

## **Population development, urbanization and regional disparities of Slovakia**

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### **Abstract**

The ongoing transformation of society has profiled new regional disparities. Almost all authors concerned with regional development in post-communist countries, especially in Visegrad Four, emphasize the key role of macro-location in west-east gradient existence and the factor of settlement hierarchization. Undoubtedly the understanding of regional disparities as generated by the factor of macro-locational exposure and the factor of settlement hierarchization is considerably simplified. Integrally conditioned arrangement reflected in regional development of the state is present not only in territorial and settlement but also in socio-cultural and economical pattern. The arrangement has been formed in long development, in Slovak conditions with crucial importance of last 150 years (period after Austrian-Hungarian treaty). A simple comparison of the population development in particular regions of Slovakia and their urbanization before 1989 and present regional disparities allow us to identify some reasons of regional development in Slovakia after 1989.

**Key words:** regional disparities, regional development, unemployment, factor of macro-locational exposure, factor of settlement hierarchization

### **1 Introduction**

The regional disparities within the post-communist countries are largely discussed (directly or indirectly) in the scientific literature. It is obvious because the long lasting existence of enormous social-economic differences among particular regions of a country can influence its political and social stability significantly. Several authors state that the fundamental scheme of regional disparities in post communist countries was created at the very beginning of the transformation. And although the social-economic differences between particular regions rose significantly, this scheme did not change within the past thirteen years.

The study of regional disparities has one apparent feature. As stated in Hampl (2001), despite of the fact that the ongoing transformation of post-communist countries and hence the development of the regional disparities is in place for more than ten years, it is obvious that this process will not be finished in the short time to come. According to the above-mentioned author, a "second phase" of transformation that will be qualitatively different from the former is coming up. Several factors, with three of them as most significant, will be important for this new phase of transformation. First, it can be observed that not only the fundamental scheme but also the increase in

socio-economic differences between particular regions have more less been finished. There should be a decrease in the influence of factors associated with the former period in the upcoming years. Second, it is realistic to say, that once the necessary experiences have been acquired, particular countries will be better off in applying more sophisticated regional policy. Third, next development of the transformation of post-communist countries will be influenced significantly by European integration processes. This fact is especially important for ten European countries that are to join the EU as early as in 2004.

The goal of this paper is to introduce the fundamental scheme of regional disparities in Slovakia and an assessment of the relationship between current regional disparities and the demographic and urban development of Slovakia before 1989.

## **2 Regional structure of Slovakia after thirteen years of the transformation**

Little simplified, one can say that in 1989 the development of regional structure of Slovakia turned back to the trajectory that has been interrupted for fifty years due to the Second World War and then by the Communism Era. Several authors (Bašovský, Divínsky 1991, Dostál, Hampl 1992, Bašovský 1995, Hampl a kol. 1996, Gorzelak 1996, Dostál 1998, Hampl 2000, Hampl 2001, Pašiak, Gajdoš, Falt'an 2001, Benč 2002, Kling 2002 a iní) are writing about this fact of the development of the regional structure of Slovakia as well as other post-communist countries in this sense. In addition, the majority of authors are also pointing out the fact that despite the long lasting development of the regional structure of Slovakia, the key influence on it was made just by the period of the Communism Era, i.e. the 42 years of 1948 till 1989.

The assessment of the development of the regional structure of Slovakia before 1989 is not the goal of this paper though. Rather this case is analyzed in several other works (Bašovský 1975, Lukniš 1985, Mládek 1986, Mládek 1990, Kling 2002 a others). According to several factors one can state that the regional development of Slovakia before 1989 was relatively simple. We will state at least three of such factors. For a long period of its development the area of Slovakia has been on the periphery of Austro-Hungarian Empire, or Hungary respectively. And such was also Slovakia's regional development. With a low rate of industrialization and urbanization the land of Slovakia was an agrarian country until 1918. Secondly, the communism period – a very important phase of the development of the regional structure of Slovakia – is quite readable. Its main idea was to balance out the differences in social-economic level of particular regions. Among the main features of the economic advancement in this period belonged the strong balanced industrialization of the whole area and the collectivization of agriculture. The development of the regional structure on this time period was marked by a strong urbanization of the area. And finally, Slovakia is rather small country considering its area and number of inhabitants. Thus, to keep track of Slovakia's regional development is much easier than of countries that are several times larger.

