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Women Mayors in Slovakia: Spatial Insights



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ABSTRACT

Women's underrepresentation in local politics is observed in many countries, including Slovakia, where minor attention is dedicated to this problem. In this paper, the spatial insight into the numeric women representation in Slovak local governments (municipalities) at the position of the mayor in recent 20 years is given to identify the areas where the representation of women mayors is the most evident and how it has evolved in time. Results are projected using maps, where local data for 2,924 municipalities are aggregated to the district level (79 districts at LAU1), and the shares of women mayors among all mayors in a district are displayed for five elections since 2002. The results confirm the increasing trend of women mayors in Slovak municipalities. Besides, the results unveil that the increase of the portion of women mayors is observed firstly in the south-center part and edge northeastern part of Slovakia. These areas are characterized by high fragmentation of residential structure, low GDP per capita, and higher ethnolinguistic fragmentation. Later, the increase of women's representation in local governments subsequently continued in the southeastern and southwestern parts of Slovakia.

KEYWORDS: *local government, woman mayor, gender gap, women underrepresentation*

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Introduction

In recent years, women's engagement in many fields of life has been promoted and perceptible, too. A voluminous part of the research is currently dedicated to the gender perspective in all sectors of the economy. A glass ceiling is frequently discussed when considering both public and private sectors (Mokhov, 2021; Burgess, 2021; Rovenská, 2020). However, many authors report that women are still underrepresented in politics (e.g. Alberti, Diaz-Rioseco & Visconti, 2021; Funk, 2020; Cardenas Acosta, 2019).

In Slovakia, women underrepresentation in public sector, as well as in local politics is evident (Maškarinec, Klimovský & Danišová, 2018; Maškarinec, Klimovský & Bláha, 2020). Men predominate in the leadership of local governments, especially in larger cities, which are attractive to them in terms of power and financial reward (Bitušíková, 2005; Crowder-Meyer, Gadarian & Trounstone, 2015). The state of gender equality in local politics in Slovakia is characterized by Bitušíková (2005) and Klimovský (2015) as unfavorable, with a long-term unchanging legislative framework and a persistent reluctance to fulfill international commitments within the framework of gender equality. These authors consider the representation of women in Slovak politics to be marginalized, and they identified a space for political discussion on the introduction of mandatory quotas for the representation of both sexes at the local or national political level (Kouba, Nálepová & Filipec, 2013). Although the area of mandatory quotas is unresolved, a positive trend of success of female candidates has been identified in Slovakia.

The research aims to enrich the information on the observed increase in women's representation in local politics through spatial insight. Numeric representation of women mayors in Slovakia in the last 20 years is displayed employing GIS maps of Slovakia. The paper identifies areas where the representation of women mayors is the most evident and how it evolves in time. Data for 2,924 local governments (municipalities) are aggregated to the district level (79 districts at LAU1), and the shares of women mayors among all mayors in a district are displayed for five election periods 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, and 2022.

The paper is organized in the following manner. After the Introduction, the theoretical background, existing research, and Slovak conditions are presented in the chapter State of the Art. After that, methods and data

sources are reported. The main results of the research are presented in the chapter Results and Discussion. The paper ends with a Conclusion and References.

State of the Art

Women's representation in local governments is under scrutiny in a myriad of country-level and regional studies (e.g. Seggaard, Kjaer & Saglie, 2022 - Denmark; Seggaard & Saglie, 2021 - Norway; Austrian Association of Cities and Town, 2021 - Austria; Devroe, Erzeel & Meier, 2020 - Belgium, Cardenas Acosta, 2019 - Mexico, Brollo & Troiano, 2016 - Brazil; Johnson, 2015, Bean, 1991 - Australia; Barnes & Burchard, 2013 - Subsaharan Africa; Alibegovic, Slijepčević & Šipić, 2013 - Croatia; Giger, 2009 - Western Europe; Bochel & Bochel, 2008 - UK; Childs & Krook, 2008 - USA; Bird, 2003 - France). Besides it, Sundström and Stockemer (2015), Escobar-Lemmon and Funk (2018), and Funk and Philips (2019) mention that the evidence at the local level is not as frequent as on the national level of government.

