



# FORUM OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES, POLITOLOGY, AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## CONTENT:

- DIE KONSTRUKTION DER ÖSTERREICHISCHEN NATIONALEN IDENTITÄT NACH 1945 DISKURSIVE STRATEGIEN DER ZWEITEN REPUBLIK IM LICHT DER WIENER KRITISCHEN DISKURSANALYSE
  - INTEGRATING TRAITS, BEHAVIOURS, AND COMPETENCES ACROSS CULTURES
  - FROM EMPIRE TO POINTS: REASSESSING BRITISH IMMIGRATION POLICY THROUGH THE LENS OF UNEVEN AND COMBINED DEVELOPMENT
  - LISTENING ASSESSMENT
- 
- RATIONAL MARKETING MANAGEMENT IN REGIONAL POLICY
  - DEVELOPMENT OF SLOVAK UNIVERSITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF DIGITIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION
  - PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORMS IN SLOVAKIA: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES IN THE CONTEXT OF EUROPEAN GOVERNANCE
  - PUBLIC POLICY AS A LIVING PROGRESS OF DECISION MAKING AND IMPLEMENTATION
  - EDUCATIONAL POLICY AS PART OF PUBLIC POLICY
  - MODIFICATION OF THE PROFILE OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC
  - FLEXICURITY AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
  - ELECTION RHETORIC, SLOGANS AND VISUAL COMMUNICATION OF THE CZECH POLITICAL SCENE IN 2025
- 
- GERMAN TENANCY LAW WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON THE CONCEPT OF RENTAL DEFECTS
  - THEORETICAL CONCEPTS AND PARADIGMS OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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# FÓRUM CUDZÍCH JAZYKOV, POLITOLÓGIE, A MEDZINÁRODNÝCH VZŤAHOV

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**Fórum cudzích jazykov, politológie a medzinárodných vzťahov** je recenzovaný vedecký časopis vydávaný na CD nosičoch Vysokou školou Danubius. Bol založený v roku 2009 ako Fórum cudzích jazykov ako recenzované neimpaktované periodikum. Od roku 2017 je rozšírený o novú sekciu politológie a medzinárodných vzťahov.

**Forum of Foreign Languages, Politology and International Relations** is peer to peer reviewed scholarly journal published on CD-ROM by Danubius University. It was established in 2009 under the title Forum of Foreign Languages as non-impact journal. In 2017 new section of politology and international relations was added.

Časopis si kladie za cieľ byť otvorenou platformou pre uverejňovanie inovatívnych výsledkov z teoretického, aplikovaného a empirického výskumu zo širokej oblasti lingvistiky, politológie a medzinárodných vzťahov, výmeny názorov, skúseností a získaných nových poznatkov a tvorivej práce prispievateľov zo SR a zo zahraničia. Je určený predovšetkým akademickým pracovníkom univerzitných i neuniverzitných vysokých škôl a vedeckých ústavov.

The journal aims to be open platform for publishing the innovative results based on theoretical, applied and empirical research in the fields of linguistics, politology and international relations. Sharing the research results and experience of Slovak and foreign contributors are in the focus of the journal editors. The scope of target spreads to academics active in tertiary education and research institutes.

Časopis vychádza dvakrát ročne a vydáva štúdie, odborné príspevky, diskusné príspevky a recenzie, pričom je rozdelený do dvoch sekcií a to na lingvistiku a oblasť politológie a medzinárodných vzťahov. Prispievatelia sekcií lingvistiky môžu svoje publikácie písať v anglickom i v inom svetovom jazyku a prispievatelia v sekcií politológia a medzinárodné vzťahy v anglickom jazyku.

The journal is published twice a year and it published studies, academic articles and polemical articles, and reviews. It is divided into two sections: Linguistics and the field of politology and international relations. Language of the publication is English or other for linguistics and English for politology and international relations.

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# FÓRUM CUDZÍCH JAZYKOV, POLITOLÓGIE, A MEDZINÁRODNÝCH VZŤAHOV

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Vážení čitatelia,

po ôsmych rokoch existencie vedeckého časopisu **Fórum cudzích jazykov**, ktorý vznikol v roku 2009, nastal čas na zmenu. Ročník 2017 sme otvorili nie len zmenou názvu časopisu, ale aj rozšírením o novú sekciu.

Dovoľte mi, aby som Vás niekoľkými slovami oboznámil s novým zameraním časopisu VŠD pod názvom **Fórum cudzích jazykov, politológie a medzinárodných vzťahov**. Publikuje štúdie, odborné príspevky, diskusné príspevky a recenzie. Je to vedecký recenzovaný časopis.

Prvá sekcia - **lingvistika** - bude tak ako aj doposiaľ venovaná potrebám a výsledkom výskumu v oblasti jazykovedy, didaktiky, svetovej literatúry a jazykového vzdelávania. Naším prvoradým cieľom je, aby časopis dosiahol vysokú odbornú a metodickú úroveň a zároveň sa stal i užitočným pomocníkom pre všetkých tých, ktorí sa podieľajú na výučbe cudzieho jazyka.

Druhá sekcia - **politológia a medzinárodné vzťahy** - sa bude zameriavať na vedecké a odborné príspevky, štúdie, recenzie a informácie o dianí v politologickej obci. Tematicky zahŕňa oblasti politickej filozofie a teórie, komparatívnu politológiu, politickú sociológiu, analýzy policy, európskych štúdií, medzinárodných vzťahov, či bezpečnostných štúdií

Verím, že Vás zameranie nášho časopisu osloví, že Vás nami predkladané výsledky poznania a výsledky výskumu zaujmú a že postupne sa rozšíri okruh čitateľov a aj prispievateľov.

**doc. PhDr. Natália Kováčová, PhD.**  
šéfredaktorka časopisu

## Editorial

Dear readers,

after eight years of existence of the Foreign Language Forum scientific journal, which was created in 2009, it is time for change. We opened the volume 2017 not only by changing the title of the magazine, but also by adding a new section.

Let me introduce the new title of the journal **Forum of Foreign Languages, Politology and International Relations**. The journal publishes research, scholarly articles, discussions and reviews. The platform is based on peer to peer reviews.

The first section - **linguistics** - will continue to publish the research in the fields of linguistics, world, literature and language education. It aims to be both research platform and offer the support for those who are active in language education.

The second section - **politology and international relations** - will focus on research, discussions, reviews, and information in the field of politology. It aims to publish the papers on political philosophy and theory, comparative politology, political sociology, policy analysis, European studies, international relations, and security studies.

I believe the new focus of the journal will be interesting to the scholarly public and we can together improve the knowledge on the mentioned topics.

**Assoc. Prof. PhDr. Natália Kováčová, PhD.**  
Editor in chief

## **CONTENT:**

### **I. LINGUISTIC SECTION**

Eva Höhn:

|                                                                                                                                                                             |          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| <b>DIE KONSTRUKTION DER ÖSTERREICHISCHEN NATIONALEN IDENTITÄT NACH 1945. DISKURSIVE STRATEGIEN DER ZWEITEN REPUBLIK IM LICHT DER WIENER KRITISCHEN DISKURSANALYSE .....</b> | <b>8</b> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|

Ildikó Némethová:

|                                                                              |           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>INTEGRATING TRAITS, BEHAVIOURS, AND COMPETENCES ACROSS CULTURES .....</b> | <b>19</b> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|

Dajana Novák:

|                                                                                                                                |           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>FROM EMPIRE TO POINTS: REASSESSING BRITISH IMMIGRATION POLICY THROUGH THE LENS OF UNEVEN AND COMBINED DEVELOPMENT .....</b> | <b>34</b> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|

Eva Stradiotová:

|                                   |           |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>LISTENING ASSESSMENT .....</b> | <b>44</b> |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|

### **II. POLITOLOGY SECTION**

Veronika Baková:

|                                                               |           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>RATIONAL MARKETING MANAGEMENT IN REGIONAL POLICY .....</b> | <b>53</b> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|

Veronika Baková, Peter Plavčan:

|                                                                                                    |           |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>DEVELOPMENT OF SLOVAK UNIVERSITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF DIGITIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION .....</b> | <b>63</b> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|

Vladimír Kováčik:

|                                                                                                                           |           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORMS IN SLOVAKIA: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES IN THE CONTEXT OF EUROPEAN GOVERNANCE .....</b> | <b>74</b> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|

Vladimír Možíšek, Michal Možíšek, Tomáš Indra, Martin Jarabák:

|                                                                                     |           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>PUBLIC POLICY AS A LIVING PROCESS OF DECISION-MAKING AND IMPLEMENTATION.....</b> | <b>87</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|

Peter Plavčan, Veronika Baková:

|                                                          |           |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>EDUCATIONAL POLICY AS PART OF PUBLIC POLICY .....</b> | <b>98</b> |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------|

Roman Šimáček, Lukáš Bernátek:

|                                                                                      |            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>MODIFICATION OF THE PROFILE OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC .....</b> | <b>109</b> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|

Zlatica Poláček Tureková:

**FLEXICURITY AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION ..... 117**

Libor Zemanec, Pavel Korovin:

**ELECTION RHETORIC, SLOGANS AND VISUAL COMMUNICATION ON THE  
CZECH POLITICAL SCENE IN 2025 ..... 124**

### **III. SECTION OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

Franz Steinau:

**GERMAN TENANCY LAW WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON THE CONCEPT OF  
RENTAL DEFECTS..... 136**

Roman Šimáček, Martin Jarabák, Radka Zborovanová:

**THEORETICAL CONCEPTS AND PARADIGMS OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN  
A HISTORICAL CONTEXT ..... 146**

## **I. LINGUISTIC SECTION**

# **DIE KONSTRUKTION DER ÖSTERREICHISCHEN NATIONALEN IDENTITÄT NACH 1945. DISKURSIVE STRATEGIEN DER ZWEITEN REPUBLIK IM LICHT DER WIENER KRITISCHEN DISKURSANALYSE**

Eva HÖHN

## **Abstrakt**

*Die Studie befasst sich mit der Konstruktion der österreichischen nationalen Identität nach 1945 im Kontext der Wiener Kritischen Diskursanalyse (WKDA). Ziel ist es, aufzuzeigen, wie sich die österreichische Identität durch Sprache, historische Narrative und politische Diskurse formierte, die es ermöglichten, das Land von einer Nachkriegsopferrolle zu einem selbstbewussten neutralen Staat zu transformieren. Die Analyse verweist auf die enge Verbindung zwischen Sprache, Macht und Erinnerung sowie auf die Rolle diskursiver Strategien bei der Formierung des kollektiven Bewusstseins. Die Studie stützt sich auf die theoretischen Rahmen von Ruth Wodak, Benedict Anderson und Stuart Hall und wendet diese auf die Entwicklung der Zweiten Republik Österreichs an.*

**Schlüsselwörter:** *österreichische Identität, Zweite Republik Österreich, Wiener Kritische Diskursanalyse, nationale Identität, Neutralität, Opferthese*

## **Abstract**

*The study explores the construction of Austrian national identity after 1945 within the framework of the Vienna School of Critical Discourse Analysis (VKDA). It aims to demonstrate how Austrian identity was shaped through language, historical narratives, and political discourses that enabled the country's transformation from a post-war victim to a self-confident neutral state. The analysis highlights the interaction between language, power, and memory, as well as the role of discursive strategies in forming collective consciousness. The study draws on the theoretical frameworks of Ruth Wodak, Benedict Anderson, and Stuart Hall and applies them to the development of the Second Austrian Republic.*

**Keywords:** *Austrian identity, Second Austrian Republic, Vienna School of Critical Discourse Analysis, national identity, neutrality, victim thesis*

## 1. Historisch-gesellschaftliche Ausgangspunkte: Österreich nach 1945

Nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg befand sich Österreich in einer Situation, in der es nicht nur sein politisches Selbstverständnis, sondern auch seine nationale Identität neu definieren musste. Das Jahr 1945 wurde zum symbolischen Beginn der Zweiten Republik Österreich, deren Grundlagen bereits während des Krieges durch die Unterzeichnung der Moskauer Deklaration von 1943 gelegt worden waren. In dieser erklärten die Alliierten Österreich zur „ersten freien Nation, die dem nationalsozialistischen Angriff zum Opfer gefallen ist“, betonten jedoch zugleich, dass sich das Land nicht seiner *Mitverantwortung* für den Krieg an der Seite Deutschlands entziehen dürfe (Wodak, 1998, S. 147).

Diese doppelte Botschaft – Befreiung auf der einen, Verantwortung auf der anderen Seite – bildete die Grundlage einer ambivalenten Deutung der österreichischen Nachkriegsgeschichte. In den Jahrzehnten nach dem Krieg setzte sich im offiziellen politischen Diskurs die sogenannte „Opferthese“ durch, der zufolge Österreich in erster Linie als Opfer der nationalsozialistischen Expansion betrachtet wurde. Dieses Narrativ wurde zum ideologischen Fundament der Nachkriegsgedächtnispolitik und ermöglichte die Konstruktion einer neuen nationalen Identität, ohne sich direkt mit der eigenen Beteiligung an den Verbrechen des NS-Regimes auseinandersetzen zu müssen.

Wie Zeyringer (1992) feststellt, diente diese These nicht nur der Stärkung der nationalen Eigenständigkeit, sondern auch als Mittel, „sich von Schuld und Schrecken der NS-Zeit zu befreien“. Viele Österreicherinnen und Österreicher nahmen sie als bequeme Erklärung der Vergangenheit an (Veber et al., 2002, S. 507). Dadurch entstand ein kollektives Gedächtnis, in dem sich das Land als „Opfer der Geschichte“ und nicht als deren aktiver Akteur präsentierte. Im Prozess des Wiederaufbaus spielte der Marshallplan eine entscheidende Rolle, da er zur Transformation des Landes von einer Agrarwirtschaft zu einer Industrie- und Tourismusnation beitrug (Aspetsberger, 1997, S. 65f). Dieses Wirtschaftswachstum bildete zugleich den Rahmen für die Herausbildung einer neuen kollektiven Identität, die auf den Mythen von Wohlstand, Neutralität und Stabilität beruhte. In den 1950er-Jahren kamen der habsburgische Mythos und die Glorifizierung des Ländlichen hinzu. Wie Veber et al. bemerken, „setzt sich das traditionelle Österreichbild aus dem habsburgischen Mythos, der bäuerlichen Volkskultur und einer erfolgreichen Wirtschaft zusammen“ (2002, S. 507). So entstand die kulturelle Vorstellung eines „kleinen, aber moralisch großen“ Österreichs – eines Landes des Friedens, der Kultur und der Neutralität.

Einen grundlegenden Wendepunkt in der Entwicklung der österreichischen Gesellschaft brachte die Ära Bruno Kreiskys (1970–1983). Seine Regierungszeit bedeutete eine Abkehr vom konservativen Landesbild hin zu einem modernen, liberalen Staat. Kreisky setzte Reformen im Bildungswesen, in der Gleichstellungspolitik und in den Frauenrechten durch und wurde zum Symbol eines „modernen Österreichs“ (Veber et al., 2002, S. 574). Zugleich stärkte er Österreichs internationale Rolle als neutraler Vermittler zwischen Ost und West, eine Funktion von besonderer Bedeutung im Kontext des Kalten Krieges.

Doch Ende der 1970er- und Anfang der 1980er-Jahre traten die ersten Risse im Bild der „*Insel der Glücklichen*“ zutage, wie Papst Paul VI. Österreich bezeichnet hatte. Die Folgen der Sozialpolitik, die wachsende Staatsverschuldung sowie zunehmende Korruptionsaffären (Veber et al., 2002, S. 576) führten zu einer Vertrauenskrise. Ihren Höhepunkt erreichte diese Entwicklung in der sogenannten Waldheim-Affäre (1986), die das bis dahin bestehende Selbstbild Österreichs im In- und Ausland tief erschütterte. Die Vorwürfe gegen Bundespräsident Kurt Waldheim wegen seiner Beteiligung an NS-Verbrechen lösten einen Schock in der österreichischen Gesellschaft aus und eröffneten erstmals eine breite Diskussion über die bis dahin tabuisierte Frage der kollektiven Schuld. Wie Bukey (2003) betont, führte gerade diese Affäre zur ersten umfassenden öffentlichen Auseinandersetzung mit der österreichischen Vergangenheit und markierte „*ein Jahr der Wende*“ (Zeyringer, 2008).

Von diesem Zeitpunkt an begann ein Prozess der schrittweisen Neubestimmung der österreichischen Identität: Die Gesellschaft musste sich der Tatsache stellen, dass sie nicht nur Opfer, sondern auch Mittäterin des totalitären Regimes gewesen war. Dieser Prozess war schmerzhaft, stellte jedoch eine notwendige Voraussetzung für die Entstehung eines reflektierten, demokratischen nationalen Bewusstseins dar. Die Identifikation der Österreicherinnen und Österreicher mit ihrem Staat nahm insbesondere seit der zweiten Hälfte der 1950er-Jahre zu. Während sich 1956 nur 49 % der Bevölkerung als Österreicher bezeichneten, waren es 1980 bereits mehr als 80 % (Veber et al., 2002, S. 507). Diese Entwicklung bestätigt, dass der Aufbau der österreichischen Identität ein langfristiger und diskursiv bedingter Prozess war.

Eine Schlüsselrolle spielten dabei zwei symbolische Säulen: der Staatsvertrag von 1955 und das Gesetz über die immerwährende Neutralität, die zum Fundament des österreichischen Selbstverständnisses wurden. Wie Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl und Liebhart (2009) festhalten, entwickelte sich die Neutralität nicht nur zu einem außenpolitischen Prinzip, sondern zu einem „*identitätsstiftenden Mythos*“, durch den sich die Österreicherinnen und Österreicher „mehr als Österreicher denn als Deutsche“ empfanden (Krieger, 2000). Die historische und

gesellschaftliche Entwicklung der Zweiten Republik zeigt somit, dass die österreichische Identität das Ergebnis diskursiver Konstruktion ist – eines Prozesses ständiger Reinterpretation der Vergangenheit, der Schaffung kollektiver Mythen und der sprachlichen Formung von Erinnerung. Wie die anschließende Analyse im Rahmen der Wiener Kritischen Diskursanalyse verdeutlichen wird, waren gerade Sprache, Narrative und politische Rede die zentralen Instrumente zur Formierung der österreichischen Nachkriegsidentität.

## **2. Theoretische Grundlagen der Wiener Kritischen Diskursanalyse (WKDA)**

### **2.1 Diskurs als soziale Praxis**

Die Wiener Kritische Diskursanalyse (WKDA), entwickelt von Ruth Wodak und ihrem Forschungsteam am Wiener Institut für Sprachwissenschaft, stellt einen interdisziplinären Ansatz zur Analyse von Sprache, Macht und Ideologie dar. Methodologisch knüpft sie an die Kritische Theorie der Gesellschaft und Foucaults Diskurstheorie an. Sie geht dabei von der Annahme aus, dass Sprache nicht nur ein Mittel der Kommunikation, sondern auch ein Instrument sozialer Praxis ist (Wodak, 1998).

Im Anschluss an diese theoretische Grundlage wird Diskurs im Rahmen der Wiener Kritischen Diskursanalyse als gesellschaftliche Praxis verstanden, die nicht nur Realität abbildet, sondern sie zugleich aktiv hervorbringt. Durch Diskurse werden kollektive Identitäten geformt, und ideologische Rahmen etabliert. Wodak betont, dass *„im Zentrum der Analyse das Zusammenspiel zwischen dem Verständnis von Nation, nationalem Bewusstsein und deren Verbindung mit Konzepten von Identität steht“* (1998, S. 190). Sprache dient somit als konstitutives Element sozialer Realität, indem sie die Weisen prägt, in denen Individuen und Gruppen sich selbst innerhalb einer gegebenen gesellschaftlichen Ordnung wahrnehmen und verstehen.

Dieser Ansatz erweist sich als besonders geeignet für die Untersuchung der österreichischen nationalen Identität, die selbst das Ergebnis historischer und politischer Diskurse ist. Die Identität Österreichs nach 1945 entstand unter diskursiven Spannungen zwischen der Verdrängung der deutschen Vergangenheit und dem Aufbau eines eigenständigen österreichischen „Wir“.

## 2.2 Die Nation als imaginierte und symbolische Gemeinschaft

Auf der Grundlage der Wiener Kritischen Diskursanalyse lassen sich theoretische Konzepte heranziehen, die das Verständnis der modernen Nation maßgeblich geprägt haben. Einer der zentralen Autoren ist Benedict Anderson, der in seinem Werk *Die Erfindung der Nation* (2005) Nationen als „*vorgestellte Gemeinschaften*“ definiert. Nach Anderson werden die Mitglieder einer Nation nicht durch tatsächliche Bekanntschaft oder unmittelbaren Kontakt verbunden, sondern durch eine gemeinsame Vorstellung von Zugehörigkeit: „*Nationen sind imaginär. Doch die Vorstellung ihrer nationalen Gemeinschaft existiert im Bewusstsein eines jeden ihrer Mitglieder*“ (Anderson, 2005, S. 16–17).

An Andersons Konzept knüpft Stuart Hall an, der die Nation als ein „*System kultureller Repräsentationen*“ versteht, als ein Ensemble diskursiver Praktiken, durch die kollektive Identitäten erzeugt und aufrechterhalten werden (Hall, 2018, S. 200–201). Nach Hall ist nationale Identität stets konstruiert, niemals naturgegeben oder homogen; ihre Stabilität hängt von Machtverhältnissen und historischen Umständen ab, die bestimmen, welche Erzählungen über die Nation erzählt werden und welche verschwiegen bleiben.

In diesem Sinne kann man von einer narrativen Identität der Nation sprechen, einer Identität, die durch das wiederholte Erzählen von Vergangenheit, Heldentaten, Leiden und nationalen Erfolgen entsteht.

## 2.3 Narrative Identität und nationale Identität

Ausgehend vom Konzept der narrativen Identität lässt sich verstehen, wie sich die österreichische nationale Identität im Laufe der Zeit formierte. Österreich war nach 1945 nicht nur ein rekonstruierter Staat, sondern auch eine rekonstruierte Erzählung, eine Erzählung von Wiederaufbau, Neutralität und Opferrolle. In politischen Reden und Gedenkzeremonien entstanden kollektive Selbstbilder, die sich auf historische Meilensteine wie das Jahr 1945 (Befreiung), 1955 (Staatsvertrag und Neutralität) oder 1995 (Beitritt zur EU) stützten.

Die Wiener Kritische Diskursanalyse weist darauf hin, dass diese Erzählungen keineswegs neutral, sondern ideologisch geprägt sind. So zeigen Wodak und de Cillia (2009) in ihrer Analyse der Reden österreichischer Bundespräsidenten, dass die Rhetorik des „*Wir*“ als Mittel kollektiver Inklusion fungiert und ein Gefühl der Zugehörigkeit zwischen Publikum, Redner und Staat erzeugt.

## 2.4 Diskursive Konstruktion von Macht und Identität

Aufbauend auf den bisherigen theoretischen Überlegungen betont die Wiener Kritische Diskursanalyse, dass Sprache nicht nur beschrieben, sondern in ihrem machtstrukturellen Charakter untersucht werden muss. Diskurs schafft Hierarchien zwischen dem „*Eigenen*“ und dem „*Fremden*“, zwischen denen, die zur Nation gehören, und jenen, die außerhalb ihrer stehen. Im österreichischen Kontext zeigt sich dieser Aspekt etwa in Debatten über Migration, Minderheiten oder die europäische Integration, in denen der Begriff der „*österreichischen Nation*“ zur Abgrenzung kollektiver Identität herangezogen wird.

Wodak et al. (1998) weisen darauf hin, dass solche Diskurse historisch situiert sind und sich jeweils an aktuelle politische Bedürfnisse anpassen. Die Wiener Kritische Diskursanalyse untersucht daher, wie sich diese Grenzen verschieben und auf welche Weise sich der Begriff „*Nation*“ in Medien, Schulbüchern und anderen gesellschaftlichen Kontexten verändert.

In diesem Sinne lässt sich festhalten, dass Sprache nicht nur Mittel der Beschreibung einer Nation ist, sondern zugleich ein konstitutives Element ihrer Existenz darstellt. Die Nation existiert als gesellschaftliche Erzählung, die sich den wandelnden historischen Umständen fortlaufend anpasst.

## 3. Zur Konstruktion der österreichischen nationalen Identität im Diskurs

Die österreichische nationale Identität wird im Sinne der Wiener Kritischen Diskursanalyse (WKDA) nicht als feststehende Größe verstanden, sondern als diskursiv erzeugt. Das bedeutet, dass sie durch gesellschaftliche Praktiken entsteht und fortwährend reproduziert wird. In diesem Zusammenhang formierte sich die Identität der Zweiten Republik als sprachliche und symbolische Antwort auf die Traumata der Vergangenheit, insbesondere auf die Zeit des Nationalsozialismus und den Anschluss an das Dritte Reich.

### 3.1 Staatsnation versus Kulturnation

Einer der zentralen Begriffe der Wiener Kritischen Diskursanalyse ist die Unterscheidung zwischen Staatsnation und Kulturnation. Nach Wodak et al. (1998) bezeichnet der Begriff *Staatsnation* eine politische Gemeinschaft, die durch Institutionen, Verfassung und Staatsbürgerschaft (*jus soli*) definiert ist, während die *Kulturnation* auf der Vorstellung gemeinsamer Herkunft, Sprache oder Religion (*jus sanguinis*) beruht.

Der österreichische Fall stellt in dieser Hinsicht eine hybride Form dar. Nach 1945 wurde die staatliche Identität über Institutionen und die internationale Politik der Neutralität aufgebaut, gleichzeitig jedoch blieben kulturelle Elemente erhalten, die mit dem habsburgischen Erbe, der deutschen Sprache und der katholischen Tradition verbunden waren. Wodak betont daher, dass „*der österreichische Diskurs keiner der beiden Modelle eindeutig zugeordnet werden kann; er zeigt vielmehr eine Synthese staatlicher und kultureller Auffassungen von Nation*“ (Wodak, 1998, S. 175).

Dies ermöglichte es Österreich nach 1945, eine eigene Version der nationalen Erzählung zu entwickeln, die sich vom deutschen Nationsmodell unterschied, zugleich jedoch bestimmte kulturelle Merkmale daraus bewahrte. Sprachlich zeigte sich dies etwa in der Hervorhebung der österreichischen Varietät des Deutschen, die zum Symbol nationaler Eigenständigkeit und Besonderheit wurde (Štefaňáková, 2012).

### **3.2 Diskursive Strategien politischer Eliten: Klestil und Vranitzky**

Politische Reden stellen für die Wiener Kritische Diskursanalyse (WKDA) eines der bedeutendsten Korpora dar, da die Sprache der Politiker als Bühne nationaler Identität zu betrachten ist. Wodak und de Cillia (2009) analysieren die Reden österreichischer Bundespräsidenten und Bundeskanzler anlässlich der Jubiläen der Zweiten Republik und zeigen, dass diese Texte nicht nur retrospektiv, sondern performativ sind.

In den Reden von Bundespräsident Thomas Klestil (1992–2004) zeigt sich eine ausgeprägte Tendenz zur positiven Selbstpräsentation. Klestil betont wiederholt Freiheit, Demokratie und Wohlstand des Landes, vermeidet jedoch eine explizite Auseinandersetzung mit der nationalsozialistischen Vergangenheit. Er preist Österreich als „*Beispiel für Stabilität, Frieden und internationales Verständnis*“ (Wodak, 1998, S. 196). Seine Rhetorik bedient sich der Metaphern von Weg und Erneuerung, die den Eindruck einer moralischen und kulturellen Wiedergeburt vermitteln.

Demgegenüber steht der Diskurs von Bundeskanzler Franz Vranitzky (1986–1997), der einen konträren Ton anschlägt. Vranitzky bekennt sich offen zur Mitverantwortung Österreichs an den nationalsozialistischen Verbrechen und spricht von der Notwendigkeit von „*Verantwortung und Erinnerung*“. Seine Rede aus dem Jahr 1988 zum 50. Jahrestag des „Anschlusses“ gilt als Wendepunkt, da er erstmals offiziell die „*Opferthese*“ zurückwies und eine ethische Reflexion der Geschichte einforderte (Bukey, 2003).

Beide Diskurse – Klestils optimistischer und Vranitzkys selbstreflexiver – greifen jedoch auf eine gemeinsame Sprache der nationalen Einheit zurück. Sowohl die Formulierung des „*Wir*“ als auch die Rede von „unserem Land“ dienen als Mittel zur Schaffung eines inklusiven Rahmens, der das kollektive Bewusstsein stärkt. Die Wiener Kritische Diskursanalyse interpretiert diese sprachlichen Mittel als ideologische Strategien, die gesellschaftliche Ordnung legitimieren und eine moralisch kohärente nationale Identität erzeugen.

### **Sprache und kollektives Gedächtnis: Metaphern, Mythen und das „*Wir*“**

Die österreichische Identität wurde nach 1945 auch durch diskursive Mythen geprägt, die die Abwesenheit einer kontinuierlichen nationalen Erzählung kompensierten. Zu den bedeutendsten zählen:

- die Opferthese,
- der Mythos der Neutralität,
- und der habsburgische Mythos als Symbol kultureller Kontinuität.

Diese narrativen Strukturen sind kollektive Gedächtnisformen, durch die historische Erfahrungen in sprachliche Bilder und symbolische Deutungen überführt werden. Sie ermöglichen es, nationale Zugehörigkeit zu artikulieren und zugleich Konflikte oder Brüche der Vergangenheit in harmonisierende Erzählungen zu transformieren.

Nach Wodak (1998, S. 147) bildete die „*Opferthese*“ das Fundament der politischen Kultur der Zweiten Republik. Die Sprache, in der dieser Mythos vermittelt wurde, war geprägt von passiven Konstruktionen und der Abwesenheit von Tätern – Handlungen „*geschahen*“, „*wurden begangen*“, „*wurde gelitten*“. Dadurch wurde direkte Schuld verdrängt und die moralische Unschuld der Nation zugleich sprachlich stabilisiert.