Factors of regional differentiation are a subject of almost every geographical study focused on regional development of post-communist countries after 1989. Hampl (2001) assumes that geographical studies can be important in determination of basic factors eliciting diversity of particular regions in their transformation capability and achieved socio-economic level. In correspondence with several authors (Dostál 1996, Hampl 2001, Pašiak, Gajdoš, Fal'an 2001, Kling 2002 and some others), a factor of macro-locational exposure (macro-position, so-called west-east gradient in V4 territory) and a factor of settlement hierarchization can be considered as the two principal factors of regional development.

Effects of the factor of macro-locational exposure is interpreted in a simple way: regions located near western state border line, e. i. near former western European countries and nearer to the capital city of Bratislava have better conditions for socio-economic progress and better conditions to cope with the transformation processes. In principle, we can agree with this statement, however, we must note that this fact is very much influenced by long-term economic and socio-cultural features of the regions which, as Hampl (2001) indicates, are manifested in their ability to accept the transformation difficulties. In case of Slovakia, one must know the history of particular regions mainly in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (after the Austrian-Hungarian Settlement in 1867, a lot of the railway lines were built and the process of industrialization was launched). Influence of the macro-position factor in Slovakia is given by the position of the capital. Bratislava lies on the south-western border with Austria (western Europe) and in a good position towards the Czech Republic. Effects of various aspects of Bratislava's position on the regional structure development have been evaluated by Kling (2003).

The fact that regions of capitals and major cities overcome the transformation period more successfully is generally accepted. Big cities have significant economic and social potentials. Their economic basis is diversified with a strong share of progressive tertiary and quaternary sectors. Big cities usually serve as centres of territorial administration, universities, business and financial institutions, media and advertisement. Their proper accessibility and opportunities of "face-to-face" contacts play an important role in the trade and enterprising. Big cities are equipped with efficient technical and social infrastructures and a favourable educational structure of their populations. In Slovakia, a positive effect of this factor of settlement hierarchization on development of the cities' hinterland (functional urban regions according to Bezák, 1990) can be observed in case of all big cities with population over 50,000. Comparing with other post-communist countries, e. g. the Czech Republic or Poland, there are two facts hindering a more effective influence of this factor. Slovakia's major centres are rather small cities with a qualitatively different development history (Korec, Rochovská 2003).

We could state several more factors which, however, do not have such general applicability. We should point at the following ones: the character of settlement, economic specialization of regions and particularities of population structures of the regions. Considering the settlement features, Slovakia can be divided into the north-west territory including majority of the big cities located evenly in the territory, and the south-east part of the country with absence of the big centres (except Košice

and Prešov located in a morphological depression of Košická kotlina). Border line between these two territories can be led from Bratislava through Nitra, Zvolen and Poprad towards Polish boundary. The progressive economic activities (such as business, services, financial sector, etc.) require a concentration of population, which handicaps less populated areas. Apart from Košická kotlina, neither major regional centres, university centres, hypermarkets nor highways can be found in the south-east territory. The north-western part of the country with 9 major cities has much better conditions for development.

Unfavourable economic specialization occurs mainly in sparsely populated rural regions oriented on agricultural production. The most vulnerable regions with agricultural countryside and with only one or two industrial plants located in a small town can be found in south-easter part of Podunajská Lowland, as well as in Juhoslovenská kotlina (South-Slovakian Basin), Východoslovenská Lowland and north-eastern regions of Slovakia. Great volumes of labour dismissed from industrial and agricultural sectors have no real possibility to find any alternative occupation. A detailed study of the vulnerable regions of Slovakia has been done by Kling (2002).

Special features of population structures of particular regions in relation with their development we have to evaluate larger, not from point of view the share of Roma population. Except the problem of Roma population, several more population features of particular regions should be highlighted. We must consider also age, educational, nationality and religious structures of the population, specific features of population movement, etc., which result in insufficient geographical population mobility and low capability to profit on own regional potentials.

We do not intend to name all factors entering the process of the regional differentiation of Slovakia after 1989. However, we would like to do several more notes. First, to understand Slovakia's regional structure, one has to study processes that led to elimination of regional disparities in the communist era. Regional development in the period of 1948–1989 and regional structure of Slovakia in 1989 served as “a background” of transformation processes. Second, all above mentioned factor have performed in a mutual coaction. A different intensity and combination of various factors enable to categorize the regions according to their “transformation successfulness” shown also by Hampl (2001). Third, some of the above mentioned factors (and some more factors that have not been discussed, such as transportation networks) act generally in the whole territory of Slovakia, on the other hand, successfulness or unsuccessfulness of the transformation of some regions have resulted from more complicated processes.

