

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROSPECTS IN TURKEY, SLOVAKIA, AND HUNGARY

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS





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ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AND LINGUISTIC OPPORTUNITY EQUALITY IN EDUCATION: REGIONAL COMPARISONS IN TÜRKİYE

This study examines the impact of economic inequalities on linguistic opportunity equality in education within the context of regional disparities in Türkiye. The role of language in education extends far beyond its communicative functions; it constitutes a fundamental component for the development of cognitive processes, literacy, academic achievement, and social mobility. The educational literature consistently highlights that students' academic performance is closely related to linguistic indicators such as mother-tongue proficiency, vocabulary range, literacy level, and critical language skills (Cummins, 2000). Therefore, linguistic capital stands out as one of the most critical components shaping educational opportunity.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital demonstrates that the linguistic resources individuals possess, depending on their social position, can produce advantages or disadvantages within educational processes (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1991). In Türkiye, socioeconomic inequalities directly influence the intergenerational transmission of linguistic capital; a strong correlation exists among income level, school infrastructure, teacher quality, and access to digital resources (İlgar, 2023). Students in economically advantaged regions are exposed to richer linguistic environments from early ages, whereas those in disadvantaged regions encounter limited and lower-quality linguistic input.

Data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) reveal substantial regional income disparities and show that these differences directly shape educational infrastructure (TÜİK, 2024). While western regions benefit from higher income levels, better-equipped school buildings, and more qualified teachers, disadvantaged regions face limitations in physical conditions, material access, and teacher stability (İlgar, 2023). According to findings by Suna and Özer (2021), Türkiye is among the countries where socioeconomic status has the strongest impact on student achievement. Consequently, pronounced disparities emerge in academic Turkish proficiency, text processing, reading comprehension, and vocabulary development among children in low-income regions.

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Students living in linguistically diverse environments often face difficulties in adapting to the language of instruction. Sudden exposure to the instructional language in early schooling, particularly in disadvantaged regions, creates barriers in mastering abstract concepts, following academic discourse, and participating in classroom interaction. These challenges hinder students' academic potential and, when combined with economic disadvantages, give rise to layered and persistent inequalities (Uğur, 2023).

The digital divide has also become a new variable affecting linguistic opportunity equality. In regions with limited access to the internet and digital devices, students have reduced exposure to online literacy practices, digital texts, and foreign language input. The OECD PISA 2022 results indicate that disparities in digital accessibility directly influence students' literacy performance (OECD, 2023). Limited access to digital content restricts students' interaction with contemporary Turkish usage, online texts, and multimodal learning environments.

Early childhood education is another crucial determinant of linguistic development. Research shows that rich linguistic stimuli provided during the preschool period significantly shape reading comprehension skills, cognitive flexibility, and academic achievement in later years (Ataç, 2017). Regional disparities in access to early childhood education lead to linguistically unequal starting points in primary school. While participation in early childhood education is higher in regions with strong socioeconomic indicators, limited access in low-income regions creates early and lasting linguistic gaps.

This study reveals the presence of a multidimensional "linguistic inequality cycle" formed by the intersection of economic level, cultural capital, digital access, and linguistic diversity. This cycle reproduces itself through the mechanism of socioeconomic status → linguistic development → academic achievement → socioeconomic status in the next generation (Suna & Özer, 2021). Therefore, ensuring linguistic opportunity equality in education is not only a requirement for the education system but also a key component of social justice and regional development.

Ultimately, achieving genuine educational equality in Türkiye requires policies that are sensitive to cultural and linguistic diversity in addition to economic development. Strengthening early childhood language support programs, improving teacher retention in disadvantaged regions, developing programs that facilitate the transition to academic Turkish, reducing the digital divide, and restructuring regional education investments are recommended. Enhancing linguistic opportunity equality holds strategic importance for both academic success and social mobility.

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Keywords: Economic inequality, linguistic opportunity equality, linguistic capital, regional disparities, education policy, socioeconomic status, academic Turkish, digital divide.

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THE ROLE OF PUBLIC FINANCE IN TÜRKİYE'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Public finance stands out as a key policy area in Turkey's economic and social transformation, both in guiding long-term development and maintaining macroeconomic stability. The fiscal discipline, structural reforms, and debt management implemented after the 2001 crisis made public finance a key component of growth. During this period, the structure of public expenditures, R&D support, human capital investments, and the modernization of tax policy shaped the framework for economic and social development.

However, studies demonstrating that public spending supports growth in the short term indicate that this long-term impact depends on the nature of spending and fiscal sustainability. The fiscal capacity of local governments, which varies regionally, varies significantly, reinforcing the decisive role of public finance in regional development. While the high share of indirect taxes, which constitute a high share of tax revenues, has been the subject of criticism, the increase in tax collection capacity, digital tax practices, progress in combating informality, and R&D incentives support the sustainability of public revenues. The contribution of public finance to social transformation is particularly evident through the expansion of expenditures in education, healthcare, and social protection. Investments in education and strengthening digital infrastructure support human capital, while the health transformation program has increased social welfare through inclusive service delivery. Digital public finance and e-government applications have strengthened institutional capacity by ensuring transparency, efficiency, and accountability in financial management.