Der Mythos der Neutralität, der sich nach der Unterzeichnung des Staatsvertrags von 1955 herauszubilden begann, diente hingegen als zentrales Element des nationalen Selbstverständnisses. Neutralität wurde zu einem festen Bestandteil des österreichischen kollektiven Gedächtnisses und zugleich zu einem Instrument der Legitimation der internationalen Stellung des Landes (Wodak – de Cillia – Reisigl – Liebhart, 2009).

Der Mythos der Habsburgermonarchie als kulturelles Erbe vervollständigte dieses Bild. Die habsburgische Tradition wurde neu als kulturelles Symbol interpretiert.

Alle diese Narrative verband die Metapher der Einheit. Ein zentrales sprachliches Merkmal war der wiederkehrende Gebrauch des kollektiven „*Wir*“, das in politischen Reden zum

moralischen Rahmen des Erinnerns wurde und die Vorstellung gemeinsamer historischer Verantwortung in ein positives nationales Selbstbild umwandelte.

### **3.4 Österreichische Neutralität und europäischer Kontext**

Wie bereits dargelegt, zählt die Politik der Neutralität zu den stabilsten identitätsstiftenden Elementen des Nachkriegsösterreichs. Mit der Erklärung der Neutralität im Jahr 1955 schuf sich Österreich eine spezifische Position als Vermittler zwischen Ost und West. Dieser Diskurs wurde nach und nach zu einem festen Bestandteil der nationalen Selbstrepräsentation und der Neutralität als moralischem Prinzip.

Neutralität entwickelte sich zu einer „*Quelle der österreichischen Identität*“, die es den Bürgerinnen und Bürgern ermöglichte, sich mit Österreich als friedlichem und unabhängigem Staat zu identifizieren. In politischen Reden wurde sie häufig mit dem Bild der „*Insel der Glücklichen*“ (Zeyringer, 1992, S. 305) verknüpft – einer Metapher für ein Land der Stabilität, des Wohlstands und der Ausgeglichenheit.

### **Zusammenfassung**

Die österreichische nationale Identität nach 1945 stellt einen einzigartigen Fall der Konstruktion staatlichen und kulturellen Selbstbewusstseins dar. Nach der Zeit des Faschismus und der nationalsozialistischen Besatzung bemühte sich die Zweite Republik Österreich um die Wiederherstellung ihrer Staatlichkeit und um die Schaffung eines neuen Selbstbildes als Land des Friedens, der Demokratie und der Neutralität. Dieser Prozess war jedoch nicht spontan, sondern diskursiv: Er vollzog sich in der Sprache politischer Reden, der Medien und kultureller Repräsentationen.

Die Wiener Kritische Diskursanalyse (WKDA) ermöglicht es, diesen Prozess als Ergebnis der Wechselwirkung zwischen Macht, Sprache und Erinnerung zu interpretieren. Durch die Analyse diskursiver Strategien lässt sich nachvollziehen, wie sich das Bild Österreichs von der „ersten Opferration“ des Nationalsozialismus zu einem selbstbewussten neutralen Staat und Mitglied der Europäischen Union wandelte. Sprache erscheint hier als Instrument performativer Wirklichkeitsgestaltung: Politische Reden, und historische Narrative dienen nicht nur als Spiegel der Geschichte, sondern als aktive Mittel der Formung kollektiver Identität.

Der Fall Österreichs zeigt, dass Identität keine feste, sondern eine veränderliche Größe ist. Die Wiener Kritische Diskursanalyse bietet damit sowohl einen theoretischen als auch einen

methodologischen Rahmen zur Untersuchung jener Prozesse, die auch im Kontext der heutigen internationalen Beziehungen von zentraler Bedeutung sind.

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# INTEGRATING TRAITS, BEHAVIOURS, AND COMPETENCES ACROSS CULTURES

Ildikó NÉMETHOVÁ

## **Abstract:**

*This paper examines the interdependence of traits, behaviours, and competences as a foundational triad of effective leadership and traces their manifestation across corporate and cultural contexts. Advancing from trait-based potential through behavioural enactment to competence integration, it positions leadership as a dynamic, contextually adaptive system rather than a fixed set of attributes. Applying this framework to real-world cases shows how authenticity and adaptation arise from the interplay of dispositional grounding, behavioural flexibility, and situational competence, and how divergent cultural grammars yield distinctive yet effective leadership architectures. The analysis argues that global leadership effectiveness hinges on reconciling psychological stability with cultural elasticity, translating self-awareness into culturally intelligent action. Consequently, the trait–behaviour–competence model offers theoretical synthesis and pedagogical utility for cross-cultural leadership programmes. The framework thus provides a scientifically grounded, pragmatically applicable basis for developing leaders capable of ethical, resonant, and adaptive performance across cultures.*

**Keywords:** leadership theory, trait–behaviour–competence integration, authenticity, adaptability

## **Abstrakt:**

*Príspevok skúma vzájomnú prepojenosť čŕt, správania a kompetencií ako základného trojuholníka efektívneho vodcovstva a analyzuje ich prejavy v rôznych firemných a kultúrnych kontextoch. Na teoretickej osi, ktorá sa rozvíja od čŕt ako potenciálu cez správanie až po integráciu kompetencií, je vodcovstvo definované ako dynamický, kontextovo adaptívny systém, nie ako súbor nemenných vlastností. Aplikácia tohto rámca na reálne podnikové prípady ukazuje, ako autenticnosť a adaptabilita vodcovstva vznikajú z interakcie dispozičného základu, behaviorálnej flexibility a situačnej kompetencie, a ako rôzne kultúrne rámce formujú odlišné, no rovnako účinné vodcovské architektúry. Analýza zdôrazňuje, že efektívnosť vodcovstva v globálnom prostredí závisí od schopnosti zosúladiť psychologickú stabilitu s kultúrnou*

*pružnosťou, teda transformovať sebauvedomenie na kultúrne inteligentné konanie. Model črta–správanie–kompetencia preto ponúka nielen teoretickú syntézu, ale aj vysokú pedagogickú využiteľnosť v programoch interkultúrneho vodcovstva. Integrácia podnikových prípadov zvyšuje efektivitu učenia tým, že prepája abstraktné koncepty s empirickou realitou firemnej praxe. Tento rámec tak poskytuje vedecky podložený a prakticky aplikovateľný základ pre rozvoj lídrov schopných etického, rezonančného a adaptívneho pôsobenia v rôznych kultúrnych prostrediach.*

**Kľúčové slová:** *teória vodcovstva, integrácia črt, správania a kompetencií, autenticnosť, adaptabilita*

## **Introduction**

Leadership is not a rank, title, or formal position of authority; it is a relational process of influence and direction. Peter G. Northouse (2022) conceptualises leadership as an interactive process through which an individual influences and motivates a group to work collectively toward a common goal. This conceptualisation frames leadership as an ongoing social interaction rather than a hierarchical role, emphasising that effective leaders are distinguished by their capacity to inspire, align, and mobilise others rather than by the authority they possess. Similarly, John P. Kotter (1990) in *A Force for Change* conceptualises leadership as the act of establishing direction and motivating people toward shared visions, underscoring that its essence lies in movement and meaning rather than in positional power. Within this perspective, leadership is fundamentally communicative and purpose-driven, a dynamic, relational exchange that constructs collective understanding and transcends organisational hierarchy.

Building on this relational and process-oriented understanding, the triangle of effective leadership, composed of traits, behaviours, and competences, offers a comprehensive framework for analysing how individual potential is transformed into measurable leadership impact. Each dimension represents a distinct but interdependent layer of the leadership process, together explaining how influence is generated, sustained, and ethically exercised. Traits form the psychological foundation of leadership: the relatively stable personal characteristics that predispose individuals toward effectiveness. These include cognitive ability, integrity, emotional stability, and drive (Kirkpatrick, Locke, 1991; Judge et al., 2002). Traits are essential because they provide authenticity, the inner orientation from which credibility, confidence, and

trust emerge, and they determine the consistency and integrity of the leader's relational influence. However, traits alone are insufficient; they define who a leader is but not how leadership is enacted in practice. Only when integrated with behavioural expression and situational competence do traits translate into adaptive, contextually relevant leadership performance.

Behaviours form the second dimension of the leadership framework and represent how leaders put their inner qualities into action. While traits describe who leaders are, behaviours show what leaders do, how they communicate, make decisions, and motivate others. Research from the Ohio State leadership studies (1945–1960), summarised in *Leader Behaviour: Its Description and Measurement* by Stogdill and Coons (1957), and the Michigan leadership studies (late 1940s–1960s), later outlined in Rensis Likert's *New Patterns of Management* (1961), showed that effective leadership depends on balancing two key orientations: focusing on tasks (initiating structure) and focusing on people (consideration). This idea was later expanded by Blake and Mouton in *The Managerial Grid: The Key to Leadership Excellence* (1964), who demonstrated that the most successful leaders combine concern for production with concern for relationships. These studies marked a turning point in leadership research, shifting attention from natural traits to learnable behaviour. They showed that leadership can be developed through practice, reflection, and feedback. Behaviours, therefore, act as the link between a leader's inner characteristics and their outward effectiveness, making leadership observable, teachable, and adaptable across different organisations and cultures.

Competences form the third and integrative dimension of the leadership triangle, representing the point at which traits and behaviours merge into effective performance. Building on the work of Boyatzis (1982), Spencer and Spencer (1993), and later Goleman (1998), competence theory defines leadership as a demonstrated capability, the ability to apply personal qualities and learned behaviours to achieve desired outcomes within a specific context. Competences show leadership in action: they reflect how knowledge, skills, and emotional intelligence are used to influence others, solve problems, and reach goals. Unlike relatively stable traits, competences can be developed through deliberate learning, practice, and feedback. For this reason, they have become a central focus of leadership development programmes, where the aim is to transform self-awareness and behavioural flexibility into measurable, contextually effective performance. These three dimensions demonstrate why leadership development must take a holistic approach. Each captures a different aspect of what it means to lead effectively: traits provide the inner foundation of authenticity and self-awareness; behaviours express leadership through visible actions that can be practised, adapted, and refined; and competences integrate both by

transforming traits and behaviours into consistent, contextually effective performance. Programmes that focus only on personality neglect the fact that leadership behaviour can be learned; those that train behaviour without encouraging self-reflection remain superficial; and those that teach skills without an ethical or emotional base risk producing technically capable but inauthentic leaders. When the three are integrated, leaders become self-aware (trait-based), behaviourally flexible (behaviour-based), and able to apply their competences effectively across diverse and changing cultural environments.

### **1 Trait Theory: Leadership Potential, Not Destiny**

The trajectory of leadership thought from the Great Man Theory to the modern Trait-Based Theory illustrates the intellectual movement from essentialism to empiricism and, ultimately, to contextual interactionism. The earliest formulations, epitomised by Thomas Carlyle (1841) in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, posited that the innate genius and moral virtue of extraordinary individuals shape history. Leadership, in this formulation, was ontological, a matter of being rather than doing, and its legitimacy derived from divine or natural endowment.

However, the deterministic optimism of Carlyle's vision was soon challenged by the sociological counterpoint of Herbert Spencer (1896), who contended that leadership cannot exist independently of the structural and cultural matrix in which it operates. Spencer (1896) proposed that an individual's capacity to transform society is shaped by the very society that forms them, establishing the lasting sociological principle that social context influences how personal traits are expressed.

Leadership thus began to be reconceptualised not as an isolated psychological phenomenon but as an emergent function of individual potential interacting with environmental affordances, a shift that laid the epistemological foundation for modern leadership science.

The early 20th century saw attempts to operationalise this synthesis through psychological measurement. Francis Galton's (1869) *Hereditary Genius*, though now methodologically obsolete, represented the first systematic effort to link hereditary endowment to leadership emergence. By the interwar period, researchers had turned to identifying measurable personality correlates of leadership effectiveness, giving rise to what became known as Trait Theory.

The pivotal transition occurred with Ralph M. Stogdill's (1948) comprehensive meta-survey *Personal Factors Associated with Leadership*, which examined 124 empirical studies. Stogdill

identified recurring traits such as intelligence, alertness, initiative, persistence, self-confidence, and sociability, yet emphasised that leadership arises not merely from possessing these qualities but from how they align with the demands of a specific situation. This statement effectively dismantled the deterministic legacy of the Great Man Theory and repositioned leadership as a relational construct: traits provide potential, but context confers relevance.

Stogdill's subsequent revision (1974) reinforced this dynamic perspective, affirming that traits such as drive for responsibility, emotional stability, and capacity to influence others consistently appeared in effective leaders, yet their salience varied with situational complexity. His contribution was not merely descriptive but theoretical: it introduced the notion that leadership traits function as dispositional variables whose utility is moderated by environmental conditions.

This relational approach was elaborated by R. D. Mann (1959), whose quantitative synthesis identified intelligence, adjustment, dominance, and extraversion as recurrent predictors of leadership emergence. Mann's findings, while statistically modest, underscore that no single trait suffices as a universal predictor; leadership is probabilistic, not deterministic.

By the late 20th century, the field matured into a more integrative phase. Kirkpatrick and Locke's (1991) article *Leadership: Do Traits Matter?* synthesised prior empirical evidence into six consistently observed leadership traits: drive, leadership motivation, integrity, self-confidence, cognitive ability, and knowledge of the business. Their claim that leaders differ from others reinvigorated trait theory by emphasising the unique nature of leadership potential while recognising that its expression is shaped by learning and contextual factors. In doing so, they positioned traits as necessary but insufficient antecedents of leadership success.

These correlations confirmed that traits do not operate in a vacuum; their expression and value depend on the cultural, institutional, and temporal context. The implication is that leadership traits possess contextual elasticity: they retain intrinsic psychological stability but vary in their interpretive meaning across environments. This elasticity has profound consequences for leadership development. If traits constitute the psychological substrate of potential, then social conditions and organisational design represent the enabling architecture through which that potential is either realised or suppressed. Modern leadership science thus regards traits not as fixed determinants but as capabilities awaiting contextual activation.

## 2 Behavioural theory: leadership as learnable action

The emergence of behavioural leadership theory in the mid-twentieth century marked a paradigmatic transformation in the study of leadership, from a focus on inherited dispositions to the systematic analysis of observable conduct. Where trait theory sought to identify the stable psychological characteristics that differentiate leaders from non-leaders, the behavioural perspective repositioned leadership as a learnable process, emphasising the empirical observation of actions rather than the attribution of innate qualities. This epistemological turn effectively democratised the concept of leadership: if traits imply exclusivity, behaviours imply accessibility. Leadership, in this view, is not what one *is* but what one *does* within a social context.

This behavioural paradigm gained scientific maturity through the two great postwar research programs at Ohio State University and the University of Michigan. At Ohio State, Ralph M. Stogdill and Carroll Shartle (1957) developed the *Leader Behaviour Description Questionnaire (LBDQ)*, which distilled leadership into two independent but complementary dimensions: initiating structure, denoting the degree of task definition, goal setting, and procedural control, and consideration, referring to the degree of interpersonal warmth, trust, and concern for subordinates. This independence of task and relational behaviours replaced the false dichotomy of production versus people, showing that effective leadership often requires the simultaneous pursuit of clarity and compassion.

Parallel studies at the University of Michigan, led by Rensis Likert (1961), arrived at similar conclusions. Likert's typology distinguished production-oriented from employee-oriented leadership and found that the latter correlated with higher job satisfaction, motivation, and group cohesion. Likert later formalised these insights in his *Systems 1–4 Model* (1967), which conceptualised leadership along a continuum from exploitative-authoritative to participative-group leadership. Empirical evidence consistently favoured the participative end of the spectrum, where decision-making, communication, and accountability are shared. Together, the Ohio and Michigan programmes established that leadership is not the product of static attributes but of dynamic behavioural patterns responsive to organisational needs.

The culmination of these empirical efforts was the *Managerial Grid Model* of Robert R. Blake and Jane S. Mouton (1964), which integrated the dual concerns for production and people into a two-dimensional coordinate system. Their model identified five archetypal leadership styles, from *Impoverished* (1,1) to *Team* (9,9), and posited that Team (9,9) is the behavioural ideal. The Managerial Grid was revolutionary because it transformed leadership assessment from description to prescription: by diagnosing one's behavioural position on the grid, a leader could

intentionally modify their style through training and feedback to approximate the 9,9 equilibrium. Leadership development thus became a matter of conscious behavioural calibration, accessible to systematic education and reflective practice.

The behavioural paradigm did more than redefine leadership; it restructured its methodology. By emphasising observable conduct, it introduced measurable variables into leadership science, enabling correlation, experimentation, and longitudinal study. It has been argued that leadership effectiveness depends on behavioural patterns rather than innate characteristics, emphasising that successful performance results from learned practice rather than natural predisposition. This behavioural operationalisation made leadership amenable to empirical validation and, crucially, to deliberate cultivation within organisations.

At the sociological level, the behavioural approach reframes leadership as a relational and communicative act embedded in social systems. Leadership ceased to be the expression of an isolated ego and became the performance of influence within structured interaction. It is through this lens that leadership acquires its democratic potential: anyone, regardless of birth or personality, may become a leader if they learn to enact behaviours that mobilise others toward shared goals. This interpretive shift was later supported by the rise of participatory leadership and human relations theory, which recognised that motivation, morale, and engagement depend on the behavioural climate established by leaders.

However, the behavioural model also exposed new complexities. Empirical studies soon revealed that no single behavioural style guarantees effectiveness across all contexts. A directive, high-structure approach may succeed in crisis management but fail in innovation-driven environments. At the same time, a high-consideration, participative style may excel in creative teams but falter in hierarchical institutions. This recognition of situational contingency led to the next wave of leadership models, including Fiedler's Contingency Theory (1967) and Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership Theory (1969), which extended behavioural logic into context-sensitive frameworks. Even within these models, however, behaviour remained the central mechanism by which leadership potential interacts with environmental demands.

### **3 Competency-based theory of leadership**

The maturation of leadership theory in the late twentieth century culminated in the emergence of competence-based models, which sought to reconcile the dispositional foundations of trait theory with the performative empiricism of behavioural theory. Competence theory proposed a unifying paradigm: leadership effectiveness derives from integrating *underlying traits, learned*

*behaviours, and contextual application* into coherent, demonstrable capabilities. While trait theorists emphasised who leaders are and behavioural theorists focused on what leaders do, the competence framework explains how leaders succeed by deploying their traits and behaviours to produce consistent, contextually appropriate results.

The intellectual origins of the competency perspective can be traced to the work of David C. McClelland (1973), whose seminal article *Testing for Competence Rather than Intelligence* challenged the predictive validity of traditional aptitude and IQ measures for occupational success. McClelland argued that performance is determined less by general intelligence than by specific clusters of motives, traits, and skills, which he termed *competences*. This insight shifted the analytical focus from abstract potential to observable capability: effectiveness was defined not by the possession of traits or the display of behaviours in isolation, but by their integration *into contextually functional performance*.

Building on McClelland's foundation, Richard E. Boyatzis (1982) systematised this approach in *The Competent Manager: A Model for Effective Performance*, which remains the cornerstone of competence-based leadership research. Boyatzis (1982) described competence as a fundamental personal attribute that enables an individual to achieve effective or exceptional performance in their role. His model identified clusters of competences, such as goal orientation, leadership influence, empathy, and self-control, that combine cognitive, emotional, and behavioural elements. Crucially, Boyatzis distinguished between *threshold competences*, necessary for minimum performance, and *differentiating competences*, which separate outstanding leaders from average ones. This distinction bridged trait stability and behavioural flexibility: competences are not innate qualities, but *learned enactments of dispositional strengths* calibrated to situational demands.

Competence-based leadership theory reframes leadership as *applied self-knowledge*. Where trait theory identifies the raw material of leadership and behavioural theory delineates its mechanics, competence theory examines how leaders combine internal and external resources to meet situational demands. It incorporates the cognitive, emotional, and social domains of leadership, anticipating later advances such as Goleman's (1998) Emotional Intelligence Model and the Cultural Intelligence (CQ) framework of Earley and Ang (2003), which define effectiveness as the ability to adapt one's mental models and behaviours across cultural and organisational boundaries.

Competences explain how leaders succeed by integrating their inner qualities and learned actions into contextually appropriate, goal-directed performance. Unlike traits, which describe who a leader is, or behaviours, which describe what a leader does, competences reveal how

leadership effectiveness is achieved. They represent the dynamic synthesis of personal attributes, behavioural skills, and situational awareness that enables consistent, adaptive, and ethically aligned action. Through this integration, leaders translate psychological potential into purposeful behaviour, selecting the correct response for each context. Competences, therefore, capture the essence of leadership as applied self-knowledge, the ability to align who one is and what one does to achieve meaningful, sustainable outcomes.

In practice, competence-based theory supplies the functional architecture for leadership excellence in contemporary organisations. It informs global leadership frameworks used by institutions such as the Korn Ferry Leadership Architect™ and the Hay/McBer model, derived from Boyatzis and McClelland's research. These systems evaluate leaders by what they are or do, and by how consistently and ethically they translate inner qualities into effective action within complex, multicultural environments. Competence theory, therefore, embodies the synthesis of the psychological, behavioural, and sociological dimensions of leadership, the theoretical triad through which potential becomes performance and performance becomes purpose.

#### **4 Leadership Across Dispositional, Behavioural, and Competency Paradigms**

The comparative study of Tesla under Elon Musk and BYD under Wang Chuanfu provides an empirical lens through which to examine the interaction of trait-based, behavioural, and competence-based leadership theories within distinct cultural and institutional settings. Both organisations operate in the same technological field, electric mobility and renewable energy. However, their leadership configurations differ sharply, reflecting personal dispositions as well as behavioural repertoires and competence patterns shaped by divergent cultural contexts. In essence, Musk and Wang exemplify two contemporary archetypes of industrial leadership: the visionary individualist and the systemic collectivist.

From the perspective of trait theory, Musk's leadership illustrates the continuing relevance of ideas originating from Carlyle's (1841) conception of the *heroic individual*, later tempered by Spencer's (1896) sociological recognition that leaders are products of their environment. Galton's (1869) emphasis on hereditary potential was refined empirically in Stogdill's (1948) and Mann's (1959) analyses, which demonstrated that leadership traits gain meaning only in relation to situational demands. Within this lineage, Musk embodies what Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) termed the *high-drive, high-cognition, high-confidence* profile. His pronounced openness to experience, risk tolerance, and achievement orientation underpin his capacity for

radical visioning, as evidenced by Tesla's mission to *accelerate the world's transition to sustainable energy*. His persistence during the 2018 *production hell* period reflects Stogdill's concept of resilience under pressure, a hallmark of high-responsibility leaders.

Wang Chuanfu, by contrast, represents a different trait constellation. Whereas Musk personifies dispositional audacity and innovation through individual charisma, Wang's leadership rests on conscientiousness, analytical precision, and pragmatic restraint. His humility and endurance align with Spencer's sociological premise that leadership reflects collective cultural conditioning as much as individual capacity. The contrast illustrates the contextual elasticity of trait expression: Musk's individual daring resonates within Silicon Valley's competitive ethos, while Wang's measured persistence aligns with China's collectivist and bureaucratic environment. Both leaders, however, display the trait of achievement motivation, the driving force identified by McClelland (1973) as foundational to leadership emergence and sustained performance.

From a behavioural perspective, their divergence becomes even more visible. Musk's leadership displays a pronounced tilt toward initiating structure, reflecting a (9,1) *produce-or-perish* orientation on Blake and Mouton's grid. His relentless performance demands, high control, and low relational buffering drive Tesla's innovation pace but also produce organisational strain and turnover. By contrast, Wang's behavioural repertoire approximates the (9,9) *team leadership* style, combining procedural rigour with relational consideration. His participative yet hierarchical approach mirrors Likert's System 4 participative model, adapted to the Confucian relational ethic (*guanxi*) of Chinese corporate culture. Through frequent engagement with engineers and collaborative problem-solving, Wang demonstrates behavioural versatility, the capacity to balance directive and supportive behaviours according to situational and cultural cues.

However, as Fiedler's contingency logic suggests, no behavioural style guarantees effectiveness across all contexts. Musk's assertive direction suits high-velocity innovation markets but would encounter resistance in consensus-based systems. At the same time, Wang's inclusive restraint, though effective in hierarchical collectivism, might appear indecisive in more individualistic environments. Behavioural theory thus reveals that leadership effectiveness lies in situational fit rather than behavioural uniformity.

The explanatory depth increases when viewed through the lens of competence theory. Musk's differentiating competence lies in systems thinking and visionary articulation, the capacity to

conceptualise industries as interconnected ecosystems and to communicate a compelling strategic narrative. His leadership integrates technological and symbolic capital but exhibits uneven emotional competence; high confidence and drive coexist with limited empathy and impulse control. This asymmetry explains both Tesla's transformative innovation and its volatile internal climate. Wang's competence architecture, conversely, exemplifies Boyatzis's model of resonant leadership. His core competences, organisational awareness, relational empathy, and adaptive coherence enable BYD's culture of procedural harmony and incremental innovation. Wang's approach also reflects Earley and Ang's (2003) concept of cultural intelligence, the competence to translate universal leadership principles into culturally specific actions.

Musk's leadership, rooted in Western individualism, prizes autonomy, disruption, and risk valorisation; Wang's, grounded in Confucian collectivism, values discipline, harmony, and long-term stability. Both leaders succeed within their respective cultural frameworks, yet encounter limits of transferability: Musk's assertive directness may clash with high-context norms. At the same time, Wang's modest restraint may appear passive in low-context competitive environments.

The Tesla–BYD comparison confirms that leadership success is contingent on coherence between personality, behavioural enactment, and competence development within specific cultural and institutional ecosystems. Musk's effectiveness stems from dispositional audacity, behavioural direction, and visionary competence; Wang's from conscientious traits, participative behaviours, and adaptive, culturally intelligent competences. The competence paradigm, which bridges McClelland's motivational foundation, Boyatzis's integrative model, and Earley and Ang's cultural intelligence theory, provides the most comprehensive framework for explaining why both leaders succeed, each within the context that sustains their distinct styles of authentic, adaptive, and effective leadership.

## **Conclusion and Implications for Future Research and Programme Innovation**

The comparative exploration of Tesla and BYD, framed through the theoretical triad of trait, behavioural, and competence-based leadership, confirms that leadership is not a fixed essence but a *dynamic configuration of potential, performance, and contextual alignment*. Across these paradigms, a developmental continuum becomes evident: traits represent dispositional grounding, behaviours denote adaptive enactment, and competences synthesise both into

sustainable capability. Each theoretical lens retains partial explanatory power; their integration, however, reveals leadership as an emergent system of interdependent factors, psychological, relational, and ethical, that coalesce within particular organisational and cultural ecologies.

This synthesis exposes the limitations of reductionist approaches that have historically fragmented leadership studies. Trait theory's dispositional determinism, behavioural theory's procedural instrumentalism, and competence theory's technicism each illuminate but also constrain understanding when treated in isolation. The contemporary leader cannot be theorised as a bearer of immutable qualities or as a mechanical executor of learned behaviours; rather, leadership must be understood as a *reflexive praxis*, an evolving equilibrium between self-concept, action, and context. This epistemic repositioning situates leadership at the intersection of psychology, sociology, and ethics, demanding theoretical pluralism and interpretive nuance. This recognition has profound implications for leadership education. Programmes grounded in the integration of traits, behaviours, and competences must transcend mechanistic training to cultivate reflective awareness, moral discernment, and contextual intelligence. The future of leadership development lies not in replication of archetypes but in *facilitating self-theorisation*: enabling individuals to construct and test their own adaptive leadership models through iterative cycles of reflection, action, and feedback. To achieve this, leadership curricula should adopt a spiral architecture that progressively links self-assessment (trait awareness), behavioural experimentation (skill enactment), and cross-cultural integration (competency synthesis).

From a research perspective, this integrative model invites methodological innovation. Future studies should employ longitudinal, multilevel, and mixed-method designs capable of tracing how leadership capacities evolve over time and across contexts. The combination of psychometric analysis (traits), behavioural observation (action patterns), and competence assessment (impact and adaptability) can yield a multidimensional understanding of leadership development. Advanced analytics, such as neurocognitive correlates of emotional regulation, AI-supported discourse analysis of communication style, and ethnographic observation of team dynamics, could illuminate how leaders internalise and externalise learning across environments.

Equally important is the ethical and intercultural dimension of leadership research. As global organisations navigate geopolitical and cultural pluralities, leadership must be reframed as *an ethical performance within complex systems*. Competence in this sense entails more than operational effectiveness; it includes moral imagination, ecological responsibility, and empathy as functional imperatives.

The integration of trait, behavioural, and competency perspectives reframes leadership as a multidimensional capacity for coherence amid complexity. It bridges the micro-level of personality, the meso-level of organisational behaviour, and the macro-level of cultural systems. For research, this synthesis invites transdisciplinary collaboration between psychology, management science, and ethics. For practice, it provides the scaffolding for leadership programmes that cultivate *contextually intelligent, emotionally resonant, and morally grounded actors* capable of leading across boundaries.