Women's underrepresentation in local politics has been discussed in many pieces of research, e.g. Seggaard, Kjaer and Saglie (2022), Devroe, Erzeel and Meier, (2020), and Köppl-Turyna and Kantorowicz (2020) found the increasing trend of female representatives. The same is observed in the local public sector of the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic (Maškarinec & Klimovský, 2017; Maškarinec, Klimovský & Danišová, 2018; Maškarinec Klimovský & Bláha, 2020).

Women representatives in local politics are investigated from several points of view and are appreciated due to their awareness of risk, inclination to financial stability, and flexible adaptation to new circumstances that occur. According to this, a part of gender parity research in local politics focuses on different attitudes of women and men in leadership and decision-making, with differences arising from general patterns of behavior of women and men (Saltzstein, 1986). Several lines of research can be observed in foreign studies.

A branch of research is based on the hypothesis of women's aversion to risk. Balaguer-Coll and Ivanova-Toneva (2021) confirmed that the female leadership of local governments contributes to improving their financial sustainability, budgetary stability, and compliance with the legal debt limit. Under women's leadership, municipalities in Spain adopt more pessimistic

tendencies, underestimating incomes and increasing spending, leading to a more favorable financial situation for these municipalities (Cuadrado-Ballesteros, Guillamón & Ríos, 2021). Women mayors are less prone to corruption (Brollo & Troiano, 2016) and their municipalities' websites are more transparent (Herrero-Gutiérrez, Simelio & Carrascosa Puertas, 2021).

Other research investigates the impact of the gender of a local elected authority on the structure and the size of local public spending, assuming that women mayors are more inclined to social fields and education. Cuadrado-Ballesteros, Guillamón and Ríos (2021) found that local government expenditure and revenue variations are affected by the percentage of women in Spanish local politics. The influence of the mayors' gender on the structure and volume of local expenditures with an emphasis on social areas is, with varying degrees, analyzed in a plethora of studies, e.g. Alberti Diaz-Rioseco and Visconti (2021), Funk (2020), Barnes et al. (2020), Funk and Philips (2019), or Funk (2015).

Part of the research focuses on women's barriers to entering the local politics, identifying socio-economic (e.g. double burden defined in Einhorn, 1993), institutional and cultural barriers (Sztwiertnia & Hellová, 2012), institutional and demographic barriers (Holman, 2017), the presence of men's domination (Sumbas, 2019) and barriers related to re-election (Brollo & Troiano, 2016; Maškarinec, Klimovský & Danišová, 2018; Maguire, 2018).

Research in recent years has also looked at the responses of female representatives to the COVID-19 pandemic. Women implemented preventive measures proactively and faster than men (Funk, 2020). In many countries, the so-called gender quotas for respecting the principle of gender equality in politics were implemented into the legislative norms (Cardenas Acosta, 2019; Bird, 2003), and the representation of women in politics has subsequently increased (Funk & Philips, 2019).

In Slovakia, only a few pieces of research deal with the representation of women in the local government, and they reflect only a small sample of Slovak cities (Maškarinec & Klimovský, 2017; Maškarinec, Klimovský & Danišová, 2018; Maškarinec Klimovský & Bláha, 2020 - analyze 71 district towns in 1994-2014). Filling that gap by employing almost all Slovak municipalities in the research is the main motivation of this paper. The paper aims to provide a spatial view of the distribution of women mayors in time and across the country's area, pointing to economic and demographic specifics tied to these areas. The paper also contributes to the general

knowledge in the field of local politics and creates a breeding ground for further research on women's representation in local politics in Slovak conditions.

Data and Methods

In Slovakia, municipal elections have been held every four years since 1990 (since the change of the ideological regime in 1989) when governments became autonomous again. In 1990 Slovakia was a part of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic, which was divided in 1992, and the autonomous Slovak Republic has existed since January 1, 1993.

Data on mayors, especially mayors' gender, are collected from semi-structured sources providing results of municipal elections. Here the name of the municipal election winner was the main indicator of the mayor's gender. Thus, the woman mayor variable is a binary variable taking values 1 if the mayor is a woman, otherwise 0. Collected data cover the past 20 years of local politics containing five periods of municipal elections - 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, and 2018 (Statistical Office of the SR 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, and 2018) and only the results of elections in regular term are considered (results of complementary elections are not included). The sample includes 2,924 cross-sectional units (all municipalities), while data on Bratislava city and Košice city are excluded from the research, even if they have their own elected political incumbents and budgets. These cities are the two biggest cities in Slovakia. They have different institutional arrangements and are composed of city municipalities (Bratislava city has 17 city municipalities and Košice city has 22) belonging to different districts (Bratislava city has 5 districts and Košice city has 4 districts). The area of Bratislava city and Košice city spatially overlaps several districts, and that might lead to certain impossibilities in displaying the results from the spatial perspective.