## **2.2 Regional differentiation of Slovakia at the end of 2002**

Problems of regional differentiation in Slovakia are studied by political scientists, economists, sociologists and obviously also geographers practically from the beginning of the transformation period, i. e. from 1990. Virtually all the studies research the issues of regional differentiation of Slovakia at the level of districts (until 1996 there were 38, from 1996 79 districts). Observing the regional differentiation, simple and well available indicators, especially unemployment rate and average salary are often used. Gross domestic product per 1 inhabitant (GDP per capita), a very significant indicator, is

practically unavailable for the statistical level of districts, we can gain the values for regions (counties) only. Obvious is an ambition of individual authors to give a true picture of regional differentiation with a complex indicator respecting the economic and also social character of regions. It is inevitable to mention that any generally acceptable complex indicator to rate regional differentiation does not exist. Those, which have been used by individual authors come from various methodologies, thus the results are different.

Benč (2002) divides districts of Slovakia into four categories basically on their socio-economic performance (developed regions, economically stabilized regions, stagnated regions, and economically depressed regions). According to the author, "socio-economic performance of a region is expressed by the value of per capita GDP and unemployment rate which depend on production capacity and services, income effect of economic processes and entrepreneurial sphere's level. As generally accepted, the higher socio-economic performance of a region, the higher GDP and the lower unemployment rate" (Benč 2002). Kling (2002) divided districts into four categories as well (developed regions, regions with potential to be developed, less developed regions with problems with development and backward regions), according to a summary indicator, "which respects economic, social and demographic parameters and selected parameters of technical infrastructure". To determine this summary indicator the author used data from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and methodology of M. E. S. A. 10. Results of these two authors are different. The most important difference is the number of districts classified into individual groups. As for the first group of developed regions, Kling includes only 11 districts, while Benč 26). In both groups, the fundamental scheme of Slovakia's regional structure is the same: "the rich northwest" and "the poor southeast". Number of districts in the first two groups and number of districts in the last two groups according to both authors is the same, which shows a high correspondence in placing the districts into "a better" and "a worse" part.

Pašiak, Gajdoš, Falt'an (2001) show regions of poverty in the Slovak Republic. As indicators of poverty, they used unemployment rate, social dependency and average wage. The authors show 19 regions (districts) of poverty being often indicated as marginal regions: Krupina, Veľký Krtíš, Poltár, Rimavská Sobota, Revúca, Rožňava, Spišská Nová Ves, Gelnica, Trebišov, Sobrance, Kežmarok, Levoča, Sabinov, Bardejov, Svidník, Stropkov, Vranov nad Topľou, Medzilaborce a Snina. All of these 19 districts are related with groups of the weakest regions according to Benč (2002) and with the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> groups according to Kling (2002).

Group of regions most impacted by the transformation emerged in 1991, when 11 problematic districts were delimited (Veľký Krtíš, Lučenec, Rimavská Sobota, Rožňava, Spišská Nová Ves, Trebišov, Čadca, Dolný Kubín, Stará Ľubovňa, Bardejov a Považská Bystrica). Later on, some other districts joined this group and territorial administrative changes in the Slovak Republic in 1996 played an important role in evaluating of regional differentiation of the country. This change brought more concrete identification of problematic regions. According to Kling (2002), regional differentiation was even intensified by the separation of Slovakia's territory into more territorial units. While before 1996, some districts included some more and less developed parts, in the new territorial organization these parts have been separated.

A very important comment on development of regional differentiation of post-communist countries was presented by Hampl (2001), who implies that despite the main tendencies or a kind of regularity in regional differentiation development trends in the transformation period which were empirically sufficiently verified, series of surprising or contradictory cases may occur. Although they have only a partial importance, they can cast doubt upon some general conclusions and effects of particular factors as well as upon integral character of transformation. Consequently, it is necessary to analyse these partial breakdowns and the ambiguity of the transformation respectively. These breakages make possible to emphasize an extraordinariness of transformation processes and development of a state regional structure.