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# FROM EMPIRE TO POINTS: REASSESSING BRITISH IMMIGRATION POLICY THROUGH THE LENS OF UNEVEN AND COMBINED DEVELOPMENT

Dajana NOVÁK

## **Abstrakt**

*V centre výskumného záujmu stoja koloniálne a postimperiálne vplyvy na súčasnú formu bodového imigračného systému Spojeného kráľovstva. Vychádzajúc z teórie nerovnomerného a kombinovaného rozvoja (UCD), je možné poukázať na neustálu prítomnosť štrukturálnych hierarchií v imigračnom systéme ako dedičstva imperiálnej minulosti. Článok tvrdí, že pobrexitová forma bodového imigračného systému, ktorý bol prezentovaný ako spravodlivý a založený na kvalifikácii migrantov, stále vykazuje znaky exkluzivity zakorenenej v britskom impériu, čím stavia imigračnú politiku do role vyjednávacieho prostriedku o národnej identite a politickej legitimitate. Prepojením historickej kontinuity so súčasným riadením migrácie článok poukazuje na to, že súčasná migračná politika zostáva odrazom imperiálnej minulosti Spojeného kráľovstva.*

**Kľúčové slová:** *teória nerovnomerného a kombinovaného rozvoja, imigračná politika, koloniálne dedičstvo, imperiálna minulosť*

## **Abstract**

*The research interest of this article is rooted in the colonial and post-imperial impacts on the current form of the United Kingdom's points-based immigration system. Drawing on the theory of Uneven and Combined Development (UCD), it highlights the persistent existence of structural hierarchies in the UK's immigration system as a legacy of its imperial past. The article argues that the post-Brexit immigration system, presented as equal and metrics-based, still reflects signs of exclusivity rooted in the British Empire. Thus, it transforms the role of immigration policy into a bargaining zone of national identity and political legitimacy. By connecting historical continuity with contemporary migration governance, the article suggests that the points-based immigration policy remains a reflection of the imperial past.*

**Key words:** *the theory of uneven and combined development, immigration policy, colonial legacies, imperial past*

## Introduction

The immigration policy of the United Kingdom has reflected social priorities, identity, and historical memories for a long time. Following the withdrawal from the EU, the UK aims to present its points-based immigration system as a fair, modern, and globally open model that bridges the geographical divide between member and non-member states of the EU through a meritocratic approach. The official government discourse claims that the system is merit-based, valuing qualification and skills, and representing equality of opportunities and economic rationality. Despite the fact, some authors (El-Enany 2020, Shutes 2021, Anderson 2022) suggest that behind this rhetoric, the continuity of colonial hierarchy is hidden, which remains in the newly established technocratic language in the form of “measurable human value.” Therefore, the British immigration system cannot be understood separately but as a product of the historical development of post-imperial heritage. The theoretical framework is represented by the concept of Uneven and Combined Development (UCD), which elaborates on colonial relations and discrepancies in the structures of modern states (Anievas, Nisancioglu 2017). As highlighted by Paul (2023), the British approach towards migration cannot be separated from imperial experience, specifically the period when migration and citizenship became political tools for maintaining power between the core and the periphery. Historical context confirms these assertions. The Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962 marked the first step, restricting access for former colonial subjects to the United Kingdom and symbolically severing the idea of a unified empire. This was followed by the Immigration Act 1971, which introduced different categories of citizenship, privileging citizens of „British origin” (Hansen 2020). According to Bhabra (2017) and Erel and Reynolds (2018), this development anchored a racialised conception of citizenship, where “Britishness” became a cultural, not a legal, status. One of the most significant examples of enduring colonial patterns is the Windrush Scandal, when lawful Caribbean inhabitants of the UK were unjustly deported as a result of the „hostile environment policy.” As El-Enany (2020) portrays, the Windrush example revealed the invisible geography of race and national belonging, in which „white Britishness” remains an implicit citizenship norm. This example triggered wide academic discussion on decolonisation of British legal and administrative culture (Eze 2021, Paul 2023). Drawing on Bhabra (2022) and El-Enany (2020), this creates a paradox: a system that claims to promote equality actually perpetuates colonial ideas of economic utility and cultural superiority. The apparent neutrality of meritocratic evaluation conceals a moral judgement about who is deemed suitable to enter the country and who remains excluded. This phenomenon can be understood as a form of

technocratic nationalism (Anderson 2022), in which imperial power transitions into bureaucratic rationality. Contemporary research therefore transcends the purely economic dimension of migration and examines the identity and symbolic aspects of immigration policy. As Paul (2023) suggests, the UK's immigration policy is not merely a tool for managing the labour force but also a space for negotiating national identity. Discourse about border control and fair approaches serves to restore the image of national sovereignty in times of imperial insecurity.

This article therefore examines the interconnectedness of the UK's historical, legal, and discursive layers of immigration policy, emphasising the continuity between colonial legacy and current points-based immigration system. Drawing on UCD and case studies, the Windrush scandal aims to demonstrate that managing migration is not merely an administrative task but also a way in which the UK shapes and perceives its identity within a globalised world.

## **Methodology**

This study uses an interdisciplinary qualitative approach, combining postcolonial theory, the concept of UCD and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The main aim was to show how Britain's imperial hierarchies still shape the logic and moral language of its immigration policy. CDA was chosen for its ability to uncover the ideological work of language – how official texts create and normalise power relations (Fairclough 2010). Unlike quantitative or corpus-based methods, CDA helps to see not only how words appear but also how they function within wider social and political meanings. The analysis focused on key documents, such as the *British Nationality Act (1948)*, *Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1962)*, *Immigration Act (1971)*, , and the *UK Points-Based Immigration System: Policy Statement (2020)*. These were complemented by the *Windrush Lessons Learned Review* (Williams 2020). Academic works on migration and postcolonial governance provided the theoretical background.

The coding process had three stages:

1. **Initial coding** – identifying repeated words and clusters (e.g., fairness, control, global talent).
2. **Axial coding** – grouping them into discursive categories such as moral worth, economic value, or national belonging.

### 3. **Interpretive coding** – linking these categories to the historical logic of imperial governance through the UCD lens.

This process revealed the constant tension between the rhetoric of fairness and the persistence of hierarchical inclusion. The CDA analysis was interpretive, focusing on meanings rather than numbers.

Theoretically, UCD offered a macro perspective on structural power, while CDA provided a micro view of linguistic choices. Together they showed how Britain's migration discourse reproduces old hierarchies under the language of merit and efficiency. The study recognises some limits. The corpus does not include internal Home Office data, and migrants' voices are missing, so interpretation relies mainly on institutional language. As a qualitative case study, it aims for analytical rather than statistical generalisation (Yin, 2014). Still, triangulation of legal, political and media sources increases reliability.

Finally, the research followed the principle of reflexivity (Bourdieu, 1990). The author's position as a researcher outside the UK context allowed both distance and sensitivity to cultural meanings in policy discourse. Overall, this method helped connect history and language, showing that Britain's points-based system is not only a technical reform but also a modern expression of older moral hierarchies

## **Results**

The analysis of the UK's immigration system confirms that its contemporary form is not the result of a sudden political shift, but rather a product of long-standing historical continuity, linking the past with the modern technocratic rationality of the state. In this sense, we can speak of a post-imperial reproduction of selectivity—a persistent system of classifying people based on their origin, economic worth, and cultural conformity, which only changes in its form, not its fundamental nature.

### **1. Historical-legal roots of selective mobility**

The basic principles of British immigration policy were established after the Second World War. The British Nationality Act (1948) declared unified citizenship for all inhabitants of the empire (Citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies), although it has been functioning from the beginning within an environment of unequal power relations. The right to enter and stay

was universal, but social and political practices advantaged migration from „white dominions“ such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand over migration from Caribbean and African colonies. As Hanses (2000) states, this ambivalence between legal universalism and social particularism became the catalyst for future conflicts in immigration policy. The gradual tightening of legislation through the introduction of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1962), followed by the Immigration Act (1971), marked a significant departure from the idea of a common empire towards the concept of a selective nation. The accepted idea of patriality, which linked the right of abode to ancestral ties with the UK, established a system of two-tier citizenship. The universal status of imperial citizen transformed into a hierarchical model, in which genealogical origin became a political filter. This genealogical logic later paved the way for modern technocratic criteria in the form of classifications by country of origin, then by level of education, language, and labour contribution. From the UCD perspective, this development can be perceived as evidence of the persistent structure of inequality between the centre and the periphery. Imperial relations, which historically legitimised colonial division of populations, are now manifested in a milder form – through different approaches towards mobility and recognition. Therefore, drawing on a historical perspective, the contemporary immigration system of the UK cannot be seen solely as an administrative mechanism but rather as an ideological tool of identity reproduction, reflecting shifts in power between the UK and its former colonies.

## **2. Administrative borders of citizenship**

The Windrush scandal (2018) acts as a crucial moment that uncovered the deep roots of colonial heritage within today's migration system. The 'hostile environment' policy, pursued since 2012, aimed to reduce illegal migrants by increasing administrative pressure — requiring proof of legal status for housing, employment, healthcare, or bank services. However, this approach also affected citizens of Caribbean origin, who arrived in the country in the 1950s as part of post-war reconstruction and never needed official documents to prove their residence. It resulted in unlawful detentions, deportations, and loss of civil rights. As Williams stated (2020), it was a 'product of institutional blind bureaucracy', where the colonial image of „legitimate citizen' was transformed into an administrative algorithm. As *Slaven* (2022) points out, the Windrush Scandal became an example of how belonging was turned into an administrative category. Through everyday bureaucracy, questions of citizenship started to define who is morally accepted as a member of the nation and who is not. Windrush therefore pointed out that

British citizenship is not universal but conditioned by visibility in the state registry. UCD demonstrates this as a continued imbalance between formal equality and material inequality. The state claims a universal right to justice, yet its practices are rooted in the logic of empire, manifesting through control via classification and registration. As El-Enany (2020) shows, Windrush was not only an administrative failure but also a moral reflection of British identity, revealing that the „white Britishness“ remains an implicit norm.

### **3. Points-based system: technocratic transformation of inequality**

Post-Brexit, the UK tried to present their new points-based immigration system as a reform based on fairness and merit. Government discourse highlights that a meritocratic approach eliminated discrimination between the EU and non-EU citizens. According to the *UK Points-Based Immigration System Policy Statement* (2020), the reform was officially introduced as a “global and fair” model designed to attract the “brightest and best”. This wording itself already shows how the government tried to legitimise control by using the language of fairness and opportunity. As Shutes (2021) and Anderson (2021) reveal, this marks a new phase of selective mobility, where the economic value of a citizen becomes the primary criterion for belonging. Within the framework of the 2021 system, points are awarded based on qualifications, salary thresholds, language competence, experience, and shortage occupations. The criteria are designed to favour highly qualified professions. This model establishes a moral hierarchy of contribution, implying that the more qualified a migrant is, the higher their eligibility for entry. From a discourse analysis perspective, official documents employ language such as “efficiency,” “control,” and “global talent,” which renders the policy appears rational and modern. However, this language conceals deeper value choices that essentially reproduce old forms of exclusion. This is what Anderson (2022) describes as “technocratic nationalism” – a system that replaces racial or cultural selection with economic indicators, while maintaining the same objective: to uphold the symbolic borders of national belonging. Similarly, Summers (2022) notes that the rise of technocratic governance in migration control transforms political decisions into technical expertise. Although this process gives an impression of neutrality, it in fact conceals the underlying value judgements embedded in the policy language.

The analysis indicates that a merit-based model does not reflect neutrality but moralised quantification. Points have become a tool for legitimising exclusivity. This approach logically connects to the historical framework where power was defined by the ability to classify, measure, and evaluate.

#### **4. Migration policy as a mirror of identity**

From analysing historical, legal, and discursive sources, it becomes evident that British migration policy functions not merely as a system of movement control but also as a mechanism for shaping national identity. Terms such as fairness, control, and global Britain serve as symbolic signals through which the state legitimises itself in the eyes of its citizens. Migration management thus becomes an act of self-assertion — a tool by which Britain defines itself in the post-imperial era. From a theoretical perspective of UCD, this illustrates the shift of colonial logic into neoliberal meritocracy. The old colonial division between the “useful” and “non-useful” has simply been expressed through the language of productivity and merit. Migrants who align with the economic logic of the state are welcomed as global talent, while others are regarded as potential risks or burdens. This discourse reinforces the symbolic boundaries between the centre and the periphery — not geographically, but morally and economically. Through its immigration policy, Britain consistently reassures itself of its autonomy, superiority, and capacity to “control its destiny.”

#### **Conclusion**

The analysis in this paper shows that the United Kingdom’s immigration policy today remains heavily influenced by its imperial past. What is often presented as a modern, fair, and efficient points-based system continues to bear the marks of older hierarchies. Yeo (2020) similarly argues that the narrative of a “broken system” functions as a political tool to justify restrictive reforms while concealing their historical continuity. The language of skills, control, and merit merely rephrases the perennial question at the heart of Britain’s identity – who belongs and under what conditions. In this way, migration management is not only about administration but also a performance of identity and power.

Seen from a wider international relations perspective, the British case reflects how post-imperial states reproduce global hierarchies through migration rather than through colonial rule. As competition for global talent increases, the UK’s metrics-based system may work as a subtle instrument of soft power – signalling openness, but still maintaining unequal relations between the Global North and South. This contradiction will likely intensify in the next decade, especially as labour mobility becomes a key field of geopolitical influence.

Future research should therefore go beyond national borders. Comparative studies with other former empires – such as France, Portugal or the Netherlands – could help identify common postcolonial patterns hidden behind technical policy language. More attention is also needed on

how merit-based criteria affect integration, belonging and social cohesion over time. Finally, scholars should not ignore the ethical dimension of this policy: how the logic of merit turns citizenship into a question of moral worth.

For policymakers, the implications are quite practical. Real fairness in migration cannot be achieved only by adjusting points or thresholds. It requires a deeper reflection on Britain's historical responsibility and a willingness to see migration not as a threat, but as a form of shared global interdependence. Until that happens, the immigration system will continue to serve as a mirror in which Britain negotiates not only who may enter, but also who it wants to be.

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# LISTENING ASSESSMENT

Eva STRADIOTOVÁ

## ***Abstract***

*Listening comprehension is one of the basic language skills, without which effective communication between participants in the communication process would not be possible. In the paper, we focus on defining the language skill of listening comprehension and the issue of assessing this skill, which is one of the most challenging areas of language testing. Assessing listening comprehension is a complex and multidimensional process, which depends primarily on the reliability, objectivity, validity, and on precisely defined criteria and test specifications. In the field of listening comprehension testing, research has moved from a discrete and integrative approach to a communicative approach that focuses on the practical use of language in authentic situations. Emphasis is placed on the reliability and validity of testing, which ensures an objective and relevant assessment of language competencies. Key aspects in test design include the precise definition of the listener's task, the selection of micro-skills, the structure of test items, and the type of responses.*

**Key words:** *listening comprehension, testing, reliability, validity, testing criteria, microskills, language competence*

## **Introduction**

Listening comprehension can be characterized as a complex analytical and synthetic activity, the success of which is influenced by the recipient of the message, their experience, language skills, and the conditions in which communication takes place. There are several obstacles to effective listening. Some of them are: physical barriers, psychological barriers, language barriers, cultural barriers, semantic barriers, environmental barriers, lack of interest, lack of self-confidence, fear, prejudice, stress, different language diversity, vocabulary, hesitation, and accent (Sanjaya & Pushp, 2011; Ockey & French, 2016; Harding, 2012; Henricksen, 1984; Brindley and Slatyer, 2002; Freedle & Kostin, 1999).

During oral communication, the listeners process a large amount of information, and the extent to which they can process it is often influenced by the speed of communication. If the communication process is very fast, it can lead to either cognitive overload or memory capacity

overload. This means that the listener may not be able to understand the input information at higher communication speeds, which he/she would be able to understand if the communication process were slower. Understanding of information is also influenced by the listener's knowledge of the topic (Jensen & Hansen, 1995).

Listening comprehension is a language skill that is essential for successful communication. Listening in everyday life, i.e., outside the teaching process, is not an isolated language skill, but is often closely linked to speaking skills. This fact is supported by research findings confirming that listening is the most frequently used language skill. We spent 45% of the total time of communication listening, 30% speaking, 16% reading, and 9% writing. A good listener spends 70% of their time listening and only 30% speaking (Duker, 1971; Feyten, 1991; Myaers & Myaers, 1992).

It is the process of receiving and interpreting spoken words in real time. It involves recognizing what is being said and understanding the content, i.e., not only understanding the main and secondary parts of communication, but also the connections between different parts of speech. Effective listening involves recognizing phonological boundaries of units, false starts, pauses, hesitations, stress, intonation, and rhythmic patterns (Dash, B.B., 2013). Especially in informal communication, participants usually use short phrases or clauses, which we call idea units. These units are often loosely connected in communication through the continuity of ideas rather than formal grammatical relationships.

The processing of these units is based on understanding the meaning of individual words. By combining these words, the listener creates the meaning of entire statements. Determining the relationship between the meaning of individual words and the meaning of entire statements is called analysis.

The analysis of idea units means determining the relationship between parts of a statement: i.e., who does what, to whom, and with what. This is based on semantic and syntactic clues. Semantic information is based, for example, on the knowledge that with certain verbs, the subject must be animate, the direct object can be animate or inanimate, and the instrument is usually inanimate. Syntactic clues are based, for example, on word order, which in English is usually subject-verb-object, or on agreement between the subject and the verb, which indicates that the noun governed by the verb represents the agent of the action (Buck, G., 2001).

In general, the listener creates the meaning of an idea unit and then forgets the words and syntax themselves, leaving only a summary of the meaning, the essence (Sachs, 1967; Buck, G., 2001).

We can conclude that the process of listening with understanding is a relatively demanding process in which the recipient of the message receives idea units, acoustic signals, and interprets them by using a wide range of information and knowledge for a specific communication purpose; it is a process of deduction, creating and modifying the interpretation of the content of the text based on information that appears relevant at that moment (Buck, G., 2001, Byrnes, 1984, Ur, 1986). Listening comprehension is a skill that requires linguistic and cognitive skills (Lepola, L. et al., 2012; Tompkins, et al., 2013).

### **Discrete, integrative, and communicative approach.**

The educational process is not rigid; it is constantly evolving. Theorists are trying to find new ways to improve the educational process, and this is reflected in changes in the approach to testing knowledge. The goal is for secondary school or university graduates to find employment in the labour market, be able to respond flexibly to practical requirements, and possess not only professional skills but also communication and language skills.

The basic task in assessment is to create test items. A test item is a part of a test that requires an assessable response from the test taker. Gary Buck (2001) states that in the past, there were three main approaches to language testing: discrete, integrative, and communicative.

The discrete approach to testing was one of the most common approaches to testing knowledge. Lado (1961) was an advocate of this type of testing, and he considered listening comprehension as a process of recognizing the sounds of a language. The basic testing technique is oral presentation of a statement in the target language by students and verification that students understand the entire statement or its key parts (Lado, 1961). He recommended testing segmental phonemes, stress, intonation, grammatical structure, and vocabulary through true/false questions, multiple-choice questions, and pictures.

In the early 1970s, researchers began to advocate for so-called integrative tests. While discrete items attempt to test language knowledge in individual parts, or tested items, integrative tests attempt to assess the student's ability to use multiple parts at once (Oller, 1979). Oller (1979) defined integrative tests as any procedure or task that causes the learner to process sequences of elements in a language that conform to the normal contextual constraints of that language.

The basic idea behind the third, communicative approach to testing is that language is used for communication, in specific situations and for specific purposes, and what matters is not what a person knows about the language or how grammatically correct they are, but whether

they can actually use the language effectively to communicate in real-life situations (Buck, 2001). Language proficiency is perceived as communicative competence (Hymes, 1972).

### **Validity and reliability of tests**

The reliability and validity of testing are important for assessing the actual knowledge acquired in the area of listening comprehension. For a test to be as reliable as possible, measurement error, which is actually the deviation in test results between test takers, must be reduced to the lowest possible level. Measurement error does not mean actual differences in the knowledge of individuals, but rather differences between testing conditions or between test authors, for example. In order for listening comprehension testing to be as reliable as possible, it is necessary to limit the various aspects of test content and evaluation. The primary task is to precisely determine the content of the tests and the testing conditions, compliance with which must also be strictly monitored. The reliability of tests must be balanced by validity, and therefore, in practice, there is a compromise between reliability and validity. When assessing the validity of listening comprehension testing, several aspects must be taken into account.

Rost (2013) lists several aspects of validity:

- face validity or subjective validity: the extent to which test users believe that the test will measure the abilities it is intended to measure,
- content validity: determines whether the test items are identical or similar to those with which students became familiar during listening comprehension practice,
- procedural validity: determines the extent to which the answers are authentic or correspond to the type of items,
- empirical validity: determines the extent to which the test results are consistent with the evaluation of another test,
- construct validity: determines the extent to which the test reflects the theoretical concepts of the ability being tested,
- ecological validity: specifies the extent to which the test can be conducted and evaluated with the available resources. Less costly testing can be considered more ecologically valid than testing that requires, for example, multiple evaluators of results, the use of special equipment, etc.

When creating tests that assess listening comprehension, the above aspects must be taken into account so that the test results reflect the level of knowledge and skills acquired.

According to Rost (2013), the following specifications are characteristic of improved listening comprehension test results:

- The role of the listener – the test must clearly define the role of the listener as a respondent, addressee, student in a lecture, judge, random spectator, or passer-by, etc.
- List of micro-skills – the test must contain a set of micro-skills that are necessary for effective listening comprehension and that are found in target situations. These include, in particular, the ability to recognize what is and what is not important in a statement, the ability to formulate a thesis-like meaning for the speaker's statement, the ability to formulate a conceptual framework that connects statements, the ability to interpret acceptable conclusions for the speaker when constructing statements, and the use of speech representation to create an appropriate response (Carroll, 1981).
- Structure of test tasks and answers – the test result depends partly on language skills and partly on procedural skills (related to the procedure). Language skills are examined through the interpretation of input tests and test items, while procedural skills are reflected in the interpretation and selection of answers. The understanding expected of the test taker is then elicited through the test item: the test taker must interpret the language in the test item in relation to the various answers (Fredericksen, 1972).
- Basic items in the test - these are spoken or recorded language data, such as a series of words, isolated words or phrases, isolated statements, a series of sentences spoken by one speaker, a continuous dialogue between two or more speakers, and a continuous monologue. Spoken language data may be accompanied by visual input such as illustrations accompanying the text, photographs, video recordings, written text, etc.
- The types of responses can be divided according to the skills required of the test taker. These include, for example, filling in gaps, completing a statement or several statements, choosing from several options, transferring information, answering questions, expressing an opinion on what has been heard, following instructions, filling in forms, completing graphs, tables, maps, writing summaries, connecting items/objects/etc.

In general, we can conclude that listening comprehension tests must have the characteristics that are typical of listening comprehension.

During the assessment, we must take into account the fact that students often use other language skills or strategies when their listening skills are tested. This can lead to results that do not accurately reflect their listening comprehension ability. For example, some students may be able to eliminate incorrect answers or even choose the correct answer using test-taking strategies. Another problem with sentence repetition and dictation tasks is that students with

well-developed sound recognition skills may be able to repeat the words or sentences they hear without understanding the information (Ockey, 2020).

## **Conclusion**

Research into listening comprehension testing is receiving increasing attention. Currently, researchers are focusing on audio recordings supplemented with visual stimuli, such as video. Studies examining the use of audio-visual recordings in testing listening comprehension skills have yielded interesting results. Ockey (2020) found that when watching videos, some respondents used visual stimuli to a large extent, others reported using them little or not at all, and there was also a group of respondents who reported that visual stimuli distracted them from listening.

The results of studies proved that second language learners had more often misinterpreted texts when nonverbal cues were excluded from the input, and test participants scored higher on tests with video than on tests with audio only (Jung, 2006; Wagner, 2010).

It has been shown that nonverbal cues (speaker's movements or expressions) are also important for listening comprehension (Dunkel & Davis, 1994).

Testing listening comprehension is a complex process that requires a great deal of attention from both teachers and test developers. Reliability and validity are crucial for the correct assessment of acquired knowledge. When creating tests, the role of the listener, the list of micro-skills, the structure of tasks and answers, the basic items in the test, and the types of answers are important. The criteria that classify listening comprehension success determine whether this skill is at a high, medium, or low level for the test taker.

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## **II. POLITOLOGY SECTION**

# RATIONAL MARKETING MANAGEMENT IN REGIONAL POLICY

Veronika BAKOVÁ

## **Abstract**

*Regional policy and within it socially responsible marketing in regional policy include an extensive area of social responsibility. And that in relation to ethical, social and legislative standards and environmental protection. The overview table shows a comparison of the traditional view of marketing in the European Union and the new view of marketing in regional politics. Activities performed by organizations stimulated by internal forces, the market, or government and the market are compared. When looking at the regional marketing of the island states, the advantages and disadvantages of their regional policies in the production of products and especially services are mentioned. Processes of sustainable marketing in the regional policy of island states are proposed. The main objective of the regional policy of the island state of Mauritius is the improvement of economic, economic and social development. It describes the historical development, the educational system in relation to the employment policy and government initiatives to improve the state of the economy.*

**Keywords:** *rational marketing management, regional policy, regional marketing, socially responsible marketing*

## **Introduction**

In regional policy, we come across a number of terms that name and describe it as a set of tools, measures or strategies that help to reduce regional differences within a certain territory or area. It is already up to the political power how to propose and implement a change that will have the main goal of improving the economic, social and economic development of a less developed region. Creating the conditions for a sustainable quality of life is an inherent part of this. This represents the overall level of people's satisfaction with their living conditions in the given environment in which they are located. These are all material and non-material factors that affect physical, psychological and social well-being. The perception of these factors creates a desire to achieve them and opens up space for changes in the current state. When there is a need to make a change, we are aware of it, formulate it, then analyze and re-evaluate the previous procedures or activities, and look for possibilities for its implementation. From the above consideration, we come to a public problem, which is the basis for the creation of a political agenda.

## **1. Rational approach to the management of public institutions**

Self-governing and international public institutions are an integral part of regional politics, which apply rational management in their structures in the current market environment. Rational and effective management is a basic tool that helps the successful implementation of the required changes in the regions. Municipalities are under pressure from the public and its constant evaluation, because their output i. j. the resulting work affects the level of quality of life in the given region. Many times they are connected with the question of whether such a change is feasible at all and whether its impact will have the desired result, especially in the long term.

Therefore, a concept of rational management is needed, which is applied in the organization. It points to the driving forces of the organization, which will enable it to obtain such a position, but on the other hand, it requires a re-evaluation of many management procedures and activities applied so far. The value, approach, understanding, retention, conviction and appreciation of employees comes into focus.

## **2. Socially responsible marketing in regional politics**

In general, we can say that we perceive regional policy as the intervention of political power, which solves the problems of the given region by means of the allocation and allocation of financial resources. Its system of goals is complex and constantly changing in space and time. The choice of location is influenced by regional, national and global factors. These goals have hierarchical relationships and must be harmonized with each other. The organizations to which they are assigned are mainly responsible for the effective management of resources. Socially responsible marketing plays an integral role in the selection and implementation processes of the projects themselves in regional politics.

Several authors from the field of marketing, who are aware of its importance, have been dealing with socially responsible marketing for a long time. Among them are the authors L. Abdrabou and I. Gubrická, who in their contribution Environmentally responsible tourism deal with the current topic of environmentally responsible marketing in the field of tourism. As they state: "At a time when the competitive struggle is intertwined with the struggle with the financial crisis and the lack of support for any sphere, companies must not resent one single area. It is a matter of social responsibility, because the only battle that every company should win is the battle for customers. A satisfied company produces satisfied customers, which is associated with increasing demand. The trend, or necessity, is the orientation of the entire company to

environmental issues. Despite the fact that the public is only passively interested in this issue, businesses prosper from their interest. Tourism is no exception. However, every business brings with it not only positives and experiences, but also a shadow associated with negatives such as the production of emissions, waste, erosion, environmental damage. There is no business that does not have to answer to the public in the field of the environment for its activities“.<sup>1</sup>

In 1979, A. B. Carrol defined: "Socially responsible business includes the economic, legal, ethical and other arbitrary expectations that society has at a given time for the organization“.<sup>2</sup>

Slovak marketing experts, including M. Hesková and P. Štarchoň, state that "socially responsible marketing is an important part of sustainable marketing. It includes a wide area of social responsibility in relation to ethical, social and legislative standards and environmental protection“.<sup>3</sup>

According to the authors A. Királ'ová and I. Strak, "Socially responsible marketing emphasizes the social, ethical, legal, ecological, environmental, safety and other context of marketing activities. In this context, it is a broader and more complex local and global responsibility of marketers, managers, entrepreneurs, employees, scientists, researchers, politicians, ministers, employees in public administration, etc.“<sup>4</sup>

#### A traditional view of marketing in the European Union and a new view of marketing in the regional politics

| <b>Organizations stimulated by internal forces</b>     | <b>Market-driven organizations</b>                                                                                                                                            | <b>Organizations stimulated by government and the market</b>                                           |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Status monitoring within the organization.             | Interest in the consumer in all areas of the organization.                                                                                                                    | Status monitoring within the region.                                                                   |
| Product and price as key elements in selling products. | Knowing the criteria on the basis of which the customer chooses a product, the organization will subsequently ensure the compliance of the marketing mix with these criteria. | Orientation to marketing communication, attracting investors, orientation to education and retraining. |
| Creating segments based on the product portfolio.      | Creation of segments based on consumer differences.                                                                                                                           | Creation of segments based on the product portfolio of the region.                                     |

<sup>1</sup> ABDRABOU, L. – GUBRICKÁ, I. 2012. Zborník z medzinárodnej vedeckej konferencie NOVÉ TRENDY V MARKETINGU – Zodpovednosť v podnikaní organizovanej v Kongresovom centre SAV na Smolenickom zámku v dňoch 6. – 7. novembra 2012, Fakulta masmediálnej komunikácie Univerzita sv. Cyrila a Metoda v Trnave. Trnava: FMKUCM, 2012, 6 s. ISBN 978-80-8105-451-8

<sup>2</sup> CARROLL, A. B. 1979. 'A Three-Dimensional Conceptual Model of Corporate Performance,' Academy of Management Review, 1979. In: Carrol A.B.: A Guide to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) s. 2 .

<sup>3</sup> HESKOVÁ, M. – ŠTARCHOŇ, P. 2009. Marketingová komunikace a moderní trendy v marketingu. Vysoká škola ekonomická, Praha : Nakladatelství Oeconomica, 2009. 180 s. ISBN 978-80-245-1520-5.