In this paper, the district approach is followed due to the quite high number of municipalities in Slovakia (2,926 reported by the Ministry of Finance of the SR), which might make the spatial insight of the results unclear. The results are projected in the form of maps.

The maps displaying the results in question are created employing the software R Studio version 2022.02.1 and a map of Slovak districts corresponding to the LAU 1 level (Geoportal, 2022).

In Slovakia, there are 79 districts. Their loading from the point of view of a number of municipalities is un-proportional (see Table 1). For this

reason, the final results are expressed as the share of municipalities with women mayors in the district on total electable mayors (corresponds to a total of municipalities) in the district.

Table 1. Representation of municipalities in districts

Municipalities in 1 district	Min.	Max.	Mean	St.Dev.
	1	114	36.65	24.96

Source: own processing

Results and Discussion

Reported increase in women's representation in Slovak local government at the position of the mayor (see, e.g. Maškarinec & Klimovský, 2017; Maškarinec, Klimovský & Danišová, 2018; Maškarinec Klimovský & Bláha, 2020) is confirmed in this research, too (see Table 2), when women mayors' representation in 79 districts increases from 19% of women mayors on all electable mayors in a district to 25%. The number of women mayors increased from 565 in 2002 to 727 in 2018 (an increase of 22%).

Women's representation in Slovak local politics evolved similarly to other European countries. Seggaard, Kjaer and Saglie (2022) observe the increase of female mayors since the 1990s from 12.5% to 35.4% in Norway and from 9.5% to 14.3% in Denmark. In Belgium, the share of female mayors increased from 4% to 15% (Devroe, Erzeel & Meier, 2020) when women's underrepresentation in local politics was mitigated through the use of legally binding gender quotas. Köppl-Turyňa and Kantorowicz (2020) observe an increasing trend in Polish female local councilors after the adoption of gender quotas, too.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the numeric representation of women mayors on all electable mayors: the district perspective

Election year	Min.	Max.	Mean	St.Dev.
2002	0.00	0.69	0.19	0.11
2006	0.00	0.50	0.21	0.11
2010	0.00	1.00*	0.23	0.14
2014	0.00	0.56	0.22	0.11
2018	0.00	1.00*	0.25	0.15

*Note: * refers to the district of Bratislava I, where only one cross-sectional unit is included (Bratislava – Staré Mesto,) and if a woman mayor is elected, it represents 100% of the sample.*

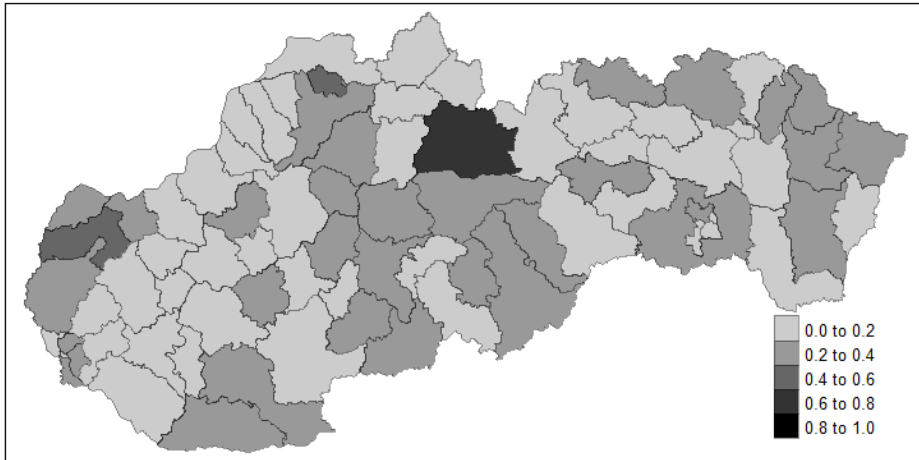
Source: own processing

Spatial insight into the women mayors' representation in five election periods is projected in Figures 1- 5. The results again confirm the increasing trend of women's representation in local governments. Besides, they unveil that the increase of the portion of women mayors is observed firstly (when comparing 2002 and 2006) in the middle of Slovakia in the southern districts of Banská Bystrica region and certain districts of Prešov region on edge north-east part of Slovakia. According to data available at the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2022), these areas are characterized by several common factors:

- High fragmentation of the residential structure - there is a large portion of small municipalities with up to 1,999 inhabitants.
- Low GDP per capita.
- And higher ethnolinguistic fragmentation. Hungarian minority exists in the south of Slovakia, emulating the border with Hungary. It is present with various intensities almost in all districts along the southern border of Slovakia. Ruthenian minority lives uniquely in the northeast part of Slovakia along the border with Ukraine. In Slovakia, the Roma minority is present, too, and lives predominantly in the Eastern part of Slovakia.

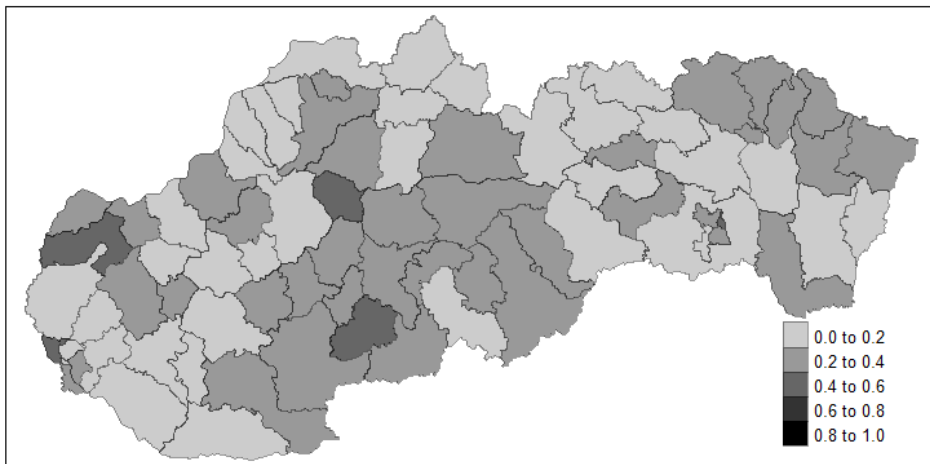
For more details, see Appendix; note that all data in Appendix are reported at the NUTS3 level, because certain data, e.g. GDP per capita, are reported only at the NUTS 3 and higher NUTS levels.