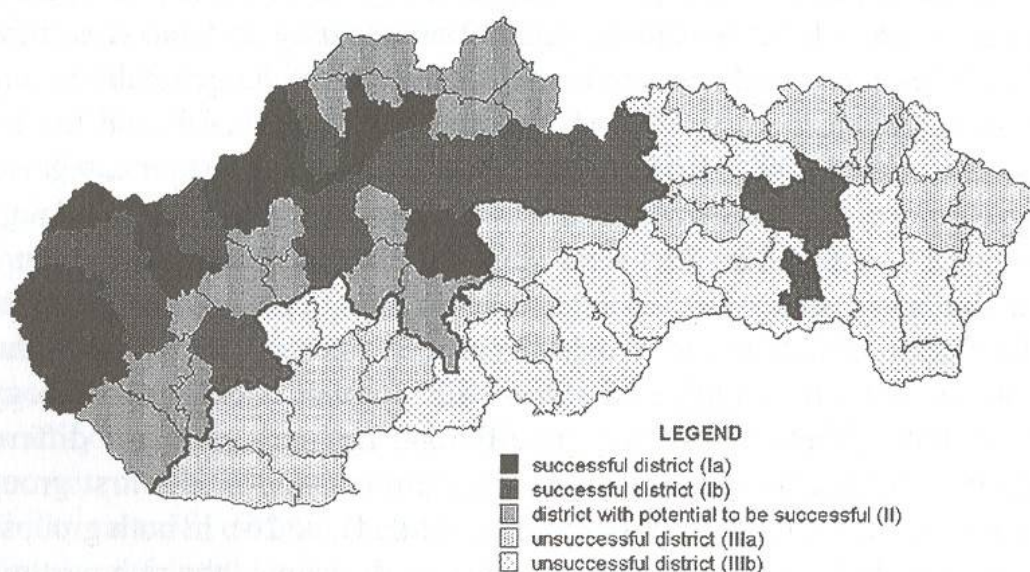


Fig. 1 Classification of districts of Slovakia according to their success in transformation (2002)

Studying the works which deal with regional disparities in Slovakia, all the authors agree that different capability of regions to adapt on economic and social transformation is the main reason for emerging and deepening of regional disparities in Slovakia. The different capability of particular regions is a consequence of the above mentioned factors of regional development of Slovakia in the period of transformation. This allows us to present a classification of regions of Slovakia according to their (expected/real?) transformation success (Fig 1). The criteria used in this classification are very simple. The criterion in the first level of regional division is a relationship to factors conditioning the regional differentiation, the criterion in the second level is unemployment rate in December, 2002. Classification of regions according to their (expected/real?) transformation success is as the following:

**I. category:** successful (well developed) regions:

Ia: Bratislava I, Bratislava II, Bratislava III, Bratislava IV, Bratislava V, Malacky, Pezinok, Senec, Skalica, Myjava, Piešťany, Trenčín, Ilava, Púchov, Žilina, Banská Bystrica (16 districts).

Ib: Trnava, Senica, Nové Mesto nad Váhom, Považská Bystrica, Nitra, Prievidza, Martin, Liptovský Mikuláš, Ružomberok, Košice I, Košice II, Košice III, Košice IV, Poprad, Prešov (15).

Tab. 1 Unemployment rate in districts of the Slovak Republic (12/2002, in per cent)