<sup>4</sup> KIRÁL'OVÁ, A. - STRAKA, I. 2013. Vliv globalizace na marketing destinace cestovního ruchu: Ekopress, s.r.o. Praha. 2013. s. 28. ISBN 978-80-86929-99-6.

|                                                               |                                                                                          |                                                                               |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Secondary market information.                                 | Conducting marketing research for the purpose of monitoring changes in the market space. | Detailed, detailed market information                                         |
| Taking care of the current state.                             | Welcoming changes (readiness for them).                                                  | The need to implement changes.                                                |
| Ignoring the competition.                                     | The effort to know the competition.                                                      | Cooperation with competitors.                                                 |
| Marketing expenses assessed as redundant or luxury.           | Marketing expenses considered as investments.                                            | Marketing expenditure considered as support for economic and economic growth. |
| Punishment for innovation.                                    | Appreciation of innovations.                                                             | Investing in innovation.                                                      |
| Getting stuck in current markets.                             | Finding hidden markets.                                                                  | Renewal and building of new market opportunities.                             |
| Stagnant organizations.                                       | Organizations supporting innovation.                                                     | Projects supporting the introduction of innovations.                          |
| Satisfaction that products are similar to competing products. | The effort to gain a competitive advantage.                                              | Efforts to satisfy needs and wishes.                                          |
| Focus on efficiency.                                          | Focus on efficiency and effectiveness.                                                   | Focus on ecology, sustainability                                              |

Source: Own processing.

The view of traditional marketing differs from marketing in regional politics in the following points:

- Organizations stimulated by the government.
- Status monitoring within the region.
- Orientation to marketing communication, attracting investors, orientation to education and retraining.
- Creation of segments based on the region's product portfolio.
- Detailed, detailed market information.
- Necessity to implement changes.
- Cooperation with competitors.
- Marketing expenses considered as support for economic and economic growth.
- Investing in innovation.
- Renewal and building of new market opportunities.
- Projects supporting the introduction of innovations.
- Efforts to satisfy needs and wishes.
- Focus on ecology, sustainability.

In regional politics, one must realize that all involved organizations are stimulated by the government, which decides on the following procedures for implementing the required changes in the region. Cooperation between individual entities, which creates partnerships on projects, plays a big role here. The entire marketing communication is oriented towards attracting investors, working together and creating a positive image of the implemented change. Marketing expenditure is seen as an investment in economic and economic growth.

### **3. View of regional marketing of island states**

Regional marketing is an accurate example of the fact that the same principles and concepts that apply generally do not apply everywhere, but must be specialized and applied depending on the given region. Some concepts are oriented to products, others to the customer and others to socially responsible behavior. Regional marketing is joined by the concept of rational marketing management, which reevaluates the current practices of organizations and effectively invests in the knowledge and development of current processes from a long-term sustainable perspective in the region with the help of projects and subsidies. Nevertheless, we can consider the regional marketing of island countries as an effort to completely adapt to the needs of customers.

In the current market environment, despite the effort to push socially responsible marketing, we encounter countries where the situation is significantly different, thanks to their regional policy. Countries that are of the insular type and whose economy is dependent on tourism and taxes should mainly focus on socially responsible business as well as marketing practices associated with it. However, the actual situation does not correspond to this. In the effort to attract the greatest possible number of tourists to holiday destinations, there are also many opportunities for the so-called unfair practices in marketing. This is associated with deceptive and misleading advertising, double prices, insufficient quality of goods, services and products. In many cases, disposable products appear, which nowadays should have long been replaced by other, environmentally friendly ones.

One of the main problems is that there are still many countries in the world that do not address the impact of the production and consumption of products on the environment, and it is tolerated by the general public. The quality of life and standard of living of the consumer play a big role in this regard. It is known that the more demanding consumer has higher expectations and needs than the average consumer. However, this does not mean that the offered service or product should differ depending on the consumer.

### **4. Sustainable marketing processes in the regional policy of island states**

The basic task of sustainable marketing in regional politics is that, in cooperation with organizations, regional differences are reduced with the help of transparent, long-term and responsibly set processes that help it achieve its goals. Fulfillment of regional policy goals in cooperation with organizations are:

- Reducing regional disparities in the island state - supporting less developed or underdeveloped areas, solving unemployment and low incomes in problem regions.
- Support of economic and economic growth in disadvantaged areas - construction and development of infrastructure (roads, railways, energy, digital networks, etc.).
- Improving the living conditions of the inhabitants - increasing the quality of life of the inhabitants - while simultaneously respecting local peculiarities, religions and mixed cultures,

supporting the adaptation of expats, easier and better access to education and health care, social services. Respect for mixed culture and mutual acceptance of traditions.

- Sustainable and balanced development of the territory in the island state - development of towns and villages, countryside, their interconnections, great emphasis is placed on the importance of environmental protection.
- Support of social and territorial cohesion – strengthening cooperation between individual regions, integration of peripheral, border and mountain areas.
- Strengthening the competitiveness of regions - investments in research, innovation, human capital, as well as expanding cooperation with more developed countries through joint projects, opening up possibilities and cooperation with global markets.

## **5. Regional policy in the island state of Mauritius**

From this point of view, the regional policy in the island state of Mauritius is a good example. Regional politics in Mauritius has gradually developed since 1835, when the British abolished slavery on the island and began to develop culturally. Mauritius has a rich colonial history, starting with the Arabs who discovered and colonized it, then the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French and finally the British until 1968, when it gained independence. The Dutch named it after Prince Maurice of Nassau in 1598, but abandoned it in 1710. The French took it over in 1715 and renamed it Île de France, being replaced by the British after 1810. Nevertheless, the French language, which is similar to the Creole language, prevails on the island, so the local population does not have a problem with the language barrier. After the end of colonization by Great Britain, the English language remained as the official language, used mainly in public administration and in medical facilities, but the local Creole population has a worse command of the English language.<sup>5</sup>

Due to the fact that tourism prevails on the island as one of the most developing industries from a marketing point of view, this environment is strongly oriented towards the customer-tourist and the satisfaction of his needs. Based on this, domestic residents try to get as much money as possible from customers in a short time, and pricing is also subject to this. High distribution costs of goods, prices of products and services directly affect the quality of life of the domestic population. One of the most serious problems is the growing gap between the rich and poor strata of the population, the middle stratum is moving towards the poorer. This is reflected in the educational level of the population, which is directly related to employment.

In Mauritius, there is a free and compulsory education system as well as free transportation for students, each school has its own uniform, i.e. j. prescribed school clothes. Teaching takes place in Creole or

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<sup>5</sup> Republic of Mauritius. [online]. [cit. 2025 -20-09]. Dostupné na: <https://govmu.org/EN/Pages/exploremauritius.aspx>

French. There are 69 public schools and 24 private schools in Mauritius. According to statistical data from 2020 of the Ministry of Education, the number of students enrolled in secondary schools reached 105,321 of which 51,025 were boys (48.4%) and 54,296 were girls (51.6%). Approximately 43.1% of the secondary school population studied in state schools and 56.9% in private schools (with and without subsidies). In private schools, English is used as the main language and French as an additional language or vice versa. Private French schools follow a combination of the British and French education systems.

In general, the Mauritian education system is set up according to the British system, which allows for easier adaptation of immigrant students to schools. The educational structure at all schools consists of the first elementary level, which represents six years of the so-called elementary school. Grades 1-6. This is followed by the second level, which represents high school from Grades 7-13, which is divided into lower and higher education levels. Years 7 to 9 (or lower secondary education) correspond to the last 3 years of the nine-year continuous cycle of basic education. After completing primary education, students continue with secondary education in years 10 to 11, at the end of which they take the Cambridge School Certificate/General Certificate of Education "O" level examination. Successful students continue in years 12 and 13 to upper secondary education leading to the Cambridge Higher School Certificate/General Certificate of Education 'A' level examination. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) offers students alternative paths for study after the 9th, 11th or 13th year, which lead to the awarding of national certificates, national diplomas or higher national diplomas in specific fields.

Education and the systematic development of education is slowed down by high competition and a mismatch between qualifications and the requirements of the labor market, which contributes to the continuing high unemployment of young people. The national unemployment rate is approximately 7%. Local residents cannot afford a better education, they are often forced to go directly to work after completing compulsory school attendance. The fact that the educational level and qualification of employees in almost all areas is insufficient is also reflected in the tourism industry. Many times the approach to the customer is unstable. Based on this, there is a competitive struggle for qualified labor, which only the best employers can afford.

As part of regional policy, the government focuses on the ongoing problem of high youth unemployment (aged 16-24), which reached 27.7% in 2021. This group faces significant challenges in finding entry-level positions due to a lack of relevant skills and work experience. Gender inequality also significantly prevails. The unemployment rate of women is much higher than that of men, because discrimination indirectly prevails.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Government Directory. [online]. [cit. 2025 -20-09]. Dostupné na: <https://govmu.org/EN/Pages/default.aspx>.

Government initiatives have begun to address vocational training, dual education, invest in retraining and skills development through training and support programs, green policy, the fight against money laundering, food security or improved transport connectivity<sup>7</sup>:

- Vocational education: The government supports technical and vocational education and training (TVET) to address skills shortages. Initiatives such as the National Skills Development Program (NSDP) and the Mauritius Institute of Training and Development (MITD) focus on providing relevant training to job seekers.
- Youth employment programs: The Youth Empowerment Program (YEP) and the Dual Education Program (DTP), offer professional placements and training that help young people enter the labor market.
- Workfare schemes: Workfare and Transitional Unemployment Benefit provide income support and training for redundant workers, although they have had mixed results.
- Sustainable and green transformation - climate change and resilience: As a small island developing country, Mauritius is very vulnerable to climate change. Its regional policy includes cooperation with international partners, such as the European Union, in the field of environmental protection, adaptation to climate change and the blue economy.
- Food security: After the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Mauritius is cooperating regionally in the area of food and nutrition security. Through organizations such as the IOC, it works to harmonize standards and strengthen agricultural value chains in order to reduce dependence on imports.
- Improved connectivity: Mauritius aims to improve regional air and maritime connectivity to promote economic integration and increase trade. This includes the development of port facilities and positioning itself as a regional center of aviation and tourism.

Mauritius is a prominent member of several regional economic communities, including the Southern African Development Community, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean Commission. These communities create space for strengthening relationships and economic development. Mauritius is also strategically pursuing free trade agreements to gain preferential access to major markets such as China and India. India through Mauritius represents the so-called a gateway for investment to the African market. According to available sources, the government has a dedicated "Strategy for Africa" which aims to establish Mauritius as a platform for investment in and from Africa. Initiatives include the Mauritius Africa Fund, which supports Mauritian companies investing on the

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<sup>7</sup> OECD, Mauritius Country Programme. [online]. [cit. 2025 -20-09]. Dostupné na <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/programmes/mauritiuscountryprogramme.html>.

continent and developing projects such as special economic zones in other African countries. Within international and diplomatic relations, the country acts as the main technical coordinator of processes such as the Economic Partnership Agreement between the EU and Eastern and Southern Africa, thereby presenting its diplomatic role in regional trade negotiations.<sup>8</sup>

## Conclusion

Regional policy solutions on the island of Mauritius focus on the areas of economic growth, sustainability and social development, including strategies to strengthen international relations and use regional integration. They strive to solve problems with youth unemployment, improve the infrastructure between individual areas of the island, strengthen the economy as well as the risks caused by frequent climate changes. From the point of view of marketing communication, campaigns that support socially responsible behavior such as saving energy and water, reducing the production of packaging and promoting a healthy lifestyle for the benefit of the entire island are coming to the fore (the inhabitants of Mauritius are statistically in third place in the population with the most frequent incidence of diabetes in the world). Not all required changes are met with a positive attitude by the public, but this is common in regional policy-making processes.

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# DEVELOPMENT OF SLOVAK UNIVERSITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF DIGITIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Veronika BAKOVÁ – Peter PLAVČAN

## **Abstract**

*Digitization is an essential part of the development of society. The European Union is moving towards a single digital market through digital transformation in several areas. It creates opportunities in several programs, especially Horizon, Digital Europe or the Single Market, which are the starting points of Slovakia's digitization strategy. The goals and approaches to Slovakia's digitization strategy are described, both in the short and long term. The measures of the three action plans of informatization and digitization in the education department are described in more detail, with special attention to universities. These measures are oriented not only to the creation of new digital technologies, but also to their use at universities. The measures also reflect the roles of universities in preparing a new qualified workforce with a university degree for the digital market of the European Union or on a wider scale.*

**Keywords:** *action plan, digital market, digitalization of the company, digital transformation, innovations, new technologies, digitalization strategy*

## **Introduction**

Among the basic starting points of the digitization of society are new technologies, the industrial revolution, the increase in the volume of data, data processing, networking and fast data transfer, all of which are challenges for society and individuals. The Slovak Republic is a member state of the European Union and focuses its activities on joint action with other member states in this area. Since 2019, several documents have been approved for the implementation of digitization in Slovak society, industry and citizen services. They are oriented towards society as a whole, but several documents of the Slovak digital policy apply to universities, which are not only the bearer of digital innovations, but also their users. The basic document of the digitalization of the Slovak Republic is the Digital Transformation Strategy of Slovakia 2030, which is being developed for the field of education in the higher education sector into three action plans for the informatization and digitalization of the education sector with a view to 2020, 2024 and 2027.

## 1. European starting points for the Slovak digitization strategy

The Digital Single Market (DSM) is a comprehensive space in which the free movement of people, services and capital is ensured and in which individuals and businesses can seamlessly access online activities, innovate, collaborate and do business under conditions of open and fair competition, using the latest digital and online technologies and services and with a high level of protection of consumer and personal data, regardless of nationality or place of residence.

The single digital market in the EU thus stands on three basic pillars:

- Ensuring better access to digital products and services,
- Creation of favorable conditions for digital networks and innovations,
- Enabling the full use of digital technologies in society.

**Digital transformation.** The topic of digital transformation is currently one of the most important in building and managing strategies and visions for states, businesses and organizations. According to the latest studies and analyzes of world scientific and analytical companies and professional media<sup>6</sup>, the following technologies are the most significant from a global point of view:

- Artificial intelligence,
- Internet of Things,
- 5G technology,
- Big data and analytical data processing,
- Edge computing and cloud computing,
- Blockchain.

By adopting the multiannual financial framework for the programming period 2021-2027 (EC, 2018), the European Union confirmed that it expects to maintain several directly managed programs such as Horizon Europe, LIFE, Creative Europe, the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) and Erasmus+. However, as a result of the new challenges facing Europe, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or migration, there is a need to finance new areas through new programs directly managed by the European Commission. Such programs include: the Single Market program, the Digital Europe program, the EU4Health program or the rescEU program.

**Horizon Europe.** 9th EU framework program for research and innovation for the period 2021-2027 with a proposed budget of approximately 95.5 billion. EUR is realized within three pillars: Excellent science, Global challenges and competitiveness of European industry, Innovative Europe

**EU4Health.** Building on the lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis, EU4Health is an ambitious and dedicated funding program for 2021-2027 to build resilient health systems in the EU to better prepare us for the future. With an investment of €5.1 billion, EU4Health is the largest health program in terms of funding, providing funds to EU states, health organizations and NGOs.

**The Digital Europe Program for the years 2021-2027.** The program aims to support and accelerate the digital transformation of the European economy, industry and society, bring benefits to European citizens, public administrations and businesses throughout the Union and increase Europe's competitiveness in the global digital economy, while contributing to overcoming the digital divide throughout the Union and strengthening the strategic autonomy of the Union.

**Single Market Program.** The EU's single market is the largest market in the world, where people, goods and capital can move almost as freely as within a single country. EU citizens can travel, study, work without being hindered by borders between member states. Consumers can buy safe products on the market and rely on a high level of food safety. The EC has launched a new special program for the next long-term EU budget 2021-2027 with a budget of €4.2 billion, which aims to strengthen the position and protection of consumers and enable small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to thrive.

**LIFE program.** Financial support from the LIFE program with a budget of 5.5 billion. EUR is aimed at protecting the environment and mitigating the effects of climate change, as well as supporting the transition to clean energy by increasing energy efficiency and the increased share of renewable sources in the energy mix. This is one of the tools that will enable the EU to achieve its climate goals and become climate neutral by 2050.

**Connecting Europe Facility - CEF.** In the new program period, CEF supports infrastructure projects connecting the EU and its regions. At the same time, it will help to better integrate the transport, energy and digital technology sectors and thus accelerate the digitization and decarbonisation of the EU economy. Specifically, 60% of the CEF budget is intended to meet climate goals in accordance with the EU's obligations under the Paris Agreement. Building on the successes achieved in the ongoing program period (2014-2020), the NPE continues to help fill the investment deficit in Europe, create new jobs and support economic growth. Last but not least, this instrument provides opportunities to introduce technologies developed thanks to EU research and innovation programmes, to support their commercialization and to ensure that trans-European networks are equipped with leading technologies.

**The Erasmus+.** In the framework of the next long-term EU budget, it proposes support for education, vocational training, support for youth and sports. A new program with a budget of 26 billion it is not only more inclusive and innovative, but also more digital and ecological. It is key to achieving a European learning area by 2025 and will mobilize the education, training, youth and sport sectors for rapid recovery and future growth. It will provide many new opportunities for European students. Thanks to increased accessibility and more flexible mobility formats, it provides opportunities to different groups of students, including those with fewer opportunities. The program offers new opportunities for collaboration, will support innovation in curriculum design, learning and teaching practices, and will promote both ecological and digital skills. It supports new flagship initiatives such as European Universities, Erasmus Teacher Academies, Centers of Excellence in Vocational Education and DiscoverEU.

**Creative Europe.** Proposal for a new program with a budget of 2.4 billion. EUR builds on the existing structure of the Creative Europe program with the Culture sub-programme, the MEDIA sub-programme and the strengthened Cross-sectoral sub-programme, which will enable innovative measures where cross-sectoral activity brings added value.

## **2. Slovakia 2030 digital transformation strategy**

The most important document of the state digitization policy was approved by the Slovak government by resolution no. 206/2019 of May 7, 2019. The strategy for the digital transformation of Slovakia 2030 (MIRRI SR, 2019) sets out the goals, namely that by 2030 Slovakia will become a modern country with an innovative and ecological industry benefiting from the knowledge-based digital and data economy, with an effective public administration ensuring the intelligent use of territory and infrastructure, and with an information society whose citizens will fully utilize their potential and to live a quality and safe life in the digital age in the context of respecting and building digital humanism.

The target entity of the strategy is the citizen, who should have a simpler and better everyday life at the workplace and in private life, as well as the citizen-entrepreneur, for whom the state should reduce the administrative burden to the maximum extent possible and support him with appropriate incentives. Information and digital technologies must be used to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants and to optimize benefits for the economic, social and environmental growth of the country with an emphasis on sustainable development. Correct setting of regulatory and non-legislative measures will start the digital transformation in the right direction.

The strategy follows on from the creation of a new EU multi-annual financial framework for the years 2021-2027, including cohesion policy instruments, as well as directly managed programs (Digital Europe and the Connecting Europe Facility - digital part), where the need to develop the digital economy receives special attention. The document also directly reflects the conceptual materials and recommendations of international organizations, especially the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the United Nations.

The approach to the digital transformation of Slovakia will be carried out as follows:

- Concepts and policies ensuring innovation in selected sectors and industries: Policies and legislative frameworks will be adjusted in a way to support digital transformation either by simplifying, removing outdated rules or adopting entirely new concepts.
- New approach to projects: A shift in the perception of project creation and orientation not only to grants from cohesion policy instruments, but also to directly managed EU programs.
- Innovation laboratories as a tool for experimenting with new ways of public performance reports: Innovation laboratories will be created for selected sectors, which will experiment with new ones policies, business models and technologies and help manage the digital transformation process.

Short-term horizon 2019-2022

- Digital transformation of schools and education for its improvement
- employment prerequisites and the acquisition of competencies necessary for the digital age,
- Creating the foundations for a modern data and digital economy and for digital
- the transformation of the wider economy,
- Improving the public administration's ability to use data and innovation for the benefit of citizens.

Long-term horizon 2022-2030

- Innovative digital and data economy,
- An educated, healthy and safe society,
- Modern and efficient public administration,
- Intelligent development of the territory,
- World-class quality science, research and innovation.

The digitalization strategy for the transformation of Slovakia 2030 will be implemented through programs directly managed by the European Commission for the program period 2021-2027.

### **3. Action plans for informatization and digital transformation of education in the Slovak Republic for the years 2014-2020 (concept), 2021-2024 and 2025-2027**

To date, three action plans have been prepared for the Digital Transformation Strategy of Slovakia 2030 to fulfill the digital transformation tasks of the strategy's short-term horizon.

#### **3.1 Concept of informatization and digitization of the education department with a view to 2020 (since 2014)**

On September 24, 2014, the Government of the Slovak Republic approved the Concept of Informatization and Digitization of the Ministry of Education with a view to 2020. (MŠVVaM SR, 2014) This document provides a basic idea of the further development of education, science, research and sports from the perspective of global digitization trends and the development needs of Slovakia.

The main goal of the Concept is to define the needs and activities in the field of informatization and digitization of the education sector in the coming years so that institutions falling under the education sector can improve their quality and that the sector provides them with adequate support. Through computerization and digitization, the ministry wants to adequately respond to the needs of practice and the market.

The strategic-design part of the Program is based on the conclusions of the analysis of the current situation and the development forecasts in the education sector and in the external environment. With regard to the application of unifying principles of informatization and digitization of the Ministry of Education proposes goals and activities for individual strategic areas of development, especially in the field of universities:

1. Infrastructure and related equipment for computerization and digitization of education,
2. Digital skills and competences for the 21st century,
3. Transformation of education through digital technologies,
4. Development of electronic services and information systems of the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Slovak Republic and schools,
5. Cyber and information security.

### **3.2 Action plan for informatization and digital transformation of education in the Slovak Republic for the period 2021-2024**

The action plan (MŠVVaM SR, 2021) for the area of higher education institutions is implemented in 5 areas with several measures aimed at the performance of higher education institutions:

1. Infrastructure and related equipment for computerization and digitization of the education sector

Measures:

Equipping classrooms and other spaces for students with the necessary technology to ensure access to digital technologies and enable the development of students' digital skills.

Equipping workplaces and workers with the necessary technology and software depending on needs

employees of universities.

2. Digital skills and competences for the 21st century

Measures:

Provide a system of education for university employees according to the specific needs of their individual categories (university teachers, researchers, artists and other employees - especially administrative staff).

Ensure that every study program includes the development of transferable and specific digital competences in accordance with European standards and practice needs (standard of digital skills will be part of the accreditation of the study program).

In the preparation of future teachers, precisely differentiate the development of digital skills (at all levels and in all subjects) and preparation for teaching informatics in primary education for all future teachers, at higher levels in the corresponding study programs. Every graduate of a pedagogical study must meet the standard of digital skills of a teacher in connection with education in approval (the standard of digital skills will be part of the accreditation of the study program). The development of digital skills of future teachers must also be linked to the practical part of their studies.

3. Transformation of education through digital technologies (digital transformation of education) Measures:

In the context of digital transformation, to innovate the education of university students.

In the context of digital transformation, to innovate the training of future teachers.

4. Development of electronic services and information systems of the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Slovak Republic and schools

Measures:

In quality assessment systems, take into account the impact of IT workplaces on the quality of the provided education.

Support for digitization of university systems.

Automation and electronicization of processes and improvement of management of internal processes of universities.

Introduction of data analysis tools.

Support for digital publishing of scientific and pedagogical outputs.

5. Cyber and information security

Measure:

Education and training of high-quality IT specialists for cyber security.

### **3.3 Action plan for informatization and digital transformation of education in the Slovak Republic for the period 2025-2027**

The action plan (MŠVVaM SR, 2025) for the area of higher education institutions is implemented in 6 areas with several measures aimed at the performance of higher education institutions:

1. Infrastructure and related equipment for computerization and digitization of the education sector

Measures:

They were not designed for the field of higher education. The ongoing implementation of measures from the previous action plan continues.

2. Digital skills and competences for the 21st century

Measures:

Ensuring the education system of university employees according to their specific needs individual categories (university teachers, researchers, artists and others employees - especially administrative staff). Ensuring that part of each study fee program was the development of competences and skills in the possibility of using assistive technologies, inclusive digital technologies.

Ensuring that every study program includes the development of transferable and specific digital competences in accordance with European standards and practice needs (the standard of digital

skills will be part of the accreditation of the study program). In the preparation of future teachers, a precise differentiation of the development of digital skills (for all degrees and in all subjects) and preparation for teaching informatics, in primary education for all future teachers, at higher levels in the corresponding study programs. Every graduate of a pedagogical study must meet the standard of digital skills of a teacher in connection with education in approval (the standard of digital skills will be part of the accreditation of the study program). The development of digital skills of future teachers must also be linked to the practical part of their studies.

### 3. Transformation of education through digital technologies (digital transformation of education)

Measure:

In the context of digital transformation, innovation in the education of university students.

### 4. Development of electronic services and information systems of the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Slovak Republic and schools

Measures:

Automation and electronicization of processes and improvement of management of internal processes of universities.

Implementation of the European Student Card and participation in the Erasmus Without Paper network.

### 5 Cyber and information security

Measure:

Building academic Security Oversight Centers (SOCs) and Computer Security Incident Response Teams (CSIRTs).

### 6. Artificial intelligence in the educational process

Measure:

Creation of new study programs at universities focused on the topics of Artificial Intelligence, Cyber Security, Digital Technologies, Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality and Extended Reality.

## **Conclusion**

The digitalization of the Slovak Republic is oriented towards the implementation of modern technologies in all sectors of the economy. As a member state of the European Union, the

Slovak Republic coordinates its activities in the field of digitization with other member states. For coordination, it uses the program documents of the digitization policy in the European Union and similarly participates in individual programs of the European Union, which are oriented directly or partially to the issue of digitization.

For that reason, the digitalization strategy 2030 is content-oriented to the program documents of the European Union. Several documents related to the strategy are being implemented in various departments. In the Ministry of Education, three action plans were approved (the first under the name concept), which specify the tasks of universities from the digitalization strategy.

Universities are not only creators of new digital technologies, but also users and spreaders of digital education. Universities are responsible for preparing a new qualified workforce with digital skills. Many tasks from the digitization strategy are oriented precisely towards fulfilling this mission of universities.

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# **PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORMS IN SLOVAKIA: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES IN THE CONTEXT OF EUROPEAN GOVERNANCE**

Vladimír KOVÁČIK

## **Abstract**

*This article examines the development and challenges of public administration in Slovakia within the broader framework of European governance. It explores the historical evolution of Slovak public administration since the transition in 1989, the impact of European Union membership, and current institutional arrangements. The paper highlights persistent challenges, including bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption perception, human resource issues, and the uneven implementation of e-Government. The study concludes with recommendations for digital transformation, governance innovation, and enhancing transparency and trust.*

**Keywords:** Slovakia; public administration; governance; European Union; reforms; transparency; e-Government

## **INTRODUCTION**

Public administration is a cornerstone of democratic governance and a decisive factor in the effectiveness of state institutions. It encompasses the processes, structures, and human resources that enable governments to implement policies, deliver services, and uphold the rule of law. In the Slovak Republic, the transformation of public administration reflects the broader trajectory of post-socialist transition in Central and Eastern Europe, where states faced the dual challenge of democratization and market liberalization after 1989 (Kopecký & Mair, 2003).

Slovakia's path has been marked by both ambitious reforms and persistent obstacles. Following independence in 1993, the country faced the need to build institutions practically from scratch. Unlike older democracies with centuries of administrative traditions, Slovakia had to modernize an inherited bureaucratic apparatus while simultaneously meeting the requirements of European integration (Lippert et al., 2001). The accession to the European Union in 2004 was a turning point, as it brought external pressure to adopt administrative standards compatible with EU law (*acquis communautaire*) and to enhance institutional capacity.

However, the process of reform has not been linear. While decentralization was formally introduced in the early 2000s, centralization tendencies have often resurfaced, reflecting political instability and low levels of trust in local governance (Beblavý, 2002). Corruption, clientelism, and the politicization of civil service recruitment have continued to undermine administrative professionalism (Meyer-Sahling & Mikkelsen, 2016). In addition, Slovakia's public administration faces the challenge of adapting to the digital era, as e-Government projects have progressed unevenly despite significant EU funding (OECD, 2022).

The purpose of this article is to analyze the evolution and current state of public administration in Slovakia, highlight structural and functional challenges, and place the Slovak experience within a comparative European perspective. Three key research questions guide the study:

1. How has Slovak public administration evolved since the democratic transition and EU accession?
2. What are the most pressing challenges undermining its efficiency and legitimacy today?
3. How does Slovakia compare with its regional peers, and what reforms are necessary to align it with principles of good governance in the EU context?

By addressing these questions, the article contributes to the broader discussion on governance in post-transition societies. It argues that while Slovakia has made significant progress in building democratic institutions and aligning with EU standards, persistent weaknesses in efficiency, transparency, and citizen trust hinder the effectiveness of its public administration.

administration plays a crucial role in ensuring effective governance, delivering public services, and maintaining the legitimacy of democratic institutions. In Slovakia, public administration has undergone profound transformations since the fall of communism in 1989. The country's accession to the European Union in 2004 accelerated reforms, yet challenges persist. This paper aims to analyze the evolution of Slovak public administration, identify its current challenges, and situate Slovakia within the European context.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

The study of public administration reforms in Slovakia must be grounded in the broader theoretical debates on governance. Scholars in public administration have developed various frameworks to conceptualize how states design and implement reforms, respond to societal demands, and integrate into supranational structures such as the European Union. Four

theoretical approaches are particularly relevant: **New Public Management (NPM)**, **Good Governance**, **Digital Governance**, and **Europeanization**.

**New Public Management (NPM).** Emerging in the 1980s and 1990s, NPM emphasizes efficiency, performance measurement, and the application of private-sector practices in the public sector (Hood, 1991; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). NPM reforms often involve decentralization, contracting-out of services, and stronger managerial autonomy. In Slovakia, NPM principles were partially implemented during the 2000 Public Administration Reform, when competences were devolved to municipalities and self-governing regions. However, the results were mixed: while decentralization enhanced local autonomy, it also revealed disparities in administrative capacity among municipalities (Beblavý, 2002).

**Good Governance.** The concept of good governance has been promoted by international organizations such as the World Bank, UN, and EU, and emphasizes transparency, accountability, participation, and rule of law (Kaufmann et al., 2010). For post-socialist states, adopting good governance principles has often been tied to conditionality for EU membership and access to structural funds. In Slovakia, initiatives to improve transparency—such as mandatory publication of contracts and the Freedom of Information Act (2000)—represent steps toward good governance. Nevertheless, the persistence of corruption scandals and politicization of state enterprises suggests a gap between formal rules and actual practices (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015).