Figure 1. Women mayors in 2002



Source: own processing

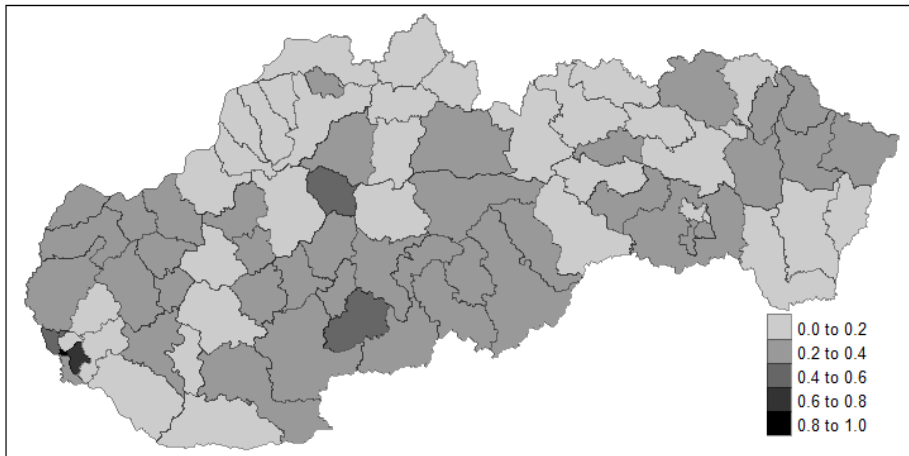
Figure 2. Women mayors in 2006



Source: own processing

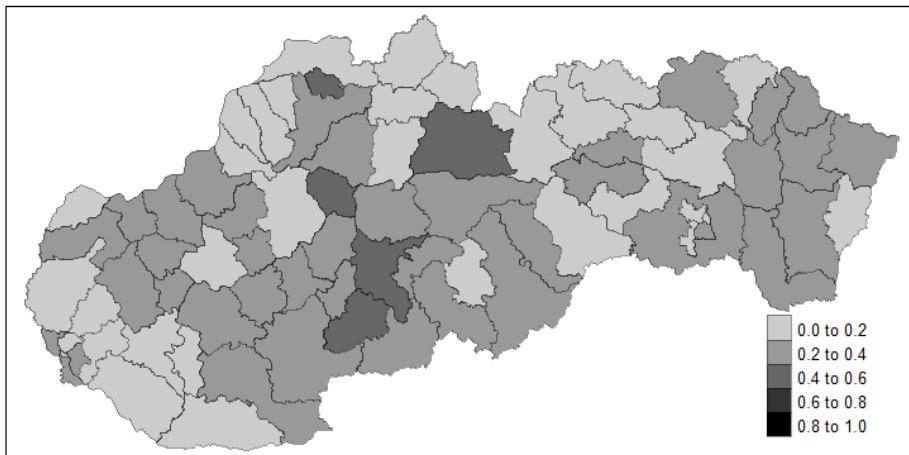
In the subsequent election periods, the women mayors' representation increased in other neighboring districts alongside the southern border of Slovakia and the western part of Slovakia.

Figure 3. Women mayors in 2010



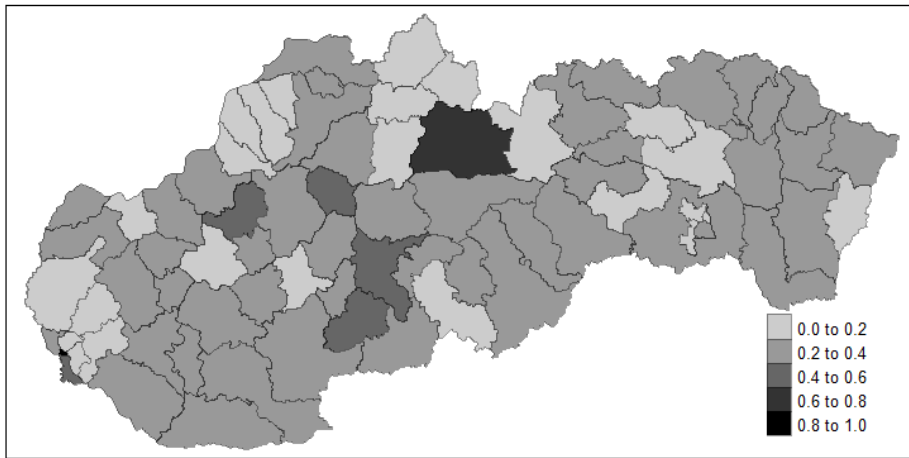
Source: own processing

Figure 4. Women mayors in 2014



Source: own processing

In 2018 the increase of women mayors is visible in a prevalent part of districts in Slovakia.

Figure 5. Women mayors in 2018

Source: own processing

The results reflecting the fragmented residential structure unveil the relationship between women mayors and municipalities small in size (measured as the number of inhabitants). These findings are in line with the findings of Bitušíková (2005) or Crowder-Meyer, Gadarian and Trounstone (2015) - when men are inclined to stand as a candidate and win in larger cities that are attractive to them in terms of power and financial reward. Contrary, Seggaard, Kjaer and Saglie (2022), Seggaard and Saglie (2021), and Maškarinec and Klimovský (2017) mention that women mayoral candidates have higher chances of winning in larger municipalities because of liberal preferences (Maškarinec & Klimovský, 2017), and because the larger size of the municipality is the indicator of more educational opportunities, higher degree of urbanization and better access to the labor market (Seggaard, Kjaer & Saglie, 2022; or Seggaard & Saglie, 2021).