Bratislava III	3.16	Stará Ľubovňa	16.91
Bratislava II	3.62	Stropkov	18.17
Bratislava IV	3.65	Banská Štiavnica	19.93
Bratislava V	4.65	Svidník	20.40
Bratislava I	4.85	Humenné	21.18
Trenčín	5.19	Snina	22.13
Ilava	6.01	Levoča	22.96
Pezinok	6.32	Nové Zámky	23.15
Senec	7.57	Poltár	23.50
Piešťany	9.38	Brezno	23.71
Púchov	9.50	Bardejov	24.05
Malacky	10.13	Spišská Nová Ves	24.35
Banská Bystrica	10.55	Krupina	24.80
Myjava	10.65	Komárno	25.89
Žilina	10.79	Levice	25.90
Skalica	11.50	Detva	26.14
Senica	11.91	Michalovce	26.85
Trnava	12.10	Zlaté Moravce	26.98
Prievidza	12.54	Medzilaborce	27.06
Nové Mesto nad Váhom	12.89	Žarnovica	27.26
Považská Bystrica	14.35	Gelnica	27.29
Liptovský Mikuláš	14.74	Košice – okolie	27.40
Košice I	14.99	Lučenec	28.20
Košice IV	15.27	Vranov nad Topľou	28.43
Košice II	15.54	Sabinov	28.76
Nitra	15.55	Kežmarok	31.36
Martin	15.56	Trebišov	31.47
Košice III	16.19	Sobrance	32.11
Ružomberok	17.13	Rožňava	32.87
Poprad	18.38	Revúca	34.94
Prešov	21.74	Veľký Krtíš	35.50
Hlohovec	13.64	Rimavská Sobota	37.22
Zvolen	13.80		
Bytča	14.02	Bratislavský kraj	5.18
Dunajská Streda	14.20	Trenčiansky kraj	10.91
Námestovo	14.64	Trnavský kraj	12.99
Čadca	14.86	Žilinský kraj	14.74
Topoľčany	15.65	Nitriansky kraj	21.51
Partizánske	15.85	Prešovský kraj	23.00
Bánovce nad Bebravou	16.14	Banskobystrický kraj	23.77
Galanta	16.22	Košický kraj	24.26
Tvrdošín	16.51		
Turčianske Teplice	17.90	<b>Slovensko</b>	<b>17.45</b>
Žiar nad Hronom	18.70		
Kysucké Nové Mesto	18.79		
Dolný Kubín	19.06		
Šaľa	20.55		

Source: Interné materiály Národného úradu práce, Bratislava 2003

**II. category:** regions with potential to be successful:

Dunajská Streda, Šaľa, Galanta, Hlohovec, Topoľčany, Bánovce nad Bebravou, Partizánske, Bytča, Čadca, Kysucké Nové Mesto, Turčianske Teplice, Dolný Kubín, Námestovo, Tvrdošín, Zvolen, Žiar nad Hronom (16).

**III. category:** unsuccessful (depressed/backward) regions:

IIIa: Nové Zámky, Komárno, Levice, Banská Štiavnica, Krupina, Poltár, Detva, Brezno, Spišská Nová Ves, Levoča, Stará Ľubovňa, Bardejov, Svidník, Stropkov, Humenné, Snina (16).

IIIb: Zlaté Moravce, Žarnovica, Veľký Krtíš, Lučenec, Rimavská Sobota, Revúca, Rožňava, Gelnica, Košice – okolie, Trebišov, Sobrance, Michalovce, Kežmarok, Sabinov, Vranov nad Topľou, Medzilaborce (16).

The first category includes districts with a great macro-position attractiveness (metropolitan region of Bratislava, region of Záhorie and region of Middle and Upper Valley of Váh river) and regions of big cities. In Ia category are the districts with unemployment rate in december 2002 was lower than 11.63 per cent (unemployment rate of the Slovak Republic in December, 2002 divided by 1.5). The third (the most unsuccessful) category contains districts with disadvantageous macro-position, adverse character of settlement, bad economic specialization, negative features of population structures and unfavourable transport connections with other territories, especially to the core spaces in western part of the state. Category Ib comprises districts with unemployment rate over 26.18 per cent (unemployment rate in Slovakia in December 2002 multiplied by 1.5). The second category contains districts with a potential to be successful with regard to the factors influencing the processes of transformation.

As for the above mentioned classification of Slovakia's regions, partially having character of a theoretical classification, it is suitable to make three notes. First, the Slovak Republic is divided into two macroregions, the rich west (northwest) and the poor east (south east), as indicated by almost all authors studying the regional structure of Slovakia. These two macroregions are a result of influence of the factors that have appeared in the transformation period. This classification of districts strongly correlates with the three classifications stated above. The line dividing "the rich west" (districts of the categories I and II) from "the poor south" can be led along south-east border of districts Dunajská Streda – Galanta – Šaľa – Nitra – Topoľčany – Partizánske – Prievidza – Žiar nad Hronom – Banská Bystrica – Ružomberok – Liptovský Mikuláš – Poprad. Four districts of Košice and Prešov district act as "islands" in the poor east of Slovakia.