**Digital Governance.** The rapid development of information and communication technologies has introduced the concept of digital governance, where public administration leverages digital tools to deliver services, interact with citizens, and enhance efficiency (Dunleavy et al., 2006). Slovakia has invested heavily in e-Government, supported by EU structural funds. However, the implementation has been inconsistent: while some services (such as electronic tax filing) function effectively, others face usability issues and low citizen uptake (OECD, 2022). This uneven progress illustrates the challenges of translating digital governance theory into practice in a context marked by limited administrative capacity and fragmented political will.

**Europeanization.** Finally, the process of Europeanization provides a framework for understanding how EU rules, norms, and practices influence domestic institutions (Radaelli, 2003). Slovakia's public administration reforms have been shaped by the need to comply with EU *acquis*, particularly in areas such as competition policy, public procurement, and structural fund management. Europeanization has created both opportunities—through financial and

technical support—and constraints, as domestic actors must adapt to supranational expectations. However, scholars note that Europeanization does not automatically eliminate entrenched practices such as clientelism; rather, its impact depends on domestic political and institutional contexts (Grabbe, 2006).

**Taken together, these theoretical perspectives help explain the complexity of public administration reforms in Slovakia. NPM highlights the tension between efficiency and equity, good governance emphasizes the normative standards of democratic accountability, digital governance points to technological opportunities and pitfalls, and Europeanization situates Slovakia within a broader transnational framework. The interplay of these models underscores why reforms in Slovakia have been uneven: they are influenced not only by domestic political dynamics but also by external conditionality and global governance trends.**

## **PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN SLOVAKIA: HISTORICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW**

The historical trajectory of Slovak public administration reflects the broader political, economic, and social transformations of the region. To understand current challenges, it is essential to trace its evolution across distinct periods: the socialist legacy, the democratic transition after 1989, the establishment of independent Slovakia in 1993, and integration into the European Union in 2004.

**The Socialist Legacy.** Prior to 1989, Slovakia was part of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and inherited a highly centralized, hierarchical administrative model. The public administration operated as an extension of the Communist Party, with decision-making concentrated in Prague and Bratislava serving as a regional administrative center (Innes, 2002). Local governments had minimal autonomy, functioning primarily as executors of central directives. This legacy of centralization and weak local governance left significant institutional path dependencies, which complicated the later process of democratization.

**Democratic Transition after 1989.** The Velvet Revolution in 1989 initiated a period of democratic reforms aimed at dismantling the socialist administrative system. The principle of subsidiarity began to gain importance, and local self-government was introduced through the 1990 Municipal Act, which granted municipalities a degree of autonomy (Illner, 1998).

However, reforms were often fragmented, lacking a coherent strategy, as policymakers grappled with simultaneous political and economic transitions.

Establishment of Independent Slovakia in 1993. The dissolution of Czechoslovakia brought additional challenges: the new Slovak Republic had to establish its own ministries, regulatory agencies, and diplomatic institutions. During the 1990s, public administration reform was overshadowed by political instability and debates over national identity (Haughton, 2001). Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar's governments prioritized central control, which delayed more ambitious decentralization. Nevertheless, groundwork was laid for later reforms, including the constitutional recognition of municipalities and higher territorial units.

The "Mikloš Reform" (2000–2002). A turning point came with the Public Administration Reform initiated by Deputy Prime Minister Ivan Mikloš. This reform sought to decentralize power by introducing eight self-governing regions (*samosprávne kraje*), transferring competencies in education, healthcare, and transport to local governments (Beblavý, 2002). It also aimed to rationalize the territorial organization by reducing state administrative districts. While the reform represented a major step toward subsidiarity, critics argue that it created a fragmented system with overlapping responsibilities, insufficient financing, and unequal administrative capacities among municipalities (Nemec & Wright, 1997).

EU Accession and Administrative Europeanization (2004). Slovakia's entry into the European Union required substantial adjustments in public administration. Compliance with the *acquis communautaire* demanded the creation of regulatory bodies in areas such as competition policy, public procurement, and financial management of EU structural funds (Lippert et al., 2001). EU conditionality also incentivized anti-corruption measures and transparency reforms, such as the adoption of the Freedom of Information Act (2000) and later digital initiatives for publishing contracts online. The need to absorb EU funds provided both opportunities for modernization and risks of corruption in procurement processes.

Contemporary Institutional Structure. Today, Slovak public administration is composed of three main levels:

1. **Central administration**, headed by the government and 13 ministries (e.g., Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Education). Central bodies also include specialized agencies and inspectorates.

2. **Regional self-government**, represented by eight self-governing regions (*vyššie územné celky*), responsible for areas such as secondary education, regional roads, and healthcare facilities.
3. **Local self-government**, encompassing 2,890 municipalities (*obce*), ranging from large cities such as Bratislava and Košice to small villages with fewer than 500 inhabitants (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2022).

This three-tiered system reflects European principles of subsidiarity but is constrained by resource disparities and frequent political debates over the balance between centralization and decentralization. Large municipalities generally perform better in service delivery, while small rural municipalities often lack professional staff and financial capacity, leading to uneven quality of governance.

**Path Dependence and Ongoing Reforms.** The Slovak case illustrates the persistence of institutional path dependence. Despite multiple reforms, elements of the socialist legacy—such as hierarchical decision-making and weak horizontal coordination—continue to shape public administration. Efforts to modernize have increasingly focused on e-Government and digital transformation, yet these initiatives remain fragmented. The historical overview demonstrates that while Slovakia has made progress toward building a modern, multi-level public administration, structural weaknesses remain embedded in its institutional design.

## KEY CHALLENGES IN SLOVAK PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Despite the significant progress achieved since 1989, Slovakia's public administration continues to face a number of systemic and structural challenges. These challenges are interconnected, often reinforcing each other, and they directly affect the efficiency, transparency, and legitimacy of governance. The most salient issues include bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption and low levels of trust, politicization of human resources, uneven digital transformation, and weak citizen engagement.

**1. Bureaucratic Inefficiency and Complexity.** Slovakia retains a reputation for excessive bureaucracy and complicated administrative procedures. Businesses and citizens frequently encounter delays and inconsistencies when interacting with public authorities. According to the World Bank's *Doing Business* reports, Slovakia has historically ranked below the EU average in areas such as obtaining construction permits, registering property, and paying taxes (World

Bank, 2020). Although administrative simplification programs have been introduced, including the so-called “anti-bureaucratic package” (2018), many procedures remain paper-based and fragmented across multiple agencies. The persistence of administrative red tape discourages entrepreneurship and reduces trust in state institutions.

**2. Corruption and Low Trust in Institutions.** Corruption remains one of the most pressing issues undermining Slovak governance. Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index (2023) ranks Slovakia 49th globally, below the EU average. High-profile scandals such as the “Gorilla” case (2012) revealed deep links between business elites and political parties, eroding citizens’ confidence in state institutions (Bútorová & Gyárfášová, 2010). Trust in government remains low: according to Eurobarometer (2023), only around 30% of Slovak citizens express trust in the national government, compared to an EU average of over 40%. This trust deficit constrains the legitimacy of reforms and increases susceptibility to populist politics.

**3. Politicization and Weak Professionalization of Human Resources.** The Slovak civil service continues to struggle with politicization, clientelism, and weak merit-based recruitment. Although the 2001 Civil Service Act sought to establish depoliticized rules for public sector employment, its implementation has been inconsistent, with frequent amendments diluting its effectiveness (Meyer-Sahling & Mikkelsen, 2016). Political appointments extend deep into the bureaucracy, undermining stability and professionalism. Surveys of Slovak civil servants reveal concerns about limited career development opportunities, inadequate training, and vulnerability to political influence (Nemec et al., 2021). This reduces administrative capacity and contributes to policy discontinuity.

**4. Uneven Digital Transformation.** While Slovakia has invested heavily in e-Government, outcomes remain mixed. EU funds have supported major projects such as the “Slovensko.sk” portal, electronic ID cards, and online tax services. Yet usability problems, overlapping systems, and lack of inter-agency coordination have hindered effectiveness (OECD, 2022). For instance, citizens often need to use multiple platforms for different services, reflecting weak integration. A 2021 survey by the European Commission found that only 59% of Slovaks had used online government services in the past year, compared to an EU average of 72% (European Commission, 2021). Digital transformation in Slovakia illustrates the broader challenge of translating policy ambitions into practical outcomes.

**5. Fragmentation and Resource Disparities in Local Governance.** With nearly 3,000 municipalities, many of which have fewer than 1,000 inhabitants, Slovakia faces challenges in delivering high-quality local services. Small municipalities often lack professional staff,

financial resources, and administrative capacity (Nemec & Sarmiento-Mirwaldt, 2016). This fragmentation leads to uneven service delivery across regions, reinforcing socio-economic inequalities between urban and rural areas. Attempts to encourage voluntary municipal mergers have met with resistance, as local identity and political interests remain strong.

**6. Citizen Participation and Weak Engagement.** Slovak governance also suffers from weak traditions of civic participation. Although legal mechanisms such as public consultations and participatory budgeting exist in some municipalities, they are not widely institutionalized. According to the OECD (2020), Slovakia ranks below the EU average in indicators of civic engagement. Civil society organizations remain active, especially in anti-corruption initiatives, but citizen participation in formal decision-making processes is often limited to voting. This democratic deficit reduces the responsiveness of public administration to societal needs.

Taken together, these challenges demonstrate that the modernization of Slovak public administration requires not only technical solutions but also deeper cultural and institutional changes. Bureaucratic simplification, anti-corruption reforms, depoliticization of the civil service, and stronger citizen engagement must be pursued simultaneously to overcome the vicious circle of inefficiency and distrust.

## **FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Looking ahead, the reform of Slovak public administration requires a comprehensive and strategic approach that addresses both technical deficiencies and deeper cultural challenges. Drawing on comparative experiences, OECD recommendations, and EU governance standards, several key priorities emerge for the future development of Slovakia's administrative system.

**1. Advancing Digital Transformation and E-Government Integration.** Slovakia must move beyond fragmented digital initiatives toward a fully integrated digital governance ecosystem. A priority should be the establishment of a unified digital identity system that allows seamless access to all public services through a single portal, modeled after Estonia's *X-Road* or Denmark's *NemID* (Dunleavy et al., 2006). Investments should focus not only on technology but also on improving user experience and accessibility. Training civil servants in digital competencies and promoting digital literacy among citizens will be critical to achieving widespread adoption. Furthermore, data-driven policy-making and open data platforms should be expanded to enhance transparency and evidence-based decision-making (OECD, 2022).

**2. Strengthening Transparency and Anti-Corruption Mechanisms.** While Slovakia has made progress in publishing public contracts and adopting transparency legislation, further steps are needed to build a culture of integrity. Recommendations include:

- Establishing an independent, adequately resourced anti-corruption agency with investigative powers, modeled after Romania's National Anticorruption Directorate.
- Expanding whistleblower protections to encourage reporting of corruption cases without fear of retaliation.
- Introducing integrity training for public officials and embedding ethics standards in performance evaluations. These measures should be accompanied by systematic monitoring of procurement processes, particularly those involving EU funds, to reduce the risk of misuse and clientelism (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015).

**3. Professionalizing Human Resources in Public Administration.** Depoliticization of the civil service is essential for building administrative capacity and policy continuity. Slovakia should:

- Reinforce merit-based recruitment and promotion, minimizing political appointments.
- Establish a Civil Service Academy for training and continuous professional development, modeled after France's École Nationale d'Administration (ENA).
- Introduce competency frameworks to ensure that officials at all levels possess the skills needed for modern governance, including digital, analytical, and communication competencies (Nemec et al., 2021).
- Improve salary structures to reduce incentives for corruption and to retain talent within the public sector.

**4. Consolidating Local Governance and Enhancing Regional Capacity.** Given the extreme fragmentation of Slovakia's municipal system, reforms must aim at strengthening inter-municipal cooperation or encouraging voluntary amalgamation. The experience of Denmark, which reduced the number of municipalities through consolidation while enhancing service delivery, illustrates possible pathways (Swianiewicz, 2010). For Slovakia, strategies may include:

- Providing financial incentives for municipal mergers.

- Expanding joint service delivery platforms across small municipalities.
- Enhancing fiscal decentralization to ensure that local governments have sufficient resources to fulfill their competencies. At the same time, regional governments (*samosprávne kraje*) should be given clearer responsibilities and adequate financing to act as effective intermediaries between central and local levels.

**5. Enhancing Citizen Engagement and Participatory Governance.** Citizen trust can only be rebuilt if governance becomes more participatory. Slovakia should institutionalize participatory budgeting in municipalities and regions, following the Polish example where over 250 cities implement this mechanism annually (Sarmiento-Mirwaldt & Nemec, 2016). Public consultations should become mandatory for major legislative proposals, with digital platforms enabling broad citizen input. Strengthening partnerships with civil society organizations and promoting civic education in schools will also be vital to developing a culture of active citizenship.

**6. Aligning with EU Governance Standards.** Finally, Slovakia should continue to align its governance practices with EU and OECD standards. This includes:

- Adopting the European Commission's *Better Regulation Agenda* to improve regulatory quality.
- Ensuring full compliance with EU procurement rules and financial accountability standards.
- Engaging in peer-learning with EU member states that have successfully modernized public administration, such as Estonia, Finland, and the Netherlands.

**Summary of Recommendations.** Slovakia's public administration stands at a crossroads. Without decisive reforms, inefficiencies, corruption, and citizen distrust will continue to undermine its legitimacy. However, with a clear strategic vision and political will, Slovakia has the potential to build a modern, efficient, and citizen-oriented public administration aligned with European standards. The key lies in simultaneously advancing digital transformation, strengthening integrity, professionalizing human resources, consolidating local governance, and deepening citizen engagement.

## CONCLUSION

The development of Slovak public administration over the past three decades illustrates both the progress and persistent challenges of governance in a post-socialist society. Slovakia has built the basic institutional architecture of a democratic state, integrated into the European Union, and implemented important reforms such as decentralization and digitalization. Yet, as the preceding analysis has shown, these reforms remain incomplete and uneven. Structural weaknesses—including bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption, politicization, weak digital performance, and limited citizen engagement—continue to undermine the legitimacy and effectiveness of governance.

The future trajectory of Slovak public administration depends on the ability of political leaders, civil servants, and citizens to build a shared vision of governance. Priorities should include the professionalization of the civil service, the fight against corruption, the consolidation of fragmented local governance, and the advancement of digital transformation. Importantly, reforms must not remain purely technical but must also cultivate a culture of transparency, accountability, and civic participation.

Slovakia's experience demonstrates that public administration is not simply a matter of legal frameworks or organizational charts but a living system shaped by historical legacies, political dynamics, and societal expectations. To succeed, future reforms must be holistic, addressing not only efficiency but also democratic legitimacy. If Slovakia is able to seize this opportunity, it can transform its public administration into a modern, citizen-oriented system that strengthens both the state and society.

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# **PUBLIC POLICY AS A LIVING PROCESS OF DECISION-MAKING AND IMPLEMENTATION**

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## **Abstract**

*The theory of public policy represents a dynamic and evolving part of political science that seeks to analyze, interpret, and influence public decision-making processes. Its foundations lie in the broader epistemological and methodological framework of political science, from which it adopts key research tools and analytical models. Classic approaches, such as Easton's input-output model or Jenkins' decision-making concept, provide fundamental insights into the functioning of political systems and the formulation of public policies. Contemporary public policy analysis builds upon these foundations by employing advanced modeling techniques, emphasizing the cyclical nature of policy processes, and incorporating systemic interactions among actors, institutions, and environmental influences. Public policy is increasingly understood not as a static act but as a living process, marked by continuous feedback, adaptation, and reinterpretation, through which societies attempt to resolve complex public issues in a coordinated and rational manner.*

**Keywords:** Public policy, political science, policy theory, decision-making, input-output model, policy cycle, public administration,

## **1. Theoretical aspects of public policy**

The theory of public policy, as an established part of political science discourse, has its roots in the broader framework of political sciences. From this framework, it consciously or implicitly adopts various research approaches, analytical procedures, and epistemological foundations. In this sense, the methodological tools of public policy theory are not isolated but rather organically derived from the political science tradition within which it was historically constituted. Methodology, understood as a systematic reflection on research methods and their theoretical foundations, plays a vital role in public policy theory. Its main function is to formulate general philosophical, logical, epistemological, and, where relevant, axiological assumptions that enable not only the meaningful application of individual research techniques but also their correct interpretation within a broader theoretical context. Every scientific

methodology contains a set of methods characteristic of a given research framework, reflecting its specific cognitive aims and subject of inquiry.

The idea of modeling the political process as a sequence of several steps was introduced as early as the 1950s by H. Lasswell. By the 1960s and 1970s, political science began to show efforts toward a more systematic and analytically precise understanding of political processes as dynamic systems, resulting from complex interactions between the environment, actors, and institutional frameworks. A significant shift in this regard is represented by the works of David Easton and William I. Jenkins, whose concepts remain foundational models of 20th-century political thinking. Their schemes of the political process are frequently referenced in standard textbooks on political science and public policy and remain relevant explanatory tools for current research on public decision-making.

Easton's model of the political system, developed especially in his works from 1957 and 1965, offers a systems approach to politics, in which the political system operates as an open and adaptive organism responding to stimuli from its environment. The key analytical axis of the model is the input-conversion-output chain, with the entire process closed by feedback. Inputs represent demands and support that enter the system in response to conditions in the social, economic, or cultural environment. Within the system, these inputs are transformed (converted) into decisions and policy outputs, such as laws, regulations, programs, or measures, that, in turn, influence the environment and generate new inputs. This so-called input-output model is valuable especially for its simplicity and abstraction, which allow its application to a wide range of political phenomena. Its cybernetic logic and focus on feedback represent one of the first attempts to capture the dynamic and cyclical nature of the political process. However, Easton's understanding of politics as a "black box" in which inputs are transformed into outputs without an explicit description of internal mechanisms also generated a need for further elaboration—particularly emphasizing the processes occurring within the political system itself. This limitation is explicitly addressed in the scholarly literature. For example, Malíková notes that although Easton's scheme allows politics to be understood as a system response to environmental pressures, it fails to offer an analytical framework for a detailed analysis of actors, decision-making procedures, or conflicts of interest that shape the nature of outputs. Easton's concept therefore stimulated the development of other models aimed at "opening the black box" and modeling internal political system processes, particularly interactions among actors, institutional constraints, and network relationships (Malíková, 2003).

In parallel with Easton, W. I. Jenkins addressed similar issues and proposed defining politics (especially public policy) as a set of decisions aimed at achieving specific objectives, adopted and implemented through public authority. Jenkins' approach emphasized the decision-making dimension of public policy and laid the foundation for further research focused on decision-making theory and the theory of public decisions.

In the context of contemporary public policy theory, the most relevant research methods and model-based approaches are those that enable the analytical grasp of specific public policy phenomena, whether in their full structural complexity or through a selected analytical lens. Such model construction is grounded in a nomothetic research objective, i.e., an effort to identify and explain relationships, phenomena, and patterns with broader applicability across similar types of public policy processes or decisions. From this perspective, it is scientifically appropriate to view the methodology of public policy as a hierarchically structured system of models representing various levels of theoretical abstraction of reality. As Fiala and Schubert emphasize, models function as theoretically condensed representations of reality, enabling the identification of key structures and mechanisms of public policy processes. Their aim is not to reproduce reality in full but to highlight, through abstraction, those aspects that are most crucial to understanding specific policies or political processes (Fiala & Schubert, 2000).

At the same time, these are tools that transform empirical data into a form that allows for theoretical reasoning, generalization, and the identification of connections that would otherwise remain hidden. These approaches, particularly modeling as a scientific method, are gaining increasing importance in public policy analysis as well. Modeling in this context represents a process in which problem formulation leads to the creation of an analytical model and the subsequent testing of its assumptions and consequences. As F. Ochraňa states, it is a cognitive process that transfers knowledge from the model—as a simplified image of reality—back into reality itself, thus aiding in a better understanding of specific situations and trends. This approach, which has proven to be particularly productive, is already established in the methodology of political science itself, where it functions as a tool that enables holistic interpretation of political processes, not only in terms of individual actors or institutions but also from the perspective of system dynamics, interactions, and structural factors.

Within the methodological framework of public policy theory, models play an important role as they allow for structured understanding of complex processes involved in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of public decisions. Models serve as analytical tools that help researchers and practitioners systematically identify the main phases, actors, structures, and dynamics of public policy processes. A scientifically grounded classification of

these approaches considers several methodological criteria, such as the mode of knowledge acquisition and form of expression, the nature of the studied object, the determining aspect of the subject of inquiry, the degree of generality, and the level of normativity of the applied approach (Veselá et al., 2007).

Among the significant model-based approaches that have become a standard part of the theoretical-methodological apparatus of public policy is the policy process model, also known as the policy cycle model. This model, known in Western literature as the policy cycle, divides public policy activity into sequentially ordered phases, from problem identification, agenda setting, formulation of alternatives, decision-making, implementation, to evaluation of the effectiveness of the adopted measures. Although this model is often criticized for its normative nature and simplification of the real dynamics of the political process, its heuristic value in the analytical examination of public policies is indisputable. It allows for the systematization of diverse empirical data and helps trace in which phase of the cycle distortions, failures, or shifts occur (Malíková, 2003).

The concept of the policy cycle is based on a normative idea of democratic governance, where politics represents the articulated will of citizens, processed through the political system into specific decisions. These decisions are further transformed by expert administration into applicable measures and implemented in practice. The policy cycle model, also referred to as the stages model, has become a standard analytical tool in the field of public policy. Its main advantage lies in its ability to systematize complex political processes into distinct stages, enabling more detailed analytical reflection of specific segments of political decision-making. In the academic literature, one can find various classifications and descriptions of the content and focus of policy cycle models. Some authors refer to models related to public policy or politics in general as ideological models. Štiková notes that these "ideological models, unlike models of the political business cycle, assume that each politician, in making decisions, follows the programmatic goals of the political party to which they belong, thus reflecting the interests of a particular group of voters. Traditionally, it is assumed that left-wing parties focus more on solving unemployment problems, while right-wing parties generally place greater emphasis on reducing inflation, even at the cost of higher unemployment" (Štiková, 2007, p. 5).

There are also approaches that emphasize the role of so-called economic actors—entities with decisive economic influence. These actors may take various forms depending on the specific societal and institutional context. For example, in the Swiss context, banking managers and owners of financial institutions may dominate. These approaches are found in the works of authors such as Persson and Tabellini (2000), who discuss rational political-economic cycle

models, or Alesina and Roubini, who describe rational ideological models (Alesina, 1990). However, it is important to distinguish between models focused on economic contexts and models that concentrate on the structure of the public policy-making process itself.

The first category includes, for example, the classic political-economic cycle model by William Nordhaus (1975), considered one of the first systematic attempts to explain the interactions between political decisions and economic indicators. This model is based on the assumptions of adaptive expectations and the irrational behavior of voters, with political actors aiming to maximize electoral gain. The main analytical tool here is the Phillips curve, which illustrates a short-term trade-off between unemployment and inflation. Political leadership can strategically influence these variables to create a favorable public perception of its performance. As Veselý notes, drawing on the works of authors such as Jones, Brewer, deLeon, Kingdon, Pressman, Wildavsky, Weimer, and Vining, these models provided useful analytical frameworks during the 1970s, though their applicability today is the subject of broader debate. Nevertheless, they remain important reference points for studying the interaction between political decision-making and socio-economic phenomena.

"Other public policy cycle models include the nine-stage model by Hogwood and Gunn (1984), the seven-stage model by Jenkins (1997), and the five-stage model by Hewlett and Ramesh (1995). As noted by several authors, in public policy analysis, most analysts are satisfied with a four-stage model, consisting of the following phases:

- Identification and recognition of a social problem
- Decision on public policy
- Implementation of public policy
- Evaluation of public policy" (Kováčová, Králík, 2017, p. 114).

## **2. Phases of the public policy cycle**

In the following text, we outline the phases of the public policy cycle: (Klus, 2007)

- Identification and articulation of the public problem:

Public problems rarely arise suddenly; they typically develop gradually until they gain the character of a socially perceived and legitimate problem. A public problem can be defined as a condition that represents a significant discrepancy between the current and the normatively desired state, which significantly affects specific social groups in their everyday reality. If left unresolved, such a problem may escalate into a deeper social crisis, ranging from disruption of social stability to extreme manifestations such as social unrest or violent conflicts.

- Decision-making process in public policy:

Decision-making in public policy within democratic regimes is based on an institutionalized competition of ideas, values, and interests. Three main groups of actors participate in decision-making: citizens, public officials, and experts. A common denominator of their interests is the effort to improve the social condition, although preferred tools and paths to the goal may differ. As R. Dahl points out, decision-making should reflect three fundamental criteria:

- individual preferences,
- professional competence,
- and economic efficiency.

Currently, emphasis is also placed on the dimension of sustainability, requiring the use of strategic analysis tools, forecasting, and thorough evaluation of the long-term impacts of adopted measures.

- Implementation of adopted policies:

Implementing public policy means translating strategic goals and measures into practice. Implementation does not occur under ideal conditions but within existing institutions, constraints, and social realities. The literature identifies four basic implementation models:

- authoritative model,
- participatory model,
- advocacy coalition model,
- and learning-in-process model.

Each of these forms has its advantages and limitations. The success of implementation can be hindered by the inertia of old institutional structures, resistance to change, lack of resources, or unwillingness of some actors to actively participate. Implementation relies on various forms of governance—from legal instruments, through organizational structures, to educational or symbolic strategies. An important aspect is the time frame: some policies are implemented with short-term goals, while others pursue long-term strategic visions.

- Evaluation of public policy:

Evaluating public policies is a key stage of the cycle because it provides feedback on whether the adopted solutions met the set objectives. Comparative analysis is most commonly

used, either over time (comparison with the previous state) or in space (comparison between regions or countries). Benchmarking-comparing with best practices in other jurisdictions- is increasingly applied. Evaluation includes both quantitative and qualitative methods, with key criteria often being:

- cost-effectiveness (cost-benefit analysis),
- social return,
- degree of social benefit,
- and the policy's ability to respond to new challenges.

Findings from this phase should then feed into the next iteration of the policy cycle, ensuring its dynamic and adaptive nature.

“Evaluation in public policy can generally be defined as an analytical tool and procedure through which two things can be achieved. First: evaluation research as an analytical tool includes examining political programs to obtain all information concerning the assessment of its performance, both process and outcome. Second: evaluation as a phase of the policy cycle generally returns this information to the policy-making process” (Wollmann 2007, p. 393). Evaluation and monitoring are two inseparable but distinct activities in managing public policies and programs that complement each other but serve different purposes. As Gombitová states, “evaluation, unlike monitoring, is carried out at a certain point in the program cycle and may take place before implementation or after its completion” (Gombitová, 2007, p. 19). This difference between evaluation and monitoring is crucial for understanding their different functions within policy assessment. Monitoring is a continuous process involving data and information collection during program or policy implementation. Its goal is to ensure a systematic approach to information about implementation progress, enabling timely identification of problems, tracking progress, and taking immediate action if needed. Monitoring includes establishing a data collection system closely tied to program goals and measurable indicators. Such indicators are essential to secure relevant and effective data collection that will provide ongoing information on the state of implementation. Monitoring thus deals with continuous tracking and recording of data, enabling operational responses to problems that may arise during implementation. This process is dynamic and should be continuously adapted to current needs and findings.

Evaluation follows monitoring and focuses on assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of the implemented policy or program. According to the Ministry of Regional Development of the Czech Republic (MMR ČR), evaluation requires prior monitoring, a clear purpose for

assessment, and relevant settings to provide feedback. Evaluation involves thorough data collection and analysis not only from monitoring but also from other sources such as external analyses, assessments, and expert studies.

Evaluation occurs at a specific point in the program cycle, often after implementation but can also be pre-implementation if assessing preparation and planning. This assessment process aims to provide reliable evidence for strategic management and decision-making, enabling identification of whether the program achieved its objectives, how expectations were met, and where improvements are needed. Evaluation may also consider broader social, economic, or political contexts in which the program was implemented, providing more comprehensive feedback. The main difference between monitoring and evaluation is that monitoring focuses on ongoing tracking, documenting, and assessing program realization, emphasizing data collection about progressive activities necessary for quick adaptation of implementation. Evaluation, on the other hand, concentrates on comprehensive assessment of effectiveness and outcomes, based on in-depth analysis of previously collected data and formulating recommendations for improvement and optimization of the policy or program. Monitoring is thus more about operational and continuous oversight, while evaluation is a process requiring deeper data analysis and interpretation, conducted at specific points in the policy cycle to improve future decision-making and implementation.

Another important analytical approach is the A-A-A model (agenda-alternatives-actions), which focuses on key moments of the decision-making process: problem formulation as an agenda, generating alternative solutions, and the actual adoption or implementation of a specific public policy action. The model highlights the significance of problem framing, as well as how power and institutional structures influence the choice from a set of alternatives and determine which solutions reach the decision-making center. It also emphasizes that political decision-making and agenda-setting are not predetermined but rather result from interactions among various actors situated in different political arenas. Political agenda emerges through communication among actors across multiple levels of the political system and may be shaped by their mutual influence. Within this model, political arenas are defined as different areas of political life where interaction occurs among various actors, each arena having specific characteristics and dynamics. The political agenda is created through negotiation and bargaining within these arenas and is continuously influenced by how actors in individual arenas deal with different problems and challenges.

Main arenas of policy-making according to the A-A-A model: (Kováčová, N., Králik, 2017)

Public arena:

This is the space where public opinions, discussions, and values form, influencing political decision-making. The public is an active participant whose views may be shaped by media, political parties, or civic organizations.

Parliamentary arena:

This is the place where political decisions are made through legislative processes. Deputies and senators discuss draft laws that can become part of the political agenda. Parliaments play a key role in setting political priorities and deciding on laws.

Party arenas:

Political programs and strategies of individual parties are shaped here. Parties negotiate whom to support within coalitions or opposition and which issues become part of their political agendas. This arena transforms political ideologies into concrete political proposals.