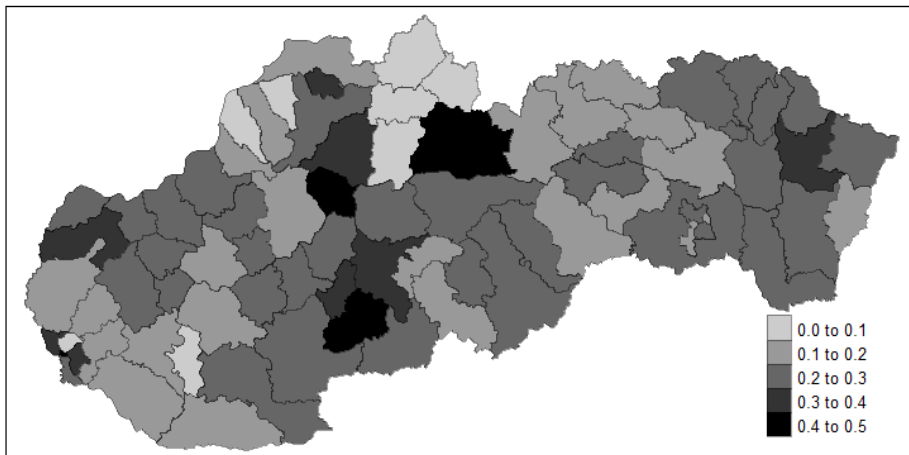
In areas with low GDP per capita, the higher portion of women mayors might be the result of persistent discontent of citizens with previous local economic conditions. It might mirror the ambition to bring something new to local politics on both sides of the voting procedure – the change of voting attitudes and the encouragement of women candidates to run for elections. Women candidates are characterized by their awareness of risk, which brings higher financial stability to local financial management (Balaguer-Coll & Ivanova-Toneva, 2021; Cuadrado-Ballesteros, Guillamón & Ríos, 2021). According to Brollo and Troiano (2016) or Baskaran et al. (2018),

women mayors are less prone to corruption, and as found by Herrero-Gutiérrez, Simelio and Carrascosa Puertas (2021), they incline to higher transparency of information. Additionally, evidence on the relationship between women politicians and economic performance points to higher economic growth with higher women's representation in politics (Baskaran et al., 2018).

Ethnic and language fragmentation points to higher heterogeneity in preferences that gives more opportunities for various mayor candidates and allows the political parties with local/regional impact to raise their own candidates (Sztwiertnia & Hellová, 2012). The aspect of preferences is mentioned in Maškarinec and Klimovský (2017). Besides, Maguire (2018) discusses the existent evidence that women candidates from minorities are more successful than men candidates.

It is observable that women's mayoral representation has increased in many districts of Slovakia since 2002. However, there are still several districts with a low share of women mayors. Those are districts where the average representation of women mayors is below 10% (see Figure 6, which displays the average representation of women mayors in the district in Slovakia in the period 2002-2018) even though the number of women mayors increased by 22% (all Slovakia) in the monitored period.

Figure 6. Women mayors - average 2002-2018



Source: own processing

Conclusion

Women's representation in politics is still regarded as a women underrepresentation, even if the number of women representatives increases in many countries of the world, as well as in Slovakia.

The spatial insight to the numeric women mayoral representation in local governments in Slovakia in the recent five election periods since 2002 is given in this paper. Areas with the most evident representation of women mayors are identified, and the between election period comparison is provided. Results confirm the increasing trend of women's representation in local governments. Besides, they unveil that the increase of the portion of women mayors is observed firstly in the south-center part and edge north-eastern part of Slovakia. These areas are characterized by high fragmentation of residential structure, low GDP per capita, and higher ethnolinguistic fragmentation. After that, the increase in women's representation in local governments subsequently continued in the southeastern and southwestern parts of Slovakia.

The limitation of the research is that it does not focus on barriers to the entry of women into politics, while in the case of 2,924 (of a total of 2,926) municipalities, it is very difficult to collect data on other candidates because this data is not available retrospectively for all municipalities (only for district capitals, which was the approach of Maškarinec & Klimovský, 2017; Maškarinec, Klimovský & Danišová, 2018; Maškarinec, Klimovský & Bláha, 2020). Another question is if the observed increasing trend of women's representation persists after the next local election in October 2022.

It is observable that the research on gender perspectives progresses (Slavinski et al., 2020). It is also noticeable that an important part of researchers in gender perspective of women's representation in governments is made by women researchers. However, the research on gender perspectives suggests, that women in leading positions might contribute to the overall financial stability of headed public or private subjects through their awareness of risk (Balaguer-Coll & Ivanova-Toneva, 2021; Cuadrado-Ballesteros, Guillamón & Ríos, 2021; Stašević & **Stavanović, 2019**) or by **their flexibility in adaptation to changes and new circumstances** (Funk, 2020; Pařová, Nyulasziová & Vejačka, 2020). However, further research in Slovak conditions might focus on women's attitudes when practicing local

financial management and thus contribute to filling the gap by gaining knowledge in this field of research.