Analysis of regional structure of the Slovak Republic included in the National Plan of Regional Development, which was accepted by the government in 2001, identifies 39 districts as depressed or stagnated regions (Benč 2002). Our classification describes 32 districts as unsuccessful (we have not included districts of Senec, Šaľa, Dunajská Streda, Bytča, Partizánske, Čadca, Kysucké Nové Mesto and Námestovo and district of Detva has been included, on the other hand). High unemployment rate, low inflow of investments, low productivity of work and deficient technical infrastructure are typical features of these districts. Though these regions have certain developing potential, especially good natural conditions and interesting cultural and historical objects, but so far they have not been able to use these positives.



Tab. 2 The development of the average wage in districts of the Slovak Republic (in SKK)

Year 1999 (average wage in SR: 10 961, including employees in abroad)					
<i>The lowest salaries</i>		<i>The highest salaries</i>		<i>The highest salaries except districts BA a KE</i>	
Stropkov	7 959	Bratislava I	16 273	Trnava	12 275
Sabinov	7 961	Bratislava II	16 071	Banská Bystrica	11 241
Snina	8 043	Košice II	14 680	Žiar nad Hronom	11 164
Stará Ľubovňa	8 261	Bratislava IV	14 142	Púchov	11 116
Námestovo	8 356	Bratislava III	13 947	Prešov	10 860
Average	8 116	Average	15 023	Average	11 331
Year 2000 (average wage in SR: 11 799, including employees in abroad)					
<i>The lowest salaries</i>		<i>The highest salaries</i>		<i>The highest salaries except districts BA a KE</i>	
Sobrance	8 292	Bratislava II	17 808	Trnava	13 474
Snina	8 497	Bratislava I	17 630	Púchov	12 868
Stropkov	8 648	Košice II	16 511	Banská Bystrica	12 170
Sabinov	8 718	Bratislava IV	16 231	Žiar nad Hronom	11 879
Bardejov	8 773	Bratislava III	15 407	Skalica	11 824
Average	8 586	Average	16 717	Average	12 443
				<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>
Difference between maximum and minimum salary				8 314	9 516
Difference between the maximum (except BA and KE) and minimum				4 316	5 182
Difference between the average of the 5 highest and the 5 lowest values				6 907	8 131
Difference between the average of the highest (except BA and KE) and the 5 lowest salaries				2 744	3 858
Level of wage (SR = 100) – minimum				72.6	70.3
Level of wage (SR = 100) – maximum				148.5	150.9
Variation range				75.9	80.6
Level of wage (SR = 100) – maximum (except BA and KE)				112.0	114.2
Variation range (except BA and KE)				39.4	43.9

Source: Regional Comparisons in the Slovak Republic 1999, 2000. Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

The last note concerns the continuing process of deepening disparities also after 10 years of the transformation. Table 2 shows the development based on average wage level in Slovakia in 1999 and 2000. The differences between the districts with the lowest and the highest average salaries were significantly increased in the period of a year. The difference between maximum and minimum salary was increased by about 1,202 SKK, the difference between average values of the five top districts and five bottom districts was increased by about 1,204 SKK. The table also shows that differences between districts with the highest and the lowest average salaries were increased in case of all observed indicators. Legislation changes create barriers for observing the development of unemployment rate.

### 3 The development of the number of inhabitants in Slovakia before 1989

Korec, Horňák, Smotanová, Kling (1998) studied population development of Slovakia before 1989, focusing on its territorial differentiation. They used districts of Slovakia established in 1996 as basic territorial units. The authors research the population development from 1869 (when the first official census took place in the territory

of Slovakia) and from the practical reasons, they follow the development until 1991. The observed time period was divided into 3 parts: 1869–1921, 1921–1950 and 1950–1991. As demarcation dates were used years of the first official censuses after significant political changes, which strongly affected the following course of social and economic development in the country.

Summarizing the results of the authors mentioned above, we can make some general statements towards the present regional disparities. First, the districts with the lowest growth index in the period 1869–1991 (up to 1.5; while the average value of the index is 2.2) are concentrated in southern and north-eastern Slovakia, i. e. in the territory called also “the poor east”. These districts with slowest growth have several common features. All of them are less populated districts with a small number of inhabitants (mostly up to 30,000 residents) (1), in the period of existence of large districts in 1960–1990, these were peripheral (2), they are located aside the main road and railway corridors of the state (3), according to Lukniš (1985) they are they are located off the core spaces of the individual makroregions of Slovakia (4) and low level of industrialization is typical for these regions (5). Another fact is that of the 32 districts from the category III (unsuccessful regions), only 2 districts achieved the the growth index higher than Slovakia’s average: Spišská Nová Ves (2.8) and Humenné (2.6). Vranov nad Topľou’s index equals 2.2 exactly. The districts with the highest values of the growth index were logically the districts of Bratislava and Košice and then the districts of Váh river Valley and also districts of Poprad, Banská Bystrica and Prievidza. There are several common features of the districts with the highest growth index values, such as a very good position towards Bratislava – Košice transport corridor, forming of regional centres of national importance, strong industrialization (in some districts even before 1948) and (as indicated by Lukniš, 1985) they represent the core spaces of Slovakia’s macroregions. Moreover, in the period of large districts between 1960–1990, they were the centres of these districts.