Cabinet arena:

This space represents the decision-making mechanism within the government cabinet, where public policy guidelines are determined. Ministries and other government bodies decide which policies to implement at the national level. The cabinet allocates political priorities among different areas.

Bureaucratic arena:

The bureaucracy, as the administrative power of the state, plays a significant role in implementing political decisions. This arena includes employees of state institutions who carry out administrative processes to ensure that political decisions are translated into practice.

## **Summary**

The stages of the public policy cycle represent a complex and dynamic process that begins with the identification and articulation of socially significant problems, continues with decision-making involving various actors, and proceeds through the implementation of adopted measures within existing institutions and social conditions. An integral part of the cycle is also the evaluation of policies through monitoring and assessment, which provide feedback and enable adaptation and improvement of public measures. The A-A-A model further emphasizes the importance of political arenas and interactions between actors that influence the formation of the political agenda and decision-making processes. This approach demonstrates that public policy is not the result of a linear process but a complex network of relationships, communication, and negotiation that shape political decisions in a pluralistic society. Therefore,

effective management of public policies requires understanding these relationships and ensuring not only sound decision-making but also thorough implementation and evaluation with regard to sustainability and social benefit.

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# EDUCATIONAL POLICY AS PART OF PUBLIC POLICY

Peter PLAVČAN – Veronika BAKOVÁ

## **Abstract**

*In the public sector, public goods are produced that serve the general benefit, including education. The principles in education for the public assessment of the performance of public sector functions are presented and their content is defined. Basic interests are manifested in educational policy, which represent the demands and ambitions of actors in education. In educational policy, according to management theory, managerial functions can also be applied to describe the activities performed, which have their specific content described in definitions. Furthermore, the tools of educational policy are described as a summary of national and international organizations, management processes, activities and documents through which education is managed. The types of reforms are also presented in a clear structure, and special types of actors participating in the reform process in education are also defined.*

**Keywords:** *functions and tools of educational policy, political decision-making, educational reform, educational policy*

## **Introduction**

In the public sector, public goods are produced that serve the general benefit, while no one can be excluded from their use. Among these public goods is also the free provision of education in the educational system. This issue is dealt with by the scientific discipline of the economics of education, which belongs to the knowledge base of the theory of educational policy.

The existence of the public sector in the state is related to its social function, which in the organizational structure of the state is performed by the block of sectors of human development (education, health, culture and social services) and the block of existential guarantees (social security). Education, as a branch of human development, participates in the simple and widespread reproduction of human potential. Public policy is a summary of principles, tools and practical actions of actors operating in the public sector.

The public sector, with regard to its nature as a social function of the state, is a sector that consumes public resources. For this reason, several principles are used for the public evaluation of the performance of public sector functions in education, the evaluation results of which

enable citizens to obtain a sufficient and comprehensible overview of the use of public funds in education.

### **1. Political decision-making and tools of educational policy**

The principles in education for the public evaluation of the performance of public sector functions are mainly quality, efficiency, fairness and accountability.

Quality in education has several meanings, it generally means the fulfillment of educational or other goals in educational institutions as well as the constant increase of prospective exclusivity in education above the expected standard goals prescribed and achieved in the educational system.

Effectiveness in education policy is understood as the fulfillment of goals with certain sources of public funds. Specific methods are used to examine the overall effectiveness of education, which consists of pedagogical effectiveness (the fulfillment of educational goals in addition to the material and personnel provision of teaching) and the economic effectiveness of education (e.g. the number of graduates in addition to public resources spent on education).

Justice is one of the basic principles of educational policy and is usually associated with the principle of equal opportunities. This principle is usually fulfilled through equality of opportunity, which in education means open access to free education, currently in the Slovak Republic at all levels of education. Free education ensures the possibility of obtaining education even for children from low-income groups. However, a number of different researches indicate (PISA) that this is not the case, only the part of the youth who come from the higher income groups of the society get to university education.

Accountability as a principle began to be applied in the first half of the 1990s in the Slovak education system at the initiative of experts from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Accountability in this sense means the public presentation of the results of one's own work in the fulfillment of educational and other goals by a school or other educational or educational institution and the need to be publicly accountable for the results achieved. This principle has brought into educational practice a number of different self-assessment quality assurance systems, as well as public websites of educational institutions with the publication of information from educational results to the consumption of public funds and other changes.

In the public sector, a number of individuals work in various organizations, it is under public control from proposals for changes in activities, legislation, financing of public institutions and individual citizens. For this reason, the public sector is also an important subject of political interest, public policy actors are involved in the redistribution of public funds for education to citizens, which more or less increases the political preferences of which politician or political party.

Many theories of management or management are directly based on the objectification of decision-making processes and the execution of activities. Evidence is also provided by various evaluation schemes (ISO, CAF EFQM, etc.), which, with their requirements for evaluation processes, lead to the automation of not only production processes, but also management processes. This procedure helps in the production sector to achieve the lowest possible error rate and consequently losses, whether material, personnel, or loss of profit.

In public policy, and thus also in educational policy, we record other approaches of actions of actors. Three basic interests are manifested in education policy, which can merge, but are mostly different and depend on the thinking and actions of education policy actors. These are individual, social, group and other interests.

Individual interests in educational policy are the interests of individuals who have ambitions and aspirations and through their actions want to assert themselves in the public or in the implementation of public policy. As a result of their activities, with media support in the public generally positively accepted opinions, e.g. for the direction of educational policy, but the result of their activity can also be a headless attack on the activities of politicians in the decision-making sphere, even if they make good decisions for the development of the educational system.

**Society interests** in educational policy are interests declared by individuals or groups of actors in education to guide the educational policy of the state. These interests are usually declared in educational policy program documents.

**Group interests** in educational policy represent the interests of individual groups of educational policy actors. These groups of education policy actors, even with a society-wide consensus on the direction of education policy and the implementation of specific measures, may partially agree with these changes, but at the same time also oppose them.

**Other interests** in educational policy are represented by individuals or groups who are not among the actors of educational policy, but who try to participate either in the successes

achieved in the educational system with the aim of personal benefit or public visibility, or vice versa, their specific interest is in conflict with the actions of one of the actors of educational policy (encumbrance of the school on its land, etc.).

For example, even with the regular annual salary increase of teachers as the only group of employees in the public interest and its guarantee by the 2017 law, some groups of educational policy actors publicly protested against this decision of the decision-making sphere, the main group interest was probably political goals.

In the concrete fulfillment of interests in educational policy, individual actors or groups of educational policy actors carry out the following activities:

- carry out an assessment of the situation in various areas of educational policy,
- propose alternative solutions in educational policy,
- they initiate negotiations with the decision-making sphere and political actors in educational policy and try to enforce their proposals for changing educational policy,
- induce individual or group pressure or political pressure on the decision-making sphere to change the educational policy or part of it through public expressions of dissatisfaction.

## **2. Functions and tools of educational policy**

In educational policy, according to management theory, managerial functions can also be applied to describe the activities performed, namely planning, organizing, leading and decision-making and controlling with their specific content in educational policy.

**The planning function** in educational policy is represented by the preparation and application of program documents of educational policy, which represent the intentions, goals and tools of the further direction of educational policy at all levels of state management.

**The organizing function** represents the creation and maintenance of an effective organization of the educational system and its components in order to fulfill the societal goals in education declared in the program documents of the educational policy. The need to create a hierarchical structure of relationships and competences and create conditions for its long-term stability is also related to the maintenance of an effective organization of the educational system, e.g. ensuring simple and, if necessary, expanded reproduction of personnel resources or sufficient financial resources.

**The function of leadership and decision-making** in educational policy represents the activity of political actors and management employees at various levels of management in the organizations of the educational system. The overall quality of leadership and decision-making in educational policy significantly affects the quality of educational, educational and other activities in the educational system.

**The control function** in educational policy is a specific process of continuous critical evaluation of educational, educational, management, financial and other activities in the organizations of the educational system. However, the aim of control in education is not only to ascertain the actual state of affairs, but also the difference from the planned goals - educational standards at all levels of the organizational structure of the educational system and in all activities carried out in the classroom (education and training), in the school (management), in the municipality, in the self-governing region and also in the central body of the state administration for education.

Political decision-making is supported in the public either through generally valid theses or also through theses that are generally considered publicly acceptable, and these are usually used to justify specific decisions in educational policy.

These theses include:

- parents have the right to raise their children - to defend home education,
- ensuring the rights of national minorities - to support the development of national education,
- the state's responsibility for education – to support the financing of specific school founders or schools in a certain region when there is a lack of public resources,
- increasing efficiency in education – reducing the number of educational institutions, employees or education expenses,
- apoliticalness in education – dismissal of employees and others.

Educational policy tools represent a summary of national and international organizations, management processes, activities and documents through which organizational, executive and control activities are carried out in the creation and implementation of educational policy. The tools of educational policy are:

- funding of education,
- educational policy program documents,

- legal regulations in education,
- international educational policy and organizations in education,
- evaluation and accreditation of education,
- lifelong learning and recognition of qualifications,
- curricular policy,
- information resources about education.

### **3. Theoretical approaches to education reform**

Reform is change. Sometimes it is difficult to determine whether a change is large enough to be considered a reform. The term reform is often used precisely to ensure greater popularity of the upcoming changes. In educational policy, this term is also used for partial changes in the organization of parts of the educational system, e.g. from the past we record the reform of teacher education, the reform of the school network and some others. When creating legal regulations, there is an unwritten rule that if more than one third of the legal regulation is to be changed, then a new one should be drafted. According to this rule, it would be possible to suggest that if there are fundamental changes in at least three educational policy instruments, one can talk about educational policy reform.

Any change in education policy can be done in two ways, democratically and undemocratically. To ensure democratic changes in educational policy tools, established mechanisms of communication with the public and the decision-making sphere serve, which are public comment procedures on the proposals for these changes or legally regulated negotiation procedures of selected educational policy actors with a decision-making sphere on the proposals for these changes, even before they are submitted for negotiation by the Government of the Slovak Republic.

**In a democratic change**, the decision-making sphere plans the change and develops program documents of the educational policy together with the actors of the educational policy, namely students, teachers, employees in the education system, but also parents and their representatives, thus taking into account the opinions of more or less users of these changes in a broad plenary, not only in the framework of legally established commenting procedures and negotiation procedures, but also in the broad plenary of the compilers when preparing these changes.

**In non-democratic change**, the decision-making sphere implements the change of educational policy instruments only formally, does not involve the actors of educational policy in the process of preparing changes, sometimes involves them only formally through the interest

groups selected by it. When participating in legally established public comment procedures or negotiation procedures, the result is that comments are not taken into account many times without rational justification.

Each educational system has its own social and economic conditions in which it fulfills its social mission. The educational system as a social system has certain internal incentives for changes in connection with social and economic changes in society. Opinions related to theories of self-regulation appear sporadically in educational policy, i.e. j. that no reform needs to be carried out. Theories of self-regulation or however, balance theories do not take into account the complexity of the educational system.

In the educational system, on the one hand, it is not possible to implement innovative changes in several educational policy instruments, but on the other hand, to implement them in the original organizational structure, in the conditions of applying the inherited original management tools and material and technical equipment.

It is the persistence in the position of the theory of self-regulation in educational policy that leads to stagnation and finally to depression in the school system in various areas. The position of teachers (social security) is gradually deteriorating due to the increase in work duties and inflation, the material and technical equipment of schools is gradually becoming obsolete, because internal economic efficiency has its limits.

According to the relationship to the social environment, reforms can be divided into internal reforms that affect the socioeconomic environment of the educational system and external reforms that affect the socioeconomic environment of the entire society.

Internal reforms include:

- correctional reforms,
- modernization reforms and
- structural reforms.

External reforms include:

- systemic reforms and
- global reforms.

The basic classification of reforms in educational policy is also presented by J. Kalous (Kalous, 1997).

**Corrective reforms** are mainly carried out after fundamental social changes with the aim of speedy correction of deformed social or economic functions in the educational reform, without previous analyzes of the actual situation, pointing to the lack of time and the need to implement a quick change. An example can be the accelerated change in budget rules for the financing of regional education in 1994 (J. Tarčák's reform) in the Slovak Republic.

**Modernization reforms** are based on the idea that education is good, but there is still room for improvement. These reforms relate to various instruments of educational policy and have the task of improving the content of education, material and technical equipment, teacher training and the like. With a lack of financial resources or a lack of will on the part of individual educational policy actors, such a modernization reform can turn into partial adjustments in educational policy.

**Structural reforms** are changes in the entire organizational structure of the educational system, including changes in organizational, executive and control functions at all levels of management in the educational system. These reforms concern, for example, the expansion of the organizational structure of the educational system including state education by private and church education, including related changes in the management functions of the decision-making sphere at various levels of management.

**Systemic reforms** are changes that are a reaction to fundamental changes in the social and economic functions of the state and are carried out together with reforms in other social areas. With their changes, these reforms go beyond the scope and content of the existing educational system. These reforms interfere with the very essence of the organization of the educational system and change the principles of its functioning. For example, the lack of public resources can change the entire system of open access to education, financing of education, and thus also the social function of the educational system.

**Global reforms** are reforms affecting the international educational environment, while the initiative can come from above, i.e. from international organizations and institutions, or from below, as an initiative from within national states from actors of educational policy. An example of a global reform from above is the radical change in the field of recognition of education and qualification documents, which was initiated by the European Commission in the last decade. An example from below is the universities' initiative for global change in the provision of higher education known as the Bologna Process.

Actors of education policy are involved in the preparation of the reform, but also often the general public, which expresses itself according to its possibilities regarding the planned changes. In addition to the usual educational policy actors, two types of actors are also involved in the educational policy reform, but with diametrically different goals. They are the so-called missionaries and emigrants (Kalous, 1997).

**Missionaries** are the actors of educational policy whose participation in the reform ensures the support of the public, but also of other actors of educational policy. These actors of educational policy are generally respected by the school and the general public as experts, humanistically oriented public officials. Their task is to prepare the reform, but also to popularize it among professionals and the general public. Therefore, it is necessary that among the missionaries there should be representatives of a wide spectrum of educational policy actors, but also at the same time representatives of different political thinking, sometimes even with divergent views on the content and performance of educational policy. Their work should be appreciated. They mostly accepted the work of a missionary with the aim of bringing about a change in educational policy, despite different political attitudes compared to the current decision-making sphere, but this participation of theirs is often disparaged among missionaries.

**Emigrants** are the opponents of the reform, they are the actors of the education policy who hinder the reform for various reasons - political (if the reform is successful, the minister gets preferences and an opposition politician loses them), professional (I know better, but I did not prevail in the round table discussion) and personal (I don't like someone or they paid me for it).

## **Conclusion**

Education policy as one of the branches of human development is part of public policy. It concerns every person in different periods of his life, as a pupil, student, graduate, parent of an educated child or a grandparent whose granddaughters or grandsons attend school. Many are affected by educational policy as people who participate in the formulation and operation of educational policy in several ways, among these actors of educational policy are school managements, pedagogical and professional employees, school staff, but also actors outside schools. They are mainly politicians dealing with educational policy, employers, churches and other actors, whom we also consider to be part of educational policy, as part of their activities are directly related to education in the state.

The current state of education policy in the world and in Europe is significantly influenced by the effects of globalization. In the last decade, we have seen a wave of migration from Third

World countries to rich countries in the Northern Hemisphere, where the population of migrant children and youth fundamentally changes the teaching process at all levels of schools. We are witnessing the escalation of international tension, which leads to an increase in military spending at the expense of public spending on culture, education and social purposes. In addition, Europe is implementing a not entirely understandable green strategy, which, although it will minimally affect global climate change, leads to a disproportionate tax and other burden on the population and its direction below the poverty line. At present, with many times ill-conceived decisions in educational policy and reduction of public spending on education, practically only one tactic is possible to prevent the reduction of the quality of education. So that all actors in education, namely the student, teacher, school director, minister and all others in education, fulfill their duties with effort and effort in order to achieve the desired result.

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# MODIFICATION OF THE PROFILE OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Roman ŠIMÁČEK, Lukáš BERNÁTEK

## **Abstract**

*Political parties in Slovakia are currently facing several challenges that reflect broader social and technological changes. The development of the party system has significantly transformed since the 1990s, from stable ideological structures to fragmented and volatile voting behavior. A significant factor is the personalization of politics and the digitalization of political communication, which strengthens the influence of individual leaders at the expense of traditional party structures. At the same time, the risk of disinformation and polarization of society is growing, which affects democratic competition and political decision-making. Voters' value preferences are shifting from classic right-left lines to new topics, such as ecology, minority rights, and the geopolitical orientation of Slovakia. This article analyzes the main challenges that Slovak political parties face and identifies factors that influence their adaptation to changing social conditions.*

**Keywords:** *political parties, party system, personalization of politics, disinformation, voting behavior, digitalization*

## **Introduction**

Political parties are a key element of a democratic political system, as they act as intermediaries between citizens and the state. Their role is not only to mobilize voters, formulate political programs and nominate candidates for elected office, but also to stabilize the political system. However, in recent decades, fundamental changes have occurred in their functioning, which are a consequence of technological progress, social transformations and increasing voter volatility.

In Slovakia, after the change of regime, the structure of the party system has transformed, moving away from the dominant position of a few main political entities towards more fragmented and less predictable electoral behavior. Digitalization and social networks have changed the way political parties communicate with voters, with traditional forms of campaigning giving way to personalized strategies and emotionally-charged content. At the same time, political polarization and the spread of disinformation are deepening, which creates new challenges for democratic competition and the management of political entities.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the current challenges facing political parties in Slovakia and compare them with the historical development of the party system. Attention will be paid in particular to the question of how voting behavior is changing, what impact does the personalization of politics have on the functioning of parties, and to what extent technological changes affect their communication and strategy.

## **Results**

The current modern era, characterized by globalization, digitalization, increasing information mobility and changes in social, economic and political structures, has a significant impact on the development of political parties. This impact is visible not only in the ways in which political parties communicate with voters, but also in their organization and strategies.

Globalization connects economies, cultures and political systems at the international level, which leads to the penetration of political ideologies and the intervention of foreign actors in internal affairs. Political parties must adapt to this phenomenon by creating policies that reflect global trends, such as climate change, migration, digital transformation, etc. At the same time, they must face the pressure of international organizations and the commitments that countries make within the framework of global treaties.

The social, economic and cultural transformation caused by technological progress and changes in values has a significant impact on the political sphere. Voters' interests are shifting from traditional topics such as economic and social issues to new ones such as digital rights, climate change, and digital justice. Political parties must reflect these new priorities in their programs while ensuring that they can communicate with a generation that is much more integrated into the system of using modern technologies and social networks.

After the fall of the communist regime in 1989 and the establishment of an independent Slovakia in 1993, political parties were formed in the conditions of transition from a totalitarian system to a pluralist democracy. In the 1990s, the party system was dominated primarily by strong leadership parties, which were often closely linked to the personality of their leader. This model was characteristic of the HZDS led by V. Mečiar, which dominated the political scene during the first decade of Slovakia's independence. This party showed signs of clientelism, centralized management, and weak democratic internal party mechanisms. The direction of Slovak politics began to change after 1998, when democratically oriented entities such as SDK, SĎĽ, SMK, SOP came to power, which opened up space for strengthening democratic institutions and integrating the Slovak Republic into European and transatlantic structures. Nevertheless, even after the 2006 elections, the party system remained largely personalized, as

confirmed by the rise of the Smer-SD party, which maintained a dominant position for more than two decades (Kopeček, 2007). In recent years, several fundamental changes can be observed in the character of political parties in our conditions, which reflect broader social trends, as well as responses to global challenges, such as digitalization, polarization of society and the increase in disinformation. In comparison with the past, the stability of political parties in today's party system has significantly weakened. While in the 1990s and early 2000s the political scene was dominated by large parties with long-term voter bases such as HZDS, SDKÚ, Smer-SD, today the Slovak party system is characterized by a high degree of fragmentation. Voters increasingly prefer new entities, which leads to the fact that parties are quickly formed and disappearing, which weakens their long-term political relevance. This phenomenon is a consequence of the growing public distrust of political elites and general disillusionment with the party system.

The fact is that the organizational structure of political parties has changed. In the 1990s, party organizations were mass entities with a large membership base and stable internal party mechanisms. Today, parties are deinstitutionalized, with many of them relying on charismatic leaders and short-term movements instead of traditional party apparatuses. Political parties are abandoning the aspect of standard behavior and increasingly relying on strong personalities, instead of ideologically anchored programs. A good example is the success of OĽaNO under the leadership of I. Matovič, which functions more as an electoral platform than as a traditional political party with solid structures. Similarly, the Sme rodina party of B. Kollár relied on populist rhetoric and the personal popularity of its leader in the 2020 elections. This trend is especially evident in Central and Eastern Europe, where political entities are often formed ad hoc before elections and after they are either dissolved or transformed into new entities.

When analyzing changes in the party system of the Slovak Republic, it is important to think about the question of why some political parties, which are in many cases established and have a strong position, have abandoned the presentation of their electoral or political programs. In the case of some parties, we see that they regularly present themselves as experts with high-quality personnel, but nevertheless publish their election program only shortly before the elections, sometimes only a few days or weeks before the vote itself.

This approach suggests that some political parties are aware that their electoral success does not depend on the program, but rather on the popularity of their leaders.

The trend of personalization of politics and growing populism is weakening party structures and ideological consistency, leading to volatility of voter preferences. Political parties now have to deal with new forms of political dynamics, characterized by an emphasis

on nationalism, the protection of national identity and, to a greater extent, protests against globalization and migration policies. Today, voting behavior is less predictable. The phenomenon of “floating voters” means that many voters make last-minute decisions based on current political sentiment, leading to more frequent changes in voting preferences and an increase in protest voting (Mudde, 2019).

While in the past, election campaigns in Slovakia were more traditional and focused on personal meetings with voters, and face-to-face campaigns were preferred, today political parties increasingly rely on digital technologies, social networks and targeted marketing, which is a consequence of the modernization and advancement of society. As we have already mentioned, the rapid development of digital technologies and social media has significantly changed the way political entities communicate with voters. For example, parties such as PS or Republika effectively used online platforms to reach voters in the 2023 early elections, in which social media became the main arena of political struggle and a space for the spread of negative campaigning and disinformation.

The party system is currently characterized by radicalization and ideological polarization. Currently, there is a gradual weakening of traditional political identities and divisions that have dominated political parties until now, such as the ideological lines between the left and the right. While in the past, Slovak political parties operated within a relatively stable ideological framework, today there is a significant polarization between liberal and conservative parties. An example is the conflict between the Socialist Party and conservative entities such as the SNS or Republika, where there are significant ideological and value differences on issues of minority rights, migration, or European integration (Bardovič, 2021). Modern voters are more likely to take into account specific issues such as environmental protection, minority rights, etc. Political parties respond to these changes by modifying their programs and political strategies to appeal to a wide range of voters. The aspect of centralization of many political parties in Slovakia is visible in the fact that the parties are controlled by a narrow group of people. This trend was typical, for example, for HZDS, SMER-SD and later for parties such as HLAS-SD, which formally declare democratic principles, but in reality are strongly controlled by their leader. At the same time, the influence of economic groups on politics is increasing, which leads to the oligarchization of the party system.

Another characteristic feature of the party system is the aspect of the fragmentation of political parties. After the transformation, a process of ideological fragmentation occurred and new political parties emerged that tried to represent different segments of society. This process continued in the following decades, when existing parties faced internal tensions and different

ideological orientations, which often led to their division or the formation of factions. Political parties faced the phenomenon of personality conflicts between leaders and members, which stimulated fragmentation. Politicians who did not feel sufficiently supported in their own party or who did not agree with its strategy often left their parent parties and founded new political entities. This aspect is often associated with so-called leaderism, where the personality of the leader plays a key role in defining the political identity of the party. These ambitions are sometimes motivated by the desire to gain more political power or achieve better electoral results, which leads to a division of the voter base. To a large extent, the electoral system based on proportional representation also contributes to the fragmentation of the political scene. In this system, it is also less likely that the dominant party will be able to take over absolute power without a broader coalition, which leads to the more frequent formation of coalitions of smaller entities that argue among themselves and eventually split if they do not agree on a common policy. Slovak political parties, as well as parties in other post-communist countries, have faced a crisis of legitimacy caused by corruption scandals, ineffective governance and the inability to respond to new challenges such as globalization, digitalization, demographic changes and new social problems. These factors undermined the stability of political parties and created space for new political entities, often offering alternatives to traditional parties. Examples include parties such as Progresívne Slovensko or Sme rodina, which emerged in response to voters' disappointment with traditional political parties.

Specific examples of the division of Slovak political parties can be found in various historical periods, especially after the fall of communism, when the political scene began to rapidly form and dynamically change. The SDKÚ was a significant centrist political party that dominated Slovak politics in the first decade after 1989. However, in 2009–2010, during the government of Prime Minister I. Radičová, the SDKÚ disintegrated. A group of politicians, including R. Sulík, left the SDKÚ and founded the SaS party. The main reason for this division was dissatisfaction with the political direction of the SDKÚ and the personal ambitions of these politicians. SaS established itself as a party oriented towards economic liberalism and a smaller role of the state in the economy, which differed from the centrist policy of the SDKÚ.

The party of the Hungarian minority, which had been a significant political actor in Slovak politics since the 1990s, differentiated into two factions in 2009. One of them was the SMK, which continued to focus on protecting the rights of the Hungarian minority, and the other was Most-Híd, founded by B. Bugár. The main reason for the split was a disagreement with the purely ethnic orientation of the SMK, while Most-Híd profiled itself as a party that

also tries to appeal to Slovak voters and is not focused exclusively on ethnic issues. This split shows how smaller ethnic parties can split based on political and ideological differences.

In the traditionally strong Christian Democratic Party, a significant split occurred in 2020. Some deputies who did not agree with the ideological direction of the party left the KDH and founded a new political entity called Demokrati. The reason was dissatisfaction with how the KDH was oriented towards cooperation with right-wing populist parties, as well as with the political expression of some leaders. The Democrats attempted to offer an alternative for voters who were looking for a party that adhered to traditional Christian Democratic values but also avoided extreme political rhetoric.

After the 2020 elections, another significant split occurred when several prominent members, including former Prime Minister P. Pellegrini, left the Smer-SD party, which dominated Slovak politics in the first decade of the 21st century. This split led to the creation of a new party, Hlas – Sociálna demokracia, which profiled itself as a left-wing and pro-European party. The split was mainly caused by differences of opinion and personality conflicts between former Smer representatives, with P. Pellegrini and his supporters criticizing the direction of the party under the leadership of R. Fico.

## **Conclusion**

Political parties in Slovakia are currently facing several significant challenges, which are the result not only of domestic political developments, but also of broader social and technological changes. While in the past the main determinants of party competition were ideological differences, regional distribution of voter support and issues of transformation after 1989, today the party system is confronted with new phenomena, such as fragmentation of the voter base, the rise of populism, digitalization of political communication and the declining level of public trust in traditional political entities.

One of the most striking changes is the weakening of stable party structures. In the 1990s, politics was dominated by large parties with a clear ideological orientation, such as HZDS, SDKÚ, KDH or SMER-SD, while the parties had a solid membership base and a relatively predictable core of voters. However, there is currently an increased volatility of voter preferences, which causes parties to emerge and disappear in rapid succession, while their long-term sustainability is uncertain. This trend is particularly visible in the case of new political entities, which can reach a large number of voters in a short time, but subsequently lose support, as shown by the examples of the parties Siet', Za ľudí and to some extent also OĽaNO.

Another significant challenge is the growing personalization of politics. While in the past, party identity was based mainly on programmatic and ideological foundations, today it is increasingly associated with leaders and their media image. This trend is supported by the development of social networks, where political communication is simplified to short, emotionally charged messages and visual presentations. Social media also allows for the circumvention of traditional party structures, with some entities functioning more as “marketing projects” around one person than as classic political parties with a long-term vision.

In addition to digitalization, political parties must also cope with the growing level of disinformation and polarization of society. The spread of unverified and misleading information through social networks and alternative media significantly influences voters' decision-making, which leads to the deepening of political and social divisions. This phenomenon is particularly dangerous in pre-election periods, when the manipulation of public opinion becomes a tool of political struggle. While in the past, traditional media had a greater influence on the formation of political preferences, today it is increasingly clear that information chaos and the uncontrolled spread of disinformation threaten the very principles of democratic competition.

Last but not least, political parties must adapt to changes in the value preferences of voters. Older dividing lines, such as the contradiction between right and left, are less pronounced today, while new topics such as environmental protection, issues of social inclusion, minority rights or the relationship with the European Union are coming to the fore. Some parties are trying to integrate these topics into their programs, while others are using culture wars as a tool to mobilize voters. This trend is also visible in discussions about Slovakia's sovereignty, migration, and stance on international organizations.

In conclusion, it can be stated that political parties in Slovakia are undergoing a dynamic development that requires new approaches to political communication, organization of party structures, and building public trust. Traditional models of party politics are gradually changing, and the future of the Slovak party system will depend on the parties' ability to respond to current challenges and changing social conditions.

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# **FLEXICURITY AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

Zlatica POLÁČEK TUREKOVÁ

## **Abstract**

*Every work situation brings with it something new. It was already during the pandemic in connection with COVID-19, when employers had to adapt to the given situation, when they began to introduce and use more work from home, home office, etc. for their employees.*

*The flexicurity concept is a modern approach to labor market management that combines employers' flexibility in hiring and firing with an adequate level of social security for employees.*

*Basically, it was created as a response not only to the above-mentioned situation with COVID-19, but also as a response to the needs of a globalized economy, where emphasis is placed on constant adaptation to changing conditions. Although flexicurity originally developed in the private sector and in countries such as Denmark, its principles are increasingly being applied in public administration as well.*

## **Key words**

*Flexicurity, public administration, labor law, employer, employee*

## **Introduction**

In the introduction of this paper, I will use a quote from Danielle Hartmann, Director of Corporate Partnerships at the Boston College Center for Work & Family, who aptly defined what flexicurity, or flexibility, essentially is.