In line with Türkiye's 2053 net-zero target, green budgeting, renewable energy incentives, carbon regulations, and the financing of sustainable investments represent a new phase in the transformation of public finance. The fiscal dimension of the green transformation necessitates that public finance develop a perspective aligned with environmental sustainability goals.

However, the sustainability of economic and social transformation faces several structural challenges. High inflation, regional inequalities, and migration trends are key risks limiting the impact of public policies. The increasing trend of international migration, particularly among the

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young population, risks weakening long-term growth potential, innovation capacity, and the human capital necessary for the digital-green transformation.

This study will highlight the strategic role of public finance in Türkiye's economic and social transformation process, focusing on the impacts of tax policy modernization, digitalization, regional development, and green transformation. Accordingly, future public finance requires a holistic strategy that prioritizes fairer and more direct taxation, expands AI-enabled digital audit mechanisms, develops performance-based regional incentive models, accelerates green budgeting processes, and focuses on inclusive policies to retain a young population. Such an approach will contribute to Türkiye's long-term economic and social transformation being both sustainable and inclusive.

Keywords: Public Finance; Economic Transformation; Tax Policy

SUSTAINABLE KNOWLEDGE – SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS? (COMPETITIVENESS FACTORS OF SMES IN TODAY'S CHANGING ECONOMY)

In today's rapidly changing, complex, and increasingly unpredictable global economic environment, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are confronted with significant adaptation challenges. Market volatility, accelerating technological development, digital transformation, and rising social and environmental expectations place continuous pressure on organizations to rethink their strategies, structures, and management practices. Within this context, competitiveness can no longer be interpreted solely in terms of short-term financial performance. Instead, long-term viability increasingly depends on the ability of firms to learn continuously, manage and utilize knowledge effectively, and embed sustainability principles into their organizational culture and leadership practices.

The concept of sustainability has gained growing importance in business and management research over the past decades. While early interpretations primarily focused on environmental protection, contemporary approaches emphasize the integrated nature of sustainability, built upon economic, social, and environmental pillars. This multidimensional perspective highlights that sustainable development requires organizations to balance efficiency, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship in a coherent and strategic manner. For SMEs, this challenge is particularly pronounced. Although these enterprises often operate with limited financial and human resources, they typically possess a high degree of flexibility, close stakeholder relationships, and specialized tacit knowledge, which can serve as a foundation for sustainable competitive advantage if managed strategically.

Against this background, the present study examines the role of sustainable knowledge management and sustainable leadership in enhancing the long-term competitiveness and organizational resilience of Slovak SMEs. The central assumption of the research is that knowledge,

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when treated as a strategic and sustainable resource, and leadership, when guided by long-term, value-based principles, mutually reinforce each other and jointly contribute to firms' adaptive capacity, innovation potential, and market success. Rather than viewing sustainability as a separate or optional initiative, the study conceptualizes it as an integral component of organizational learning, decision-making, and strategic orientation.

Methodologically, the research adopts a qualitative approach in order to capture the complexity and context-specific nature of sustainability-related practices within SMEs. Data were collected through structured in-depth interviews conducted with 15 owners and senior managers of Slovak SMEs that have been operating for at least five years and are actively present in their respective market segments. This selection criterion ensured that respondents possessed sufficient managerial experience and strategic insight to reflect on sustainability-related challenges and practices. The interviews, conducted between May and October 2025 via online platforms, lasted between 55 and 70 minutes on average and were fully recorded and transcribed with the participants' consent. The collected qualitative data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. Through an open coding process, recurring patterns, key concepts, and relationships were identified and subsequently grouped into higher-level thematic categories such as sustainable knowledge practices, leadership commitment, organizational culture, and competitive outcomes.

The findings indicate that sustainability, in some form, is present in all examined enterprises; however, its depth of integration and strategic coherence vary considerably across organizations. Many SMEs still approach sustainability in an ad hoc or fragmented manner, often driven by external requirements or short-term considerations. Nevertheless, the interviews reveal a growing awareness among managers that sustainability extends beyond environmental compliance and is closely linked to knowledge development, innovation, and long-term business success. One of the key results of the study is the central role of leadership commitment in embedding sustainability into organizational practices. Respondents consistently emphasized that sustainability initiatives are most effective when they are supported by the personal values, example-setting behavior, and long-term vision of top management. Leaders who actively promote open communication, employee participation, and ethical decision-making tend to foster organizational cultures that support learning, experimentation, and knowledge sharing. In smaller enterprises, where decision-making processes are often informal, leadership attitudes and behaviors have an especially direct and visible impact on organizational practices. The analysis also highlights that sustainable knowledge management in SMEs goes beyond formal training programs. It includes continuous employee development, informal knowledge sharing, mentoring, and active engagement with external professional networks and partners. Such practices contribute to the development of learning organizations capable of responding flexibly to market changes. Several respondents

reported that integrating sustainability-related knowledge into daily operations enabled them to identify new business opportunities, such as participation in green supply chains, access to sustainability-oriented tenders, or the development of environmentally and socially responsible products and services. Importantly, the findings suggest that sustainability and competitiveness are not contradictory objectives but mutually reinforcing dimensions. SMEs that strategically integrate sustainability principles into their knowledge management and leadership practices tend to exhibit higher levels of adaptability, innovation capability, and stakeholder trust. Ethical and transparent operations were frequently mentioned as factors that strengthen customer relationships, enhance corporate reputation, and contribute to long-term market stability.