The development of population size is a very simple indicator, but more authors agree that it reflects development potential of a region very sensibly. If we consider the population development during the whole period (125 years), we can also state that this simple indicator divides Slovakia into the more dynamic north-west and more static south-east. If we look at the individual time periods, we can see that the period 1869–1921 resembles most the current period as for the transformation success of particular districts. In this period, the difference between the dynamic west and static east was obvious (Korec, Hornák, Smatanová, Kling, 1998, page 47). The last development period (1950–1991) shows two noteworthy facts. First, above-average values of the growth index is typical for many districts of north-eastern Slovakia (Spišská Nová Ves, Sabinov, Bardejov, Svidník, Vranov nad Topľou a Humenné). Second, very low values of the growth index (below 1.25 in comparison with Slovakia’s average being as high as 1.5) was observed in a couple of districts in southern part of Slovakia (Komárno, Nové Zámky, Levice, Krupina, Veľký Krtíš, Detva, Lučenec, Poltár, Rimavská Sobota and Rožňava). Very interesting is also the fact that the growth index lower than 1.0 (population decline) in the dynamic period 1950–1991 is typical for the following 3 districts: Banská Štiavnica, Sobrance and Medzilaborce (Korec, Hornák, Smatanová, Kling, 1998, page 49).

#### 4 Urbanization in Slovakia before 1989

The development of urbanization rate in Slovakia from 1869 to 1991 is shown in Table 3. The table documents that the territory of Slovakia was a rural country with minimum urbanization rate not only in 1869 (urbanization rate reaching to 8.62 per cent) but also in 1950 (27.30 per cent). Slovakia's decisive urbanization era was the communist period. From 1950 to 1991, the rate of urbanization was increased from 2.30 up to 56.68 per cent while the population living in towns and cities rised from 939,910 to 2, 989,247 (i.e. by over 2 millions). In other words, the number of inhabitants living in urban settlements in 1991 was about 2.18 times higher than in 1950. A typical feature of the urbanization process in Slovakia between 1950–1991 was its close relationship with industrialization (Bašovský 1975, Lukniš 1985, Mládek 1986, Bašovský, Divínsky 1991 and some others). The authors who deal with the urbanization of Slovakia after 1950 refer to its many drawbacks in relationship to regional structure development of Slovakia. In this paper, we would like to emphasize three features of Slovakia's urbanization before 1989, which significantly influenced the development of regional disparities in the country.

Tab. 3 The development of urbanization rate of the Slovak Republic

	1869	1921	1950	1991
Total number of inhabitants	2 481 811	2 993 859	3 442 317	5 274 335
Number of urban inhabitants	213 810	423 821	939 910	2 989 247
Growth of urban population	+ 210 011	+ 416 089	+ 2 049 337	
Urbanization rate (per cent)	8.62	14.16	27.30	56.68

Source: Retrospektivní lexikon obcí Československé socialistické republiky 1850–1970, FSÚ, Praha, 1978; Štatistický lexikón obcí Slovenskej republiky 1992. ŠÚ SR, Bratislava, 1994

Weclawowicz (1992, 1997) named the urbanization which took place in the European communist countries after 1945 as a lame urbanization. He highly emphasizes: a) vehement population growth which was based on the migration of residents from villages, b) close relationship between urbanization and industrialization processes, c) insufficient development of typical urban functions (such as trade, services, business, finances and some others), d) absence of urban lifestyle and e) underdeveloped structure of the cities, especially underdeveloped centres. All of these features of the lame urbanization were highly typical for the urbanization of Slovakia. Concerning the development of regional disparities in Slovakia, linkage between Slovak towns and cities with industry and low development of typical urban functions in the urban settlements played the main role. In small and middle-sized towns, we could usually observe only a single industrial factory representing the region's economic base. Industrial factories were synonymous to concrete towns (Calex – Zlaté Moravce, Elektrosvit – Nové Zámky, Niklova huta – Sered', Podpolianske strojárne – Detva, Chemko – Strážske, Bukóza – Vranov nad Topľou, Chemlon – Humenné, Vihorlat – Snina, etc.). Transformation problems had more or less been expected in these towns and regions.