*„Flexibility, flexicurity, however, does not mean that employees work less. It means that they work differently,“ (Danielle Hartmann)*

Public administration is traditionally characterized by a high degree of stability and strong employee protection. However, the present era brings numerous challenges, both in terms of increasing work efficiency, optimizing costs, and better meeting the demands of citizens (employees).

In the context of these challenges, flexicurity appears to be a key tool for the modernization of the public sector.

In general, it can be briefly stated that flexicurity was created by combining two English words, 'flexibility' and 'security' i.e. flexibility and security or stability for employees. Flexicurity was first introduced in the 1990s in Denmark by Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, leader of the Party of European Socialists, specifically between 1992 and 2001, and the result was a reduction in Danish unemployment. However, a full understanding and connection with globalization and digitalization came only in the 21st century, particularly within the framework of the Council of Europe and the adoption of the European Union Green Paper on November 23, 2006 (hereinafter referred to as the 'Green Paper').

The essence of the Danish model of flexicurity, which has also inspired other countries, though not in its full sense, but with certain elements adopted, such as Germany and Austria, lies in the idea that employers have the flexibility to more easily hire and lay off employees in order to adapt to changing market conditions, while employees enjoy security in the form of social protection and active labor market policies. As the European Commission referred to it, this was the Danish 'golden triangle'.<sup>1</sup>

The development of flexicurity is indeed dated and associated with the EU Green Paper of November 23, 2006, concerning the so-called modernization of labor law, the main goal of which is to address the challenges of the 21st century and to foster greater flexibility in employment relations. The early stage of flexicurity development at the European level was marked by the adoption of the White Paper in 1993. Essentially, this White Paper emphasized the need to make the labor market more flexible on one hand, while simultaneously maintaining employee protection on the other. In 2000, the European Council approved the so-called Lisbon Strategy at its meeting in Lisbon.

The Lisbon Strategy aimed to make the economies of EU countries more dynamic and competitive, including within the EU member states. Although it was not fully successful and was replaced by the Europe 2020 strategy, the latter continued to regard flexicurity as an important tool for modernizing labor markets and achieving significant goals in employment, social inclusion, and social security.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Scandinavian-Polish Chamber of Commerce. Flexicurity – Danish Golden Triangle [online]. spcc.pl. <https://www.spcc.pl/node/12033>

<sup>2</sup> K obecným zásadám flexikurity: větší počet a vyšší kvalita pracovních míst prostřednictvím flexibility a jistoty“, available at:

[http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/employment\\_and\\_social\\_policy/community\\_employment\\_policies/c10159\\_cs.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/employment_and_social_policy/community_employment_policies/c10159_cs.htm)

The Europe 2020 strategy, in the context of flexicurity, focused on:

- increasing the effectiveness of active labor market policies
- supporting flexible and reliable contractual agreements
- developing comprehensive lifelong learning strategies
- modernizing social security systems

The European Parliament and the Council of the EU have a slightly different perspective on the issue of flexicurity compared to the European Commission. While it is not a fundamentally divergent viewpoint, there are certain differences in their approaches.

In the context of flexible working relations, both employers and employees consider how to most effectively utilize working hours and the possibility of linking them with rest periods, not only during lunch breaks or smoking breaks, but also through the use of sick days, home office, remote work, telecommuting, or work via online platforms. Currently, a trend is emerging in which flexibility is not only applied to the number of employees and their employment on a part-time basis but also in relation to working hours, and this is also the case in public administration.

In the employment relationship, as well as in the civil service and the public sector, the principle of equality is applied, which can be defined as legal equality between the employee and the employer, as well as equality among employees themselves. Equality, as a fundamental human right within the legal system, expresses the requirement that individuals holding human rights be treated equally in similar situations and differently in different situations.<sup>3</sup>

When discussing flexicurity itself, we can refer to the four fundamental pillars on which it is built, namely:

The first pillar encompasses so-called flexible employment contracts. This is also important in public administration, which must respond to the current modern trends in labor law. It is here that new trends emerge, such as platform work – one of the modern forms of employment. An online platform is a form of employment in which organizations or individuals use the platform to access other organizations or individuals to address specific issues or provide specialized services in exchange for payment, such as outsourcing.

Even in public administration, the system of shortened work hours, so-called 'kurzarbeit', is beginning to be introduced, which was adopted into the legal system of the Slovak Republic through Act No. 215/2021 Coll.

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<sup>3</sup> PETRÍKOVÁ L. Zákaz diskriminácie v pracovnoprávných vzťahoch z dôvodu veku, Leges, 2018, p. 12

Specifically, this concerns Act No. 215/2021 Coll. on Support during Reduced Working Hours, effective from March 1, 2022. The aim of adopting this law was not directly prompted by the Lisbon measures or the Europe 2020 Strategy, but rather by the situation that affected virtually the entire world, but especially Europe and Asia – the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim was to create and adopt a law that would become a functional part of the stable legal order of the Slovak Republic and would serve, as a helpful tool, for the systemic, claim-based, and transparent provision of support to employees of employers during the duration of an external factor with a temporary nature, which the employer could not influence or prevent, and which has a negative impact on the allocation of work to employees, particularly in extraordinary situations, states of emergency, or extraordinary circumstances declared by the government of the Slovak Republic, or force majeure circumstances that no employer can influence, leading to significant negative impacts on jobs in the labor market, threatening their existence or even causing their elimination.<sup>4</sup>

The second pillar encompasses active labor market policies, which, in addition to measures to support employment, such as training and retraining programs, also include a range of other measures and tools that the state and other relevant institutions use to improve the functioning of the labor market and address unemployment issues.

The third pillar focuses on modern social security systems, which aim to respond to new employment trends, as they were originally designed for the so-called standard forms of employment.

The fourth pillar - effective social dialogue essentially concerns professional discussions, negotiations, consultations and joint actions involving organisations representing two social partners (employers and employees). Here, the so-called tripartite dialogue is characterised between public authorities.

The concept of flexicurity is based on the assumption that flexibility and social security are not opposites but mutually supportive factors. The strategy of the flexicurity concept seeks to sensitively combine different types of flexibility and social security in order to increase the adaptability of workers and enterprises as well as to ensure their stability and protection against social risks.<sup>5</sup>

Globalization and digitalization themselves fundamentally affect the concept of flexicurity, i.e. the balance between labor market flexibility and social security of employees. Digitalization is

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<sup>4</sup> STANDING, G. Global labour flexibility: seeking distributive justice, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2011

<sup>5</sup> [https://fsr.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/AV12\\_KOZSR\\_Flexibilne\\_formy.pdf](https://fsr.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/AV12_KOZSR_Flexibilne_formy.pdf)

one of the key concepts of the present, influencing and modifying the functioning and development of all areas of social and economic life, including law.<sup>6</sup>

In order to increase the attractiveness of employment in an employment relationship, it is necessary to consider not only changes to the current legal regulation, but also the possibility of introducing new forms of employment for employers, for whom it is necessary to adapt employment to current market developments and the related needs for their activities (whether production or provision of services). This is also the case in public administration. The integration of flexicurity into public administration can bring several advantages, which are not only more flexible employment contracts, as mentioned in this contribution in the first pillar, but also less rigid organizational structures, better responses to changing requirements, new forms of employment are also aimed at this, including in the area of public administration.

Fundamentally, new forms of employment could be used mainly by employees for whom a change or modification of work performance in a classic employment relationship is either necessary or useful, whether due to the impossibility of performing work in a classic, regular relationship due to reasons arising from their health, age, the need to combine family care, or for reasons of using time outside of work for education. This essentially implies adapting to new work models that would take into account the individual needs and preferences of the employee. On the other hand, modular social protection and the related social inclusion and, of course, equality should be at the forefront. Essentially, flexicurity should contribute to reducing labour market segmentation and promoting equal opportunities for all, regardless of gender, age, ethnic origin or other specific characteristics. Public administration itself is also becoming a more attractive employer for the younger generation and top professionals who appreciate more flexible forms of work. On the other hand, the implementation of flexicurity in public administration is not without problems. Rigid legislation, strong traditions and resistance to change can hinder its full adoption. On the other hand, the positive and negative aspects of flexicurity can also be summarized within the framework of globalisation and digitalisation.

Positive aspects of flexicurity in the digital world:

- a) adaptability of the labor market – lies in the connection with the demands on the workforce. Flexicurity allows for a faster response to these changes through easier adaptation of employment contracts and support for retraining.
- b) expansion of employment opportunities outside the territory of the Slovak Republic

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<sup>6</sup> HORVÁTH, M. Občianske právo a pracovné právo v digitálnej sfére, 2021, Spolok Slovákov v Poľsku (Krakow), s.55

c) better reconciliation of work and private life. Flexible working hours and the possibility of working from home enable digitalization and contribute to the so-called work-life balance.

Regarding the negative aspects of flexicurity in the digital world: a) The increase in short-term contracts, which can lead to precarious and underpaid jobs b) The erosion of traditional, classical labor standards, especially in terms of the job, working hours, probationary periods, etc. c) The digital divide and inequality in the labor market in terms of the skills of a potential employee d) Problems with the enforceability of rights. In essence, in the digital environment, it can be more difficult to identify the employer and enforce legal claims related to, for example, the termination of employment or other claims related to the right to leave, the right to social security benefits, etc. e) The psychological impact of uncertainty.

### **Summary**

Flexible working is one of the tools through which an organization wants to ensure adequate conditions for a high-quality working and non-working life of employees, which has demonstrably direct impacts on corporate activities, corporate performance and the perspective of its functioning. In conclusion, this paper can be stated that active labor market policy is an integral part of successful flexicurity. Without effective active labor market policy tools, a flexible labor market could lead to high unemployment and social insecurity. In essence, active labor market policy and its tools help mitigate the negative consequences of flexibility for employees by providing them with tools and support for rapid re-employment.

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# ELECTION RHETORIC, SLOGANS AND VISUAL COMMUNICATION ON THE CZECH POLITICAL SCENE IN 2025

Libor ZEMANEC, Pavel KOROVIN

## **Abstract**

*Election rhetoric is a significant element of political communication, through which political entities strive to influence public opinion and gain the support of voters. In the current media environment, there is a significant shift from traditional media towards the online space, especially social networks, which fundamentally change the nature of political communication. This shift affects the form, dynamics and style of election rhetoric, which is becoming faster, more visually attractive and more emotional. The aim of the paper is to analyse how election rhetoric, visual communication and the use of modern technologies are formed in the Czech political environment. The paper combines theoretical approaches from the field of political rhetoric, media communication and marketing with an empirical analysis of specific election campaigns, focusing on identifying strategies, discursive frameworks and their impact on voter behaviour.*

## **Keywords**

*election rhetoric; political communication; social networks; Czech politics; visual communication; artificial intelligence; political marketing;*

## **Introduction**

Election rhetoric is one of the key elements of political communication. Its main goal is to influence the public, convince voters of the values, competencies or vision of political entities and gain their support in the elections. However, nowadays, politicians' rhetoric no longer takes place exclusively in traditional media such as the press, radio or television, but is increasingly moving to the online space, especially social networks. This shift is changing not only the form but also the character of political communication, which is becoming faster, more emotional and visually more expressive. In this regard, the Czech political scene is an interesting example of the connection of classical rhetoric with modern digital strategies. Politicians such as Andrej Babiš, Petr Fiala, Tomio Okamura or Zdeněk Hřib use social networks not only as an information channel, but also as a space for building a personal image, emotionally mobilizing voters and spreading campaigns with clearly defined symbols and slogans. Election

communication thus takes on a hybrid character, combining verbal, visual and technological dimensions. The use of artificial intelligence in election campaigns, which has become a modern phenomenon, also deserves special attention. The use of AI changes the way voters perceive the reality and authenticity of political messages. This trend brings new ethical dilemmas and raises questions about the limits of manipulation in political communication. The aim of this work is to analyze how election rhetoric, slogans and visual communication are formed in the Czech political environment, what strategies individual actors use and what impact modern technologies have on their content and persuasiveness. The work is based on a combination of theoretical knowledge about political rhetoric, media communication and marketing, as well as on the analysis of specific examples from the Czech election campaign.

## **1. Theory of Political Communication**

As a result of technological development, political communication has become one of the key elements of modern political life. It significantly influences how public opinion, political attitudes and interaction between citizens, the media and political actors are formed. Despite its growing importance, it is not a clearly defined concept, because its interpretation changes depending on the approach of the individual disciplines that deal with this area. Political communication stands at the intersection of political science, media studies, sociology, psychology and rhetoric, which gives it an interdisciplinary character (Kaid, 2004). In general, political rhetoric can be understood as any process of exchanging information and opinions about political issues or personalities, which takes place within the public space and is intended for various target groups (Elishar-Malka, Ariel and Weimann, 2020). While in the past, research in this area focused mainly on election campaigns and voter behavior, today it also includes broader aspects of political behavior, attitudes, and media influence (Brunnerová and Charvát, 2017). According to Macková, political communication can be understood from two perspectives: as a practical activity, i.e. the process or product of communication itself, or as an academic discipline that theoretically studies these processes (Macková, 2017). McNair develops this idea and defines political communication as “intentional communication about politics”. He distinguishes three basic types: • communication created by politicians and institutions themselves in order to promote their interests, • communication directed at political actors by citizens, the media, or journalists, • and communication about politicians and their activities that appears in news reports and expert commentaries (McNair, 2003). The subject of interest in this field is mainly the relationship between media and politics, i.e. the way in which

the media shape political reality and how politicians use the media environment to promote their goals. This includes, for example, research on election campaigns, media images of political actors, civic participation, and the roles of traditional and new media (Bennett and Iyengar, 2008). Since the beginning of the 21st century, special attention has been paid to new media, which have fundamentally changed the dynamics of political communication. Digital platforms enable interactivity, connectivity, and the immediate dissemination of information, thereby disrupting traditional models of media communication (Lister et al., 2009). New media, based on digital coding of data, bring new communication environments in which politics and the public can meet in real time. The Internet has become a discursive space that allows for broader civic participation and more direct interaction between political elites and the public (Gane and Beer, 2008). From the perspective of contemporary political communication, it is a field that examines how political organizations, candidates, and civil society use digital environments to interact with each other, not only during election campaigns, but also in everyday political life (Brunnerová and Charvát, 2017). While the concept of mediatization of politics was originally associated with traditional media, the advent of the Internet and social networks has opened a completely new stage of political communication. Digital platforms allow politicians to bypass traditional media channels and establish direct contact with the public. The interactive nature of these media – feedback, two-way communication, and co-creation of content – increases the democratic and participatory potential of communication (Dahlgren, 2001).

Nowadays, we can therefore speak of a so-called hybrid system of political communication, which combines elements of traditional mass media with the use of digital platforms (Chadwick, 2013). An important distinguishing feature of new media is interactivity, which changes the position of the audience from a passive receiver to an active participant in public debate (Gane and Beer, 2008). With the expansion of digital networks, the very concept of the public is also changing. New media expand the traditional understanding of public space and enable the emergence of new forms of social discussion (Chlebcová Hečková, 2015). Politicians must therefore adapt to diverse social environments and take their specificities into account when planning communication strategies (Hoffmann and Suphan, 2017).

### **1.1. Visual Political Communication**

Visual communication is an integral part of political life. Just like ideas, values or program statements, the visual aspect of politics plays a key role in today's digitalized world. However, the visual dimension of politics is not a product of modern times. Ancient civilizations have

already left behind visual messages, from cave paintings to monumental sculptures and paintings of rulers, with which they sought to consolidate their power and influence the way the public perceived them. For centuries, visual rhetoric has been part of political expression. Portraits, busts, statues, and later photographs or graphic representations shaped the public image of rulers and political leaders. Aristotle, when describing the ideal state, emphasized the importance of the visual aspect of social life. He stated that the best form of society is one in which all citizens can "see each other with one glance". Hartley (1992) later interpreted this principle as a metaphor for civic surveillance and mutual perception, which allows citizens to evaluate politicians and their behavior. Although today's political communities are much larger than the city-states of antiquity, technological progress has brought new possibilities for visual presentation. Politicians today use digital media and social networks as the main tools for shaping their image and communicating with the public. Machiavelli already drew attention to the strategic importance of visual self-presentation in his work *The Prince*. According to him, a ruler does not actually have to possess all the virtues if he can create the impression in the eyes of the public that he has them (Machiavelli, 2012). One of the most comprehensive overviews of the functions of visuals in political communication was offered by Dan Schill (2012), who, based on previous research, identified ten basic functions of visuals in the political environment:

- **Argumentative function:** Visuals can act as persuasive rhetorical tools. Even without the use of words, they can create meanings through contrast, associations, or analogies. However, their effectiveness is conditioned by the cultural and historical context of the audience. Schill also draws attention to the importance of nonverbal communication, such as gestures and facial expressions, which can shape the perception of politicians. Similarly, images of crowds can create the impression of popularity and mass support for a candidate.
- **Agenda-setting function:** Visuals allow politicians to influence which topics come to the center of media attention. According to the theory of agenda-setting, the media shape what society considers important through their choice of topics. Good photographs can add weight to messages and help politicians maintain control over their own media image.
- **Dramatization function:** Visuals can emphasize a certain problem or conflict, thereby increasing public interest. Typical examples are press conferences, symbolic gestures such as shaking hands, or joint performances, which visually express cooperation and peace.
- **Emotional function:** Visuals have a strong ability to evoke an emotional response, which can also lead to subsequent action. This power is used not only by politicians, but also by the media when they want to gain attention and activate the audience.

- Image-building function: Voters form their image of politicians mainly through photographs or television appearances. These visual symbols form an impression of the politician's personality, credibility, or competence. A well-thought-out visual strategy can therefore fundamentally influence how a candidate is perceived.
- Identification function: Visuals support the creation of a feeling of closeness and similarity between the politician and the voter. If voters identify with the politician, they begin to perceive him or her more positively and more trustworthy.
- Documentary function: Photos and videos represent visual evidence that a certain event actually happened. Footage of politicians in informal situations can act as confirmation of their "human" side. On the other hand, visual records can also contradict the image that the candidate is trying to create.
- The function of visuals as social symbols: Politicians use visual elements to connect with cultural and social symbols - for example, the national flag as a sign of patriotism or the traditional colors of a nation as a sign of continuity and stability.
- The transport function: Visuals can transport the audience to another time or place -for example, to an idealized future or the "golden days" of the past. Such images strengthen the voter's emotional connection to the campaign message.
- The function of ambiguity: Some images deliberately work with ambiguity or vagueness, thus allowing them to convey negative messages without being overtly offensive. In the media, this is manifested, for example, by choosing an unflattering photo of a politician, which can change the tone of an otherwise neutral message.

## **2. Current trends in Czech election rhetoric**

The way in which leaders of individual parties adapt their rhetoric to current trends and voter sentiments also plays a significant role in the Czech political scene. According to political marketer Michopoulos, Andrej Babiš has long been one of the most experienced actors in the field of election promotion in the Czech Republic. However, in his opinion, in the current campaign he has not reached the rhetorical level that he had in the past. Michopoulos points out that Babiš's communication seems ambiguous because he is trying to simultaneously address different segments of voters. This strategic oscillation between anti-system and mainstream rhetoric causes his messages to lose clarity and consistency. On the one hand, Babiš appears as a representative of a non-systemic current that criticizes traditional political elites, but at the same time emphasizes support for the Western orientation and membership of the Czech Republic in NATO. According to experts, this contradiction makes it difficult for voters to

interpret the identity of the ANO movement and weakens its communication persuasiveness. According to Michopoulos, an interesting trend in the current campaign is also the turn in the communication of the Pirate Party, which, after a series of less successful periods, managed to renew its rhetorical strategy and regain public attention. This approach is described as one of the biggest surprises of the current elections. Parties with a strongly populist or nationally oriented discourse also maintain a stable position in the campaign, especially the SPD led by Tomi Okamura and the Stačilo movement. These entities purposefully use simple language, strong emotions and an appeal to citizens' dissatisfaction, thereby effectively strengthening the relationship with their voter base. An interesting element of the campaign was also the reflection on Slovakia as a warning symbol, especially in connection with the policies of Robert Fico. According to Michopoulos, Slovakia is used as a “crystal ball” in the Czech electoral discourse, showing which direction the Czech Republic could take if Babiš wins. Another important aspect is the way Babiš approaches public debates. According to experts, his decision to avoid the televised super debate and move communication to the podcast environment was pragmatic, as he has no chance of significantly gaining support in the discussion format, and rather risks losing support due to his nervousness and tendency to impulsive reactions. This approach illustrates how modern political communication also takes into account the personal rhetorical skills of individual leaders and their ability to handle media pressure (TA3, 2025).

## **2.1. Social media as part of political communication**

With the growing influence of digital platforms, political communication in the Czech Republic is moving from traditional media to the online space, where a crucial part of the election campaign takes place. Czech politicians are increasingly relying on communication via social media, which has become the main tool for mobilizing voters and shaping public image. As the analysis of Carl Data Company shows, social media is no longer just a means of collecting likes, but represents a crucial battleground for the votes of undecided voters. The analysis divided politicians according to their communication strategies. Mass communicators- among them Fiala, Andrej Babiš (ANO) and Vít Rakušan (STAN) - rely on a wide range of topics and frequent updates, thanks to which they achieve high reach, but with average audience engagement. Mobilizers, such as Tomio Okamura (SPD), Kateřina Konečná (KSČM) or Filip Turek (Motoristi), use polarizing and emotional topics (migration, energy, relationship to the EU), and even though they produce less content, they achieve significantly higher audience interaction. Professionally oriented communicators, such as Marek Výborný (KDU-ČSL) and

Zdeněk Hřib (Piráti), focus on substantive and professional topics—for example, agriculture, housing or transport. Although their posts address a smaller audience, they increase their professional profile. On the contrary, Markéta Pekarová Adamová (TOP 09) shows only marginal activity without a clear line of communication, which is related to her planned departure from top politics. The most active user of social networks was Prime Minister Petr Fiala, who published up to 699 posts in the monitored period. His communication is characterized by a high volume of content and a varied thematic scope, from campaign reports to defending government decisions to emphasizing values such as democracy or pro-Western orientation. Marek Výborný published 479 posts, Okamura 454 and Rakušan 452. In fifth place was Andrej Babiš with 426 posts. The largest part of his content consists of campaign reports. He also focuses on criticism of the government, personal life and occasionally on healthcare and European issues. In terms of content, campaign posts dominate, accounting for approximately 40% of communication and bringing the highest level of interactions. Topics such as government criticism, politicians' personal lives or economic issues generate thousands of reactions and comments. Polarizing topics such as energy prices, relations with the LGBT+ community or intra-coalition tensions, although they make up a smaller share of posts, often arouse above-average public interest. According to Jakub Šiler, CEO of Carl Data Company, social networks are no longer an addition to the campaign, but its core, and it is the digital space that allows politicians to effectively shape public opinion and emotionally connect voters with their message (Rédli, 2025).

## **2.2 Using Artificial Intelligence in Election Campaigns**

The dynamically changing digital communication environment is bringing new strategies and technologies to political campaigns that fundamentally affect the way parties address their voters. The 2025 elections to the Chamber of Deputies in the Czech Republic were also groundbreaking in terms of the use of modern technologies in political communication. For the first time, artificial intelligence (AI) became a widely used tool in an election campaign, fundamentally changing the nature of election rhetoric and visual communication. Several political parties, from the right-wing nationalist SPD to the left-wing populist Stačilo! movement, to the liberal Pirates and the ANO movement, used AI to create visuals and audio recordings. Deepfake videos, where everything was invented, were also appearing more and more frequently. These practices are pushing the boundaries of traditional political marketing. Generated photos and videos of politicians and voters appear online, which are often indistinguishable from reality at first glance. Such visual aids significantly influence the

emotional impression of the campaign and can contribute to the spread of manipulation and disinformation. As journalist Kristína Chrenková points out, most people cannot reliably recognize that this is artificially created content, which reduces trust in the authenticity of political communication. From the perspective of marketing strategy, the popularity of AI in campaigns is understandable. As social media data analysis expert Josef Šlerka explains, AI offers quick creation, low costs, and a high rate of content dissemination. Political parties can thus create hundreds of personalized visuals and videos in a short time, which reach thousands of voters via social networks. This approach changes the dynamics of pre-election rhetoric. At the same time, however, it raises ethical questions related to the truthfulness and transparency of political communication. Deepfake videos, even if sometimes clearly satirical, can contribute to the erosion of audience trust and the deepening of societal polarization. The Czech experience shows that artificial intelligence technologies are becoming a new tool of political rhetoric. It is a tool that, while increasing the effectiveness of campaigns, also weakens the boundaries between reality and fiction (Chrenková, 2025).

## **Conclusion**

Pre-election rhetoric in contemporary political communication is undergoing a significant transformation, fundamentally influenced by digitalization and new media. Social networks have become a key space where politicians not only present their opinions, but also purposefully build a personal brand and mobilize their voters. The online space thus ceases to be a supplement to traditional campaigns, but becomes the main battlefield for the attention and trust of the voter. This tendency is very clearly manifested in the Czech political scene. Analyses of the communication of Czech political leaders on social networks show that individual politicians choose different strategies according to their profile and target group. Prime Minister Petr Fiala (ODS) relies on a high volume of posts, thematic diversity and an emphasis on the presentation of the government and stability. Andrej Babiš (ANO) uses personal communication, videos from the field and an emphasis on authenticity and contact with voters. Tomio Okamura (SPD), on the other hand, relies on polarizing themes, conflicting language, and appeals to emotions, which is how he manages to maintain strong engagement with his community. These differences illustrate that Czech election rhetoric is increasingly adapting to the logic of social media, i.e. simplicity, emotionality, and immediate audience response. At the same time, campaigns are increasingly using artificial intelligence and data analysis, which allow for personalization of content and reduction of costs. However, this trend also brings risks, such as manipulation of public opinion, spreading disinformation, and unethical use of

data. The Czech experience thus reflects a broader problem of contemporary political communication in Europe, namely finding a balance between the effectiveness of digital marketing and maintaining transparency and trust. The aim of this work was to present the specifics of election rhetoric and visual communication, with an emphasis on the Czech political environment. The results show that although the forms of communication are changing dynamically, the basic essence remains the same -to gain attention, arouse emotion and convince the voter. The future of political communication will therefore increasingly depend on the ability of politicians to combine modern technologies with an authentic and understandable message that appeals to citizens.

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### **III. SECTION OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

# GERMAN TENANCY LAW WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON THE CONCEPT OF RENTAL DEFECTS

Franz STEINAU

## **Abstract:**

*With these provisions, the German Civil Code opens the section on tenancy law. These simple words regulate the main obligations of tenant and landlord and thus lay the foundation for every single tenancy agreement in the Federal Republic of Germany. The obligations are in a relationship that bears the Latin term synallagma: The obligations to perform are in a relationship of exchange. The simple principle of do ut des applies - I give so that you give.*

*Hardly any other contract is concluded as frequently as a tenancy agreement and yet it is of existential importance - at least for one of the two parties. The tenant is in a relationship of dependency with his landlord, as the landlord provides him with the living space. This usually forms the center of the tenant's life and is their place of retreat. To a certain extent, the landlord is therefore in a position of superiority, while the tenant is in need of protection. German tenancy law attempts to take this into account and therefore contains numerous provisions to protect the tenant. The tenant's need for protection is opposed by § 903 BGB. The owner may deal with his property as he pleases - in particular, he may exclude others from dealing with his property.*

*How German tenancy law attempts to reconcile these two positions will be the subject of this article. Particular attention will be paid to the consequences of a breach of a primary obligation by the landlord. Namely, the defective transfer of the leased property.*

**Keywords:** *German Rental Law, Lease Agreement, Rental Defect, Notice of Defect, Right to Reduction, Rent Reduction*

## *§ 535 BGB*

*The rental agreement obliges the landlord to grant the tenant the use of the rented property. The landlord must leave the rented property to the tenant in a condition suitable for use in accordance with the contract and maintain it in this condition during the rental period. He*

*shall bear the burdens resting on the rented property. The tenant is obliged to pay the landlord the agreed rent.*

## **1. Types of Rental Agreements**

The rental agreement is a contract for the transfer of a movable or immovable object in return for payment of a fee. It is irrelevant whether the leased property is owned by the landlord or not. Renting out third-party property is also permissible. However, a person cannot be both landlord and tenant. In this case, a tenancy either does not come into existence or expires due to so-called confusion if the tenant subsequently acquires ownership of the property.

The applicability of some tenancy law regulations depends on the type of rented property. For example, different regulations apply to rented residential premises than to the letting of commercial premises. One of the reasons for this difference in treatment is the tenant's need for protection, as described above. With regard to the maintenance of a residential tenancy, the tenant is more worthy of protection than with regard to the maintenance of a tenancy for commercial premises. This is because only in the former case is the tenant's personal existence potentially threatened by the termination of the tenancy.

A residential lease exists if, according to the purpose of the agreement, premises are provided for a fee for the purpose of private residence and to satisfy the housing needs of the tenant or their relatives. The question of whether a tenancy for residential space exists must therefore be based on the purpose of use pursued by the tenant with the rental.

Commercial premises, on the other hand, are all rooms that are rented out for purposes other than residential use (stores, storage rooms, offices, doctors' surgeries, law firms, production rooms, garages, etc.). Here too, it is not the actual use that is decisive, but the agreed purpose.

## **2 The Main Obligation of The Landlord: Transfer and Granting of Use**

### **a) Requirements for The Rented Property Upon Transfer**

The landlord must hand over the rented property to the tenant. Direct possession of the property must therefore be transferred from the landlord to the tenant. As a rule, possession is transferred by handing over the keys to the tenant.

At this point in time, the item must be in a contractual condition according to § 535 BGB. Six principles have emerged from this formulation:

(1) The contractual condition shall be determined according to the consensual will of the contracting parties. The decisive factor is therefore which agreements the parties have made regarding the condition of the rented property.

This also applies to circumstances that affect the rented property from outside. The agreement can therefore also refer to noise or other immissions, for example. Such a quality agreement can also be made tacitly. German law refers to such a tacit agreement as an *implied* agreement by conclusive conduct.