Overall, the study demonstrates that the integration of sustainable knowledge management and sustainable leadership represents a multidimensional and dynamic process. Sustainable knowledge enhances organizational learning, resilience, and proactive problem-solving, while sustainable leadership provides the normative and strategic framework necessary to align these processes with long-term economic, social, and environmental goals. Together, these dimensions enable SMEs not only to adapt to external challenges but also to actively shape their business environment by creating shared value for stakeholders.

The research contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical insights into the interconnected roles of knowledge and leadership in the sustainability–competitiveness nexus within the SME context, particularly in Slovakia. From a practical perspective, the fostering value-based leadership, structured knowledge development, and participatory organizational cultures. While the qualitative nature of the study limits generalizability, the findings offer guidance for SME managers seeking to strengthen their competitive position by results highlight promising directions for future research, including quantitative validation and comparative analyses across countries and sectors.

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CHALLENGES AND ACCEPTANCE OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN THE CORPORATE ENVIRONMENT

The modern corporate environment in both Hungary and Slovakia is continuously changing, shaped by globalization, digitalization, technological advancement, and the rapid transformation of economic and regulatory conditions. These factors impose increasing adaptation pressures on organizations, which can maintain their competitiveness only through conscious, structured, and flexible operations. In this dynamic environment, project management plays a crucial role by providing an integrated management approach that supports the achievement of strategic objectives and enhances organizational effectiveness.

Project management does not merely represent a technical toolkit but requires a complex set of competencies, including communication, problem-solving, decision-making, and leadership skills. In practice, organizations face numerous challenges, such as the unclear definition of project goals and requirements, continuous changes in project scope, inadequate identification and management of risks, and resistance to organizational change. A particularly critical factor is the lack of top management support, which often hinders the successful implementation of projects in both Hungary and Slovakia. At the same time, communication barriers - such as deficiencies in information flow, hierarchical structures, or cultural differences - emerge as significant risk factors.

Interpreting project management as a strategic tool enables organizations not only to respond to changes but also to shape them proactively. Through projects, organizational learning, innovation, and process improvement can be realized, which in the long term contribute to increased organizational agility and the development of sustainable competitive advantage. The key to success lies in the deliberate development of soft skills - especially effective communication, collaboration, leadership competencies, and conflict management - along with the integration of modern technological solutions and digital tools into project processes. Furthermore, it is essential that the project management mindset be embedded into organizational culture and strategic thinking.

The analysis of project failures reveals that their causes are often not technical but rather human and organizational in nature. These include inadequate risk management, failure to meet deadlines,

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insufficient resource planning, unclear goals and expectations, and a lack of motivation and commitment within the project team. Consequently, the introduction and development of project management entail significant organizational change, affecting structure, processes, organizational culture, strategy, and applied technologies.

Organizational changes frequently provoke resistance among stakeholders, which can be attributed to both individual and situational factors. The sources of resistance may include uncertainty, stress, lack of information, unclear roles and responsibilities, inadequate communication, and inconsistent support from top management. To manage resistance effectively, management must ensure clear and consistent communication, stakeholder involvement, empathetic leadership behavior, and targeted training programs. Acceptance is strongly influenced by employees' attitudes, perceived organizational support (POS), the quality of leader-member exchange (LMX), and the presence of fair distributive and procedural practices.

Top Management Support is one of the most decisive factors for project management success and can be identified across five main dimensions: the provision of resources, the establishment of appropriate structural and organizational arrangements, consistent and transparent communication, the availability of expertise and knowledge, and the delegation of authority and decision-making power. The effectiveness of project communication is further influenced by the work environment, the emotional state of stakeholders, cultural and language differences, and challenges arising from geographical distance and time zone differences, which become particularly salient in international projects.

The foundation of successful project management consists of well-defined projects, a clear system of goals and requirements, high-quality teamwork, regular status reporting, and appropriate documentation. These elements are complemented by leadership role modeling, continuous support, and the alignment of project objectives with organizational culture and strategy.

Overall, it can be concluded that the successful application of project management depends not only on the appropriate selection of methodological tools but also on the complex system formed by organizational culture, communication quality, leadership commitment, and resistance management. The academic literature (Kotter; Akhavan Tabassi; Patil; Mentis; Cerpa-Verner; Aarseth-Andersen-Rolstadas; Damawan-Azizah; Schwartz; Ahmad-Mohamed; Naybour; Rehman) provides a solid theoretical foundation; however