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Appendix

Regions - NUTS3 level – residential structure, GDP per capita, and ethnolinguistic fragmentation

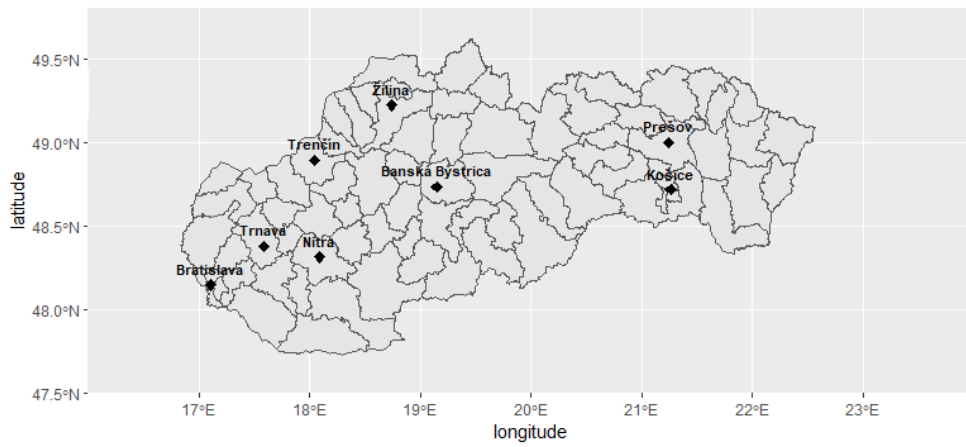
Regions NUTS 3	2018	2014	2010	2006	2002										
Fragmentation of the residential structure: the share of small municipalities with up to 1,999 inhabitants															
Bratislava	0.51	0.58	0.60	0.68	0.69										
Trnava	0.75	0.76	0.77	0.78	0.80										
Trenčín	0.83	0.83	0.83	0.83	0.84										
Nitra	0.83	0.84	0.83	0.83	0.84										
Žilina	0.79	0.79	0.79	0.79	0.79										
Ban.Bystrica	0.91	0.91	0.91	0.91	0.91										
Prešov	0.90	0.90	0.91	0.91	0.92										
Košice	0.89	0.90	0.90	0.90	0.91										
GDP per capita NUTS 3 in Eur															
Bratislava	39,021	34,496	31,223	24,751	16,267										
Trnava	17,727	15,744	13,940	12,798	6,873										
Trenčín	13,639	12,012	10,993	9,788	6,384										
Nitra	13,388	11,942	10,109	8,854	5,738										
Žilina	14,136	12,268	11,186	8,453	5,624										
Ban.Bystrica	12,021	9,817	9,233	7,584	5,847										
Prešov	10,435	8,343	7,148	5,628	4,212										
Košice	13,307	11,082	10,007	8,800	6,206										
Ethnolinguistic fragmentation: Share of minority population on total population															
	HU	RU	RO	HU	RU	RO	HU	RU	RO	HU	RU	RO	HU	RU	RO
Bratislava	0.04	0.00	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.00	0.05	0.00	0.00
Trnava	0.21	0.00	0.01	0.21	0.00	0.01	0.23	0.00	0.01	0.24	0.00	0.01	0.24	0.00	0.01
Trenčín	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Nitra	0.24	0.00	0.01	0.24	0.00	0.01	0.27	0.00	0.01	0.27	0.00	0.01	0.27	0.00	0.01
Žilina	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Ban.Bystrica	0.11	0.00	0.02	0.10	0.00	0.02	0.12	0.00	0.02	0.12	0.00	0.02	0.12	0.00	0.02
Prešov	0.00	0.03	0.05	0.00	0.03	0.05	0.00	0.03	0.05	0.00	0.03	0.04	0.00	0.03	0.04
Košice	0.09	0.00	0.05	0.09	0.00	0.05	0.11	0.00	0.05	0.11	0.00	0.05	0.11	0.00	0.04

Note: HU- Hungarian minority, RU – Ruthenian minority, RO – Roma minority

Location of regions: Bratislava: south-west, Trnava: west, Trenčín: west, Nitra: south-west, Žilina: north-center, Banská Bystrica: south-center, Prešov: north-east, Košice: south-east.

Source: own processing based on SO SR (2022)

Location of regional cities



Source: map - own processing

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