Studying the distribution of Slovak towns/cities according to their population size over the territory of Slovakia, we can observe a significant concentration of big cities

(over 50,000 inhabitants) in north-western part of the country. The influence of this fact on Slovakia's regional structure development after 1989 was already noticed in section 2.1 of this paper. The territorial distribution of towns/cities over the territory of Slovakia creates a basis of country's regional structure. The authors dealing with Slovakia's urban and regional structure before 1989 identically observed that the period 1948–1989 created a lot of deformations in the regional structure. From aspect of the studied phenomenon (relationship between urbanization before 1989 and current regional disparities), urban underdevelopment of the South-Slovak Lowlands was the principal territorial deformation of urban and regional structure of Slovakia before 1989. Bašovský (1995) comments that the improvement of the economic and urban utilization of the southern transport corridor (the former large districts Levice, Veľký Krtíš, Lučenec, Rimavská Sobota, Rožňava a Košice-okolie) would bring a refreshment not only to its economic and demographic growth, it would also help integrate this area with the both metropolitan regions of Slovakia. However, the fact that after 1948 there was no town/city in position of a regional administrative centre unfavourably influenced the development of the urban structure of the mentioned territory.

A special urbanization feature of Slovakia in the period between 1950–1989 is an intensive growth of the population of big cities. This feature is largely discussed in the study of Korec, Rochovská (2003). All of the ten top cities of Slovakia reached the 1991/1950 growth index higher than 2.0, Banská Bystrica even 6.25, Poprad 5.16, Nitra 4.05, Prešov 3.82, Košice 3.75, Trenčín 3.50 a Žilina 3.22. Bratislava reached the lowest growth index 2.29. To make a better picture, we can make a comparison with the Czech Republic, where only one city out of the ten biggest ones reached the growth index higher than 2.0 (Pardubice, 2.23). Prague recorded only 1.21, Brno 1.30 and Plzeň 1.45. In case of Slovakia's big cities, the growth of population was accompanied by industrialization and intensive migration. Except for these two processes, annexation of surrounding villages to administrative territory of the big cities played an important role, too. It is obvious that big cities of Slovakia – being young urban structures and acting as the leaders of the transformation process – have had difficult development conditions after 1989.

## 5 Conclusion

In agreement with several authors, the most important factors that influenced the development of the regional structure of Slovakia after 1989 are the factor of macro-locational exposure, the factor of settlement hierarchization, character of settlement, economic specialization of regions and special features of population structure of the regions. In context with the factor of macro-locational exposure, we would like to pay attention to the study of the EMPIRICA Institute in Bonn, Germany (Trend 1993), where 414 regions of Europe were analyzed concerning a basic question: Where to invest in Europe? The four top positions were occupied by the following regions: Bratislava region, region of west Czechia, Győr – Sopron and Poznan region.

The analysis of the population development in Slovakia before 1989 allows us to make few notes in relationship to the current regional disparities and to the regional

development of Slovakia after 1989. The population development Slovakia between 1869–1991 significantly predicted the regional development after 1989 (1). Of the three different development periods, the one between 1869–1921, when Slovakia was part of Austria-Hungarian Monarchy has the highest propinquity with regional development of Slovakia after 1989. The 1921–1950 period was faint, all the districts were characterized by low and relatively balanced growth. In the years 1950–1989, districts in northern Slovakia were the most dynamic regions, which was a result of regional policy in the communist era (2). Southern parts of the country showed only low growth indexes throughout the whole time period, but extraordinarily negative was the population development in the southern districts in the 1950–1991 period.

Urbanization of Slovakia in the communist era, with its many positive effects, forms the background of the current problems of regional development. Especially three features of the urbanization processes in Slovakia have had the direct effect on the launch and later development of regional disparities after 1989 in years 1948–1989: character of urbanization (lame urbanization), concentration of big cities in north-western part of the country and rapid population growth of the big cities, the leaders of the transformation processes.

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