(2) If the contractual agreements are not readily recognizable, the content of the contractual situation must be determined in accordance with §§ 133, 157 BGB by determining the true intention of the parties, taking into account good faith and customary practice. It must therefore be investigated what the parties wanted and how the respective contractual partner could understand a statement made by the other party. The parties can also agree a standard that is below the minimum standard. However, the agreement must be unambiguous.

(3) If the parties' agreements are incomplete, the contractual situation shall be determined by way of supplementary interpretation of the contract in good faith, taking into account customary practice; it must be investigated what agreement the parties would have reached,

(4) If a condition has neither been expressly nor impliedly agreed, the condition owed by the Lessor shall be based on customary practice.

(5) If a handover protocol is drawn up when the rented property is handed over and certain defects are recorded in it, this does not mean that this condition is approved as being in accordance with the contract. This is because findings in a handover report are generally not part of the tenancy agreement; rather, they are intended to document the condition existing at the time of handover.

### **b) Consequence of Transfer in a Condition Contrary to The Contract**

The consequence of a defective handover of the rented property in a condition contrary to the contract is that the tenant can refuse to take over the property and/or can make a claim against the landlord for restoration of the condition in accordance with the contract. However, this only applies if the defect is not minor.

### **c) Burden of Proof with Regard to the Lack of Conformity**

In court, the burden of proof for the defectiveness of a rental object is distributed as follows: In general, it must be assumed that the rented property is in accordance with the contract if the

tenant can make the contractually agreed use of it. If the landlord offers a rental object suitable for the contractual use and the tenant claims that a better condition than the given condition has been agreed, the tenant must prove that the agreement is favorable to him. If the rented property deviates from the generally accepted standard to the detriment of the tenant, the landlord must prove that the given condition corresponds to the contractual agreements.

#### **d) Consequences of a Missing Transfer**

The landlord has no claim to rent before the property is handed over, as - in the absence of an agreement to the contrary - he is obliged to perform in advance. If the transfer is refused, the tenant can assert a claim for performance. In addition, the tenant is entitled to claim damages. These claims arise from the point of view of inability or impossibility. The tenant also has a right of withdrawal. In order to assert these rights, the landlord must be given a deadline to hand over the rented property. However, there is no need to set such a deadline if the landlord has finally and definitely refused performance. This can be assumed if the landlord terminates the rental agreement or contests his declaration aimed at concluding the agreement or if he withdraws from the agreement. However, purely factual conduct that shows that the landlord is determined not to fulfill the contract is also sufficient.

### **3. Obligation of The Landlord to Maintain The Contractual Condition**

The obligation to maintain the use of the property includes the obligation to grant use as well as the obligation to maintain and repair the property. The duty to maintain use entitles the tenant to ensure that the rented property can be used safely throughout the entire rental period.

The duty of use also includes the **duty of care**. According to this, the landlord has a secondary contractual obligation to refrain from disturbing the tenant or taking any measures that could endanger the tenant's furnishings. This duty of care means, among other things, that the landlord must comply with the fire protection regulations under public law.

Maintenance includes all measures to prevent a condition that is contrary to the contract. **Repair** is the elimination of defects. The obligation to maintain the rented property begins with the handover of the rented property; according to the statutory regulation, it expires at the end of the rental period. During this period, the landlord must maintain the rented property in a contractual condition. It is irrelevant whether the cause of the defect was caused by the tenant. Something else only applies if the tenant is responsible for the defect. The claim for the rectification of defects is a contractual obligation that does not expire as long as the tenancy exists. After the end of the rental period, the tenant can no longer

assert the claim for performance; this also applies if a longer eviction period has been granted. However, it is recognized that the landlord must carry out such measures as are necessary to avert danger to the life and limb of the tenant (duty to ensure public safety) and to enable the property to be used in accordance with generally accepted standards.

It is sufficient for the need for legal protection for the action for repair if the apartment is defective, because in this case the tenant does not receive what he is entitled to under the tenancy agreement. It is not necessary for the tenant to be personally affected by the defect. The tenant can therefore also sue for repairs if he does not use the apartment at all or if he has sublet it or given it to a third party for use.

#### **4. The Landlord's Obligation to Bear The Burden**

Ownership of a property in particular is usually associated with a number of financial burdens. These burdens can be divided into the burdens on the property and the financial liabilities that affect the owner as a person.

The first group includes encumbrances that are directly linked to the property without any reference to the person of the owner. It is typical for these encumbrances that they are transferred to the new owner in the event of a change of ownership. The encumbrances can be of a public or private law nature. Public charges include property tax, municipal fees and charges for water, drainage, street cleaning, refuse collection and chimney cleaning, as well as residents' contributions.

Charges under private law include interest on mortgages, charges on real property and the like.

A distinction must be made between encumbrances resting on the property and encumbrances that affect the owner as a person, either because he has assumed corresponding obligations or because he is liable for them by law. The owner's obligation to bear encumbrances is not transferred to the tenant through the letting. Furthermore, it goes without saying that the personal obligations of the owner are not affected by the letting.

However, a different agreement can be made.

#### **5. The Tenant's Main Obligation: Payment of The Rent**

The tenant is obliged to pay the agreed rent to the landlord. The rent is the total consideration that the tenant has to pay for the provision of the rented property. The consideration usually consists of a certain amount of money. However, any other services or grants of use can also be considered as

remuneration. It can also be agreed that the consideration is to be paid in the form of a one-off payment or service.

If the landlord cannot prove a specific rent agreement, this does not result in a unilateral right of the landlord to determine the rent, but the appropriate or customary local rent is then owed.

When agreeing the rent on the occasion of establishing a tenancy and when agreeing increases during the tenancy period, the upper limits stipulated by law must be observed for residential rents.

According to this provision, unreasonably high fees are, for example, those that exceed the usual fees in the municipality by more than 20 % due to the utilization of a low supply of comparable rooms.

Charges that are necessary to cover the landlord's ongoing expenses are not unreasonably high, provided that they are not conspicuously disproportionate to the landlord's performance on the basis of the usual charges.

The term "consideration" refers to the monetary value of tenant services, i.e. the basic rent, operating costs, fees of all kinds, a building cost subsidy, a tenant loan, the obligation to carry out cosmetic repairs or minor repairs; in short, everything that the tenant owes for the provision of the apartment. In practice, however, only the amount of the basic rent plays a role, as this is the only figure that allows a comparison with the usual charges. The fact that the tenant also has to pay operating costs, cosmetic repairs and minor repairs can generally be disregarded because the tenant's burden with these services is generally customary.

The starting point for the question of excessive rent is the local rent. A rent index can be used to determine the local comparative rent. If an outdated rent index is used, a surcharge must be added for changes in the rent level that have occurred in the meantime. Repairable defects do not affect the rent. Unrectifiable defects must be taken into account at the expense of the landlord. It is permissible to add surcharges for special services (furnishing, permission to sublet, etc.). An excessive rent is to be assumed if the customary local rent is exceeded by more than 20%.

A breach of the rent cap results in the partial invalidity of the rent agreement. This results in dynamic nullity: the respective price changes must be determined at least at annual intervals. The respective local rent increased by the materiality surcharge is decisive. As a result, the maximum rent owed increases solely due to the increase in the customary local price level.

Conversely, a fall in the customary local price level can lead to a rent that was permissible when the contract was concluded exceeding the permissible limit from a certain point in time. In this case, too, partial invalidity occurs because it is sufficient for the landlord to accept the price-inappropriate payment in order to fulfill the prohibition.

## **6. The Right to Reduce the Rent if The Rented Property is Defective**

### *§ 536 BGB*

*If the rented property has a defect at the time it is handed over to the tenant which renders it unsuitable for use in accordance with the contract, or if such a defect arises during the rental period, the tenant shall be exempt from paying the rent for the period during which the suitability is impaired. For the period during which the suitability is reduced, he shall only have to pay an appropriately reduced rent. An insignificant reduction in suitability shall not be taken into account. [...]*

If the usability of the leased property is canceled or impaired, German tenancy law provides the tenant with various rights. On the one hand, these have the effect of restoring the balance in return for performance and consideration. On the other hand, if the tenant exercises these rights, pressure is also exerted on the landlord to fulfill his obligations and restore the property to a condition in accordance with the contract.

The right to reduce the rent is probably the most frequently exercised right in practice. This means that only a reduced amount of rent is owed. This right of the tenant is not a claim to be asserted by the tenant, but the reduction occurs automatically. If the tenant continues to pay the full rent, they are entitled to repayment of the overpaid amount.

The only prerequisite for a rent reduction is the existence of a defect. This is the case if the actual condition of the rented property deviates from the contractually agreed condition to the detriment of the tenant. Even insignificant impairments of use constitute a defect, so that the concept of defect here differs from the concept of contractual condition discussed above. A reduction also occurs if the defect does not subjectively affect the tenant because he does not actually use the rented property.

The basis for calculating the amount of the rent reduction is the gross rent. The reduction in rent must then be proportional to the reduction in suitability for use. The reduction rate can be higher or lower if the defect remains the same, depending on how the defect affects the suitability of the rented property for the contractual use. A defective heating system, for

example, affects the tenant more in winter than in summer; consequently, different reduction rates are also appropriate for the respective seasons.

However, the right to a reduction is excluded in certain cases:

(1) The suitability of the rented property for use in accordance with the contract is only insignificantly reduced by the defect. Although the right to reduce the rent does not apply in these cases, the right to have the defect rectified by the landlord, for example, also applies to these so-called minor defects.

(2) The tenant was aware of the defect when the tenancy agreement was concluded. In this case, the tenant is not in need of protection.

(3) The tenant shall continue to pay the rent in full despite being aware of the defect. However, a subsequent rent reduction is possible if circumstances arise from which the landlord can infer that the tenant wishes to make use of his right to reduce the rent.

(4) No notice of defects has been given. The mandatory prerequisite for a rent reduction is the notification of the defect to the landlord in order to give the landlord the opportunity to remedy the defect.

(5) The defect was caused by the tenant or the tenant refuses to allow the landlord to take measures to remedy the defect.

## **7. Conclusion**

This shows that German tenancy law defines the obligations of tenants and landlords very precisely. Case law has also further strengthened and expanded the tenant's rights. As a result, the tenant's often inferior position vis-à-vis the landlord has become a relationship of equals. Tenants are now so extensively protected that some are even criticizing the fact that tenants are being taken advantage of. It remains to be seen whether this criticism will be reflected in case law in the future.

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# THEORETICAL CONCEPTS AND PARADIGMS OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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## **Abstract:**

*Knowledge and study of political parties are essential for understanding the functioning of democratic systems and the dynamics of political life in society. Political parties represent the main actors of public policy, mediating the relationship between citizens and the state, shaping political competition, articulating and aggregating the interests of various groups of the population, and ensuring the stability or transformation of the political regime. Their analysis allows us to identify ideological starting points, power relations, strategies for gaining voter support, and mechanisms of their influence on political decision-making. The aim of the article is to define historical aspects and approaches to political parties. A correct understanding of historical aspects is important for formulating conclusions and conducting research in the field of changing the profile of political parties and their development. The methodological procedures by which we achieve this aim are the historical, descriptive and synthesis methods.*

**Key words:** *political parties, mass parties, cartel parties, political system, public policy*

## **Introduction**

Political parties are organizations that strive to gain power through participation in elections and the creation of public policy. The electoral system, on the other hand, determines the rules according to which voters' votes are converted into mandates in legislative bodies.

Knowledge and research of political parties is essential for understanding the functioning of democratic systems and the dynamics of political life in society. Political parties represent the main actors of public policy, mediating the relationship between citizens and the state, shaping political competition, articulating and aggregating the interests of various groups of the population and ensuring the stability or transformation of the political regime. Their analysis allows us to identify ideological starting points, power relations, strategies for gaining voter support and mechanisms of their influence on political decision-making.

One of the main reasons why it is important to study political parties is their role in shaping public policies. Parties not only formulate programs, but also carry out their implementation by occupying executive and legislative positions. Their ideological orientation and value setting influence the nature of public policies, whether in the field of economy, social

rights, security or foreign relations. Analysis of programs, promises and subsequent implementation of measures allows us to assess the degree of consistency between the declared goals and the real political activities of the parties.

The study of political parties is also crucial for understanding the dynamics of political cycles, elections, and party competition. Voter voting behavior changes under the influence of economic, social, and cultural factors, and political parties adapt to these developments by adjusting their strategies, rhetoric, and program priorities. Analysis of election campaigns, party communication, and their interaction with the media provides important information about which methods of mobilization and political marketing are most effective in a given environment. An important aspect of studying political parties is also their internal structure and organizational functioning. The way in which parties are organized, how their membership base functions, what mechanisms for selecting leaders they use, and to what extent they are democratic within their structures affects their ability to adapt to new challenges. Centralized parties with a dominant leader may have different decision-making processes and political cultures than parties with pluralistic leadership and strong internal party democracy (Scarrow, 2015). Centralized political parties are characterized by a strong hierarchical structure, where decision-making powers are concentrated in the hands of a narrow leadership group, often headed by the party leader or close party leadership. This model of centralization means that strategic decisions, candidate nominations, and also the formation of the political program take place at the level of the party leadership, while the membership base and regional structures have only limited influence on these processes. In the context of Slovak political culture, the centralization of parties is to some extent the result of historical and social factors that have shaped the way the party system has functioned since the establishment of an independent Slovak Republic.

## **Results**

Political parties are also an important indicator of the stability and quality of a democratic regime. In consolidated democracies, they fulfill the role of intermediaries between citizens and political power, thereby contributing to the legitimacy of the system. Conversely, in autocratic or hybrid regimes, political parties can be instruments of centralized control and consolidation of authoritarian power. Examining their functioning in different types of regimes allows for a better understanding of the processes of democratization, as well as the mechanisms by which democracy can be disrupted.

Given the dynamic development of society, the analysis of political parties is essential in terms of their influence on social events and the formation of public opinion. Parties are not only passive actors who respond to the demands of voters, but also actively shape public discourse, spread ideologies and influence social norms. Their activities in the media, on social networks or in civil society can contribute to the strengthening of democratic political culture, but also to the spread of populism, disinformation and polarization of society ( Norris, 200).

A political party is not only a basic part of the party system, but also a primary element of any democratic pluralist regime. In a broader sense, it is an organization that unites individuals based on common interests and ideological proximity. The main goal of each political party is to gain political power, either by forming a single-party government or at least by participating in its execution. It is a structured group of people who unite on the basis of common beliefs and program priorities, with the aim of actively participating in the governance of the state. They try to achieve this goal through the maximum possible support of voters in democratic elections, which represent a legitimate tool for gaining political power.

Approaches to the study of political parties represent diverse methodological frameworks that allow for a comprehensive analysis of the functioning, structure and behavior of political entities in democratic systems. In the political science literature, several theoretical perspectives are distinguished, which differ depending on which aspects of political parties are emphasized (Kulašik, 2007; Heywood, 2008). The institutional approach focuses on examining the internal structures of parties, their organizational structure, functioning and decision-making mechanisms. The approach analyzes, for example, internal party rules, hierarchy, membership base and party financing. It pays special attention to issues of party discipline, democratic mechanisms within parties and the process of candidate nominations. The sociological approach focuses on the connection of political parties with various social groups and social cleavages. It examines the extent to which parties reflect the social structure of society and what role they play in the articulation and aggregation of the interests of different social classes. It is often based on theories of social contradictions (so-called cleavages theory), as formulated by S. M. Lipset and S. Rokkan. The theory of conflict lines represents one of the primary approaches to explaining the emergence, development and stabilization of political parties in European democracies. The essence is based on the assumption that political parties arise as representatives of basic social conflicts that were formed during historical processes in society. “The issue of cleavage has been addressed by, for example, Evans, Lane, etc. In voting behavior, the theory of cleavages emphasizes that the voter’s social affiliation plays a significant influence on the decision in elections” (Kováčová, N., 2019, p. 77).

Lipset and Rokkan identified four basic conflict lines that arose as a result of two significant transformation processes, namely the national revolution (associated with the building of modern nation-states) and the industrial revolution (associated with the transition from an agrarian to an industrial society).

1. *Center vs. periphery* (cultural-ethnic line) - the conflict line reflects the tension between centralized state power and peripheral, often ethnically or linguistically distinct groups. It arose as a result of national revolution, when state authorities promoted linguistic, cultural and administrative unification, which provoked resistance from minority communities. Political parties representing peripheral interests are often regional or ethnic parties.

2. *Church vs. state* (religious line) - arose as a result of conflicts between secular state power and religious institutions, especially in connection with issues of education, family law and public morality. In countries with a dominant Catholic population, this conflict led to the emergence of Christian democratic parties.

3. *City vs. countryside* (agrarian line)- the conflict between urban and rural interests arose as a result of industrialization, which favored urban areas and industrial sectors at the expense of agrarian regions. The conflict led to the formation of agrarian parties, which defended the interests of farmers.

4. *Labor vs. capital* (class line)- the most significant line as a result of the industrial revolution, which expresses the tension between the working class and the property-owning bourgeoisie. It led to the emergence of labor and social democratic parties on the one hand and conservative or liberal parties on the other ( Malík, Hlavatý, 2020).

*The behavioral approach* focuses on the behavior of actors within parties, especially members, leaders, and voters. It analyzes the motivations of individual participants in party life, the way they interact, and the factors influencing the choice of a political party, and also includes research on voter behavior and the identification of voting patterns. Behavioral political scientists often use quantitative methods, such as public opinion polls, analysis of voter patterns, and election results, to empirically verify their theories about political behavior. Based on this data, models are created that help explain political processes. Kováčová N. emphasizes that political decisions are not always the result of rational calculations, but are often also influenced by psychological factors, such as identification with political ideologies, emotional reactions to political events, or perceptions of political leaders. Behavioral analysis therefore also includes understanding these non-rational motives (Kováčová, N., 2014).

*The functional approach* examines the roles that political parties play in the political system. The key functions of parties include mobilizing voters, recruiting political elites, or ensuring governance ( Klíma, 1998). The above approach gives us an answer to the question of the importance of parties for the stability and efficiency of a democratic system. One of the main functions of political parties is the representation of various interests and values that exist in society. Political parties serve as a channel through which individuals and groups can express their political opinions and demands. Political parties therefore function as tools that enable citizens to effectively participate in political decision-making and influence public policy through the electoral process. They play an important role in the formation of public policy. Each party, based on its ideology, political goals, and election promises, presents its program, which determines the directions of development of specific areas of social life (such as the economy, education, healthcare, foreign policy, etc.). After receiving a mandate in the elections, parties shape public policy and set legislative priorities. The function of policy formation is associated with the formation of coalitions, the adoption of laws and the monitoring of their implementation. In addition, political parties are also important in the field of political education and voter mobilization. Through political campaigns, educational activities and political debates, political parties try to increase the political engagement of citizens and encourage them to participate in elections. Political education and mobilization are of fundamental importance for the dynamics of a democratic system, as they support the awareness and political activity of citizens, thereby contributing to a higher level of political participation. They also help to consolidate society by trying to reconcile different group interests and minimize political conflicts. The above process can be carried out through broader coalition groupings or by involving smaller, specific interests in the broader political debate. In a democracy, political parties perform not only governing functions, but also control and opposition roles. Opposition parties play a key role in checking the performance of the government and putting pressure on the ruling coalition. Opposition strategies and alternative policy proposals ensure balance in the democratic system and prevent abuse of political power. Political opposition thus ensures the vitality of the democratic system and promotes transparency and accountability.

*The ideological approach* emphasizes the programmatic orientations of political parties, their ideological anchoring and the ways in which they present and promote their values. This approach examines the content of election programs, political rhetoric and changes in ideological positions over time. The representation of ideology is often a reflection of broader social problems and currents of opinion in society. For example, parties on the left side of the

political spectrum are usually characterized by progressive values such as social justice, equality and state intervention in the economy, while right-wing parties favor the free market and individual responsibility.

*The historical-comparative approach* compares the development of political parties in different countries, taking into account historical, political and cultural contexts. Its justification lies in the possibility of identifying similarities and differences between party systems, as well as trends in the transformation of political parties as a result of social changes.

The first beginnings of the existence of political parties can be observed in political communities, where there were various factions and groups striving to influence public decision-making. However, it was not until the rise of constitutionalism and parliamentarism in the 18th and 19th centuries that political parties in the form we know today were formed. The first modern political parties can be classified as those emerging in the context of the development of representative democracy, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States. The British Whigs and Tories or the American Federalists and Democratic-Republicans represented the predecessors of current party structures, with their primary goal being to mobilize support for specific political programs and candidates. During this period, political parties were more likely loose associations of elites, centered around influential individuals and their interests. A significant shift in the nature of political parties occurred with the expansion of the right to vote and the rise of mass politics in the 19th century. With industrialization and urbanization, political parties transformed into mass organizations that began to systematically address broader segments of the electorate. This process was particularly visible in Europe, where strong social democratic, conservative and liberal parties emerged, representing specific social groups. In the post-World War II period, the role of center-right and social democratic parties in the West was strengthened, while new types of parties, such as ecological or populist movements, were gradually formed. In post-communist countries after 1989, political parties developed in the context of transition or transformation to democracy, often building on historical traditions or emerging as completely new political entities.

One of the first theoretical definitions of political parties was offered by J. Schumpeter, who characterized them as “groups of people who act together in the interest of gaining political power within the framework of a competitive electoral process” (Schumpeter, 1942, p. 283). The essence of the definition is based on his broader concept of democracy as a competition of

political elites, because in his understanding the success of maintaining the stability of democratic functioning depends on a narrow circle of those in power.

M. Duverger expanded this definition and emphasized the organizational aspect of political parties. According to him, political parties are “organizations whose goal is to influence or exercise power in the state and which seek to support voters through elections or other mechanisms of political participation” (Duverger, 1951, p. 5). His theory of party typology based on organizational structure and origin is one of the basic concepts in political science. The theoretical basis for examining the influence of electoral systems on voter behavior and the structure of the party system can be considered his concept emphasizing three basic rules, connecting the electoral mechanism with the form of the party spectrum. Duverger pointed out that a single-round majority system creates favorable conditions for bipartism, while a two-round majority system and proportional representation rather facilitate the existence of multiple political entities (Rybář, 2011). However, the above interpretation represents only a simplified view of the relationship between the electoral system and the number of parties. Duverger's approach does not focus only on the quantitative aspect, but also includes qualitative factors, such as the internal structure of the parties and their mutual relations. According to him, it is the degree of dependence or independence of the parties towards each other and their ability to adapt to changes in the political environment that play a key role in the formation of the party system. The French political scientist also studied the institutionalization of parties, the process by which political entities transform from informal movements into stable and enduring organizations. He considered this process important for the consolidation of democratic regimes, since, according to him, stable and strong parties contribute to the predictability of the political system and reduce the risk of its disintegration.

Sartori defined political parties as “political organizations that, through elections or other means, obtain public support to promote their political programs” (Sartori, 1976, p. 63). He also studied the functions of parties, including the representation of social interests, mediation between citizens and the state, and the formation of government institutions among their main tasks. Political parties are an integral part of the mechanisms of political representation. This concept is essential for ensuring balance in the political system, as it prevents the emergence of uncontrolled dominance by one group, thereby eliminating the risk of tyranny by the majority. According to Vlčej, “a political party is a certain institutional grouping of citizens who have a common opinion on solving public affairs, for which they decided to unite in a group. In order to attract citizens in elections, each political party must have a certain political program with which it wants to address potential voters” (Vlčej, 2018, p. 12).

The emergence and development of political parties is influenced by several factors, with one of the primary determinants being the regional perspective. Regional conditions play a significant role in the formation of the party system, as political parties often arise as a reaction to specific needs, interests or historical experiences of the population in specific areas. The regional perspective reflects geographical, historical, socio-economic and cultural conditions, which have a fundamental impact on the ideological orientation and programmatic goals of political parties. The geographical and historical context of regions often predetermines the political preferences and orientation of voters. Areas that have been exposed to ethnic conflicts or colonization in the past tend to form political parties focused on protecting national or ethnic rights. An example is political parties representing national minorities, such as the parties of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. At the same time, in areas with historical experience with autonomous movements or efforts for independence, regional nationalist parties are emerging that demand greater self-government or political autonomy, as is the case in Scotland or Catalonia.

The socio-economic conditions of the regions also influence the ideological orientation of political parties. In agrarian areas with a predominance of agricultural production, conservative or agrarian political parties are traditionally formed, defending the interests of farmers and the rural population. On the contrary, industrial regions dominated by the working class are often the base of left-wing parties with an emphasis on social justice and workers' rights. In urban areas with a higher degree of urbanization and education, liberal and progressive political parties find support, promoting civil liberties, environmental issues and an open society. Cultural and ethnic factors play a significant role, especially in multicultural regions, where parties representing the interests of specific national, religious or linguistic communities are formed. These parties are often oriented towards the protection of the cultural rights of minorities and support legislative changes that ensure the equal status of minority groups in society. In some cases, regional identity contributes to the creation of autonomous political entities that demand decentralization of public administration and strengthening of regional competences.

The political tradition and ideological background of regions also influence the development of the party system. Some areas have a long-standing tradition of supporting conservative or left-wing parties, and these political preferences are often transmitted between generations. In Slovakia, such an example can be seen in eastern Slovakia, where support for social democratic parties has long prevailed, while Bratislava and western Slovakia tend towards liberal and right-wing entities.

According to the criterion of historical development, as we have already outlined in the introduction to this subsection, political parties can be classified into the following groups: (Kulašik, 2007)

- Elite parties - represent the oldest type of political parties, whose roots go back to the period before the expansion of universal suffrage. These parties were closely connected with parliamentary elites and were mainly composed of aristocrats, intellectuals or the upper classes of society. They did not have a sufficiently broad membership base and were financed mainly from the personal resources of their members. Their functioning was largely informal and organized on the principle of personal relationships rather than on complex structures with a fixed hierarchy.

- Mass parties - came to the fore at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries and tried to address broad segments of the population. These parties had a well-established organizational structure with local, regional and national levels, while membership in the party was often understood as active participation in political life. They were typical mainly for social democratic and communist movements, but also for Christian democratic and some agrarian parties. An important feature of mass parties was their ideological character, which means that they were carriers of clearly defined programs and long-term political goals. "Socialist mass parties gradually, under the pressure of strikes in factories, created pressure on the monarchist system so that general democratic elections could be gradually held. Until then, only a narrowly defined layer of society based on social and gender affiliation could participate in elections, this was approximately 3 to 5% of the population of society. The main program points included: universal suffrage for both men and women, the introduction of an eight-hour working day, and work days off during weekends" ( Vlčej, 2018, p. 16).

- Catch-all parties (all-people's parties) - in the second half of the 20th century, especially after World War II, mass parties began to lose their importance and were replaced by the so-called catch-all parties, which tried to appeal to the widest possible range of voters, regardless of their social or economic affiliation. They were characterized by the weakening of ideological foundations in favor of a pragmatic approach to politics. Election campaigns became more personified, with the party leader starting to play a key role in mobilizing voters. The financing of such parties gradually shifted from membership fees to state subsidies and sponsorship donations from large economic entities. Examples can be found in post-war European parties, such as the German CDU or the British Labour Party, which transformed from mass parties into catch-all parties.

- Cartel parties - with the development of state subsidies for political parties and the growing professionalization of politics, the concept of cartel parties emerged in the second half of the 20th century ( Kopeček, 2007). This model is based on the assumption that political parties have become strongly connected to the state and, instead of competing with each other, create a kind of "cartel", which allows them to maintain a dominant position on the political scene. A characteristic feature is the weakening of the membership base, while their functioning is more dependent on the professional apparatus than on the activism of ordinary members and they are also heavily dependent on state subsidies, which allows them to maintain their existence even without mass public support. Cartel parties include many contemporary Western political parties, which increasingly rely on technocratic management and professional marketing strategies.

Although the professional literature most often presents the classification of political parties presented by us with respect to the criterion of historical development, due to the modernization of the time, it is possible to expand this differentiation by a fifth type, which are the so-called *Personalized and Digitalized Parties*. Their presence is noticeable in the 21st century, and as a result of digitalization and the development of social networks, new types of political parties are emerging, which we can describe as digital or personalized parties. They rely less on traditional organizational structures for their operations and use online mobilization of voters more. A distinctive aspect is often a charismatic leader who has sufficient leverage to gain preferences for the entire political party, while party mechanisms can be flexible and less formal within the party. They often use populist rhetoric and digital campaigns to directly address voters without mediation by traditional media or party structures. Examples can be found in parties such as the Italian Five Star Movement or in some campaigns of American and European populist movements. In the conditions of the Slovak Republic, a personalized party is, for example, OĽaNO, Republika, Progresívne Slovensko.

The development of political parties is currently facing new challenges, especially in connection with globalization, digitalization and the growing personalization of politics. Party structures are transforming, traditional mass parties are weakening in favor of more flexible and less hierarchical political movements. Despite these changes, however, political parties remain decisive actors in democratic systems, ensuring the mediation of public interests of citizens and the formation of public policy.

## **Conclusion**

The study of political parties is not only an academic discipline, but also has practical significance for policymakers, civil society and voters themselves. It allows for a better understanding of the intensity of political processes, identifying challenges to the democratic functioning of the state and seeking solutions to improve the quality of political life. Ultimately, it contributes to public awareness, strengthening democratic institutions and protecting the fundamental principles of political pluralism.

The history of political parties shows how voters' preferences have changed and how political movements have adapted to new challenges. For example, industrialization in the 19th century contributed to the emergence of labor and socialist parties, while globalization and technological innovation in the 21st century have supported the rise of populist and protest movements. Historical analysis allows us to understand not only the origins of different ideologies, but also how they have evolved over time – for example, how socialist parties gradually adapted to the principles of a market economy or how perceptions of conservatism have changed in different periods. An important aspect of the historical study of political parties is also the ability to learn from past mistakes and crises. Analyzing the collapse of democratic regimes, the rise of authoritarian political forces, and failed reforms allows us to better anticipate potential risks and avoid the recurrence of undesirable scenarios. For example, examining the causes of the weakening of interwar democracy in Europe helps us understand what factors can lead to the disruption of democratic institutions today.

Political parties are therefore not only actors in contemporary politics, but also the result of long-term historical processes. Their study provides valuable insights for analyzing political developments, predicting future trends, and understanding how societies adapt to changing conditions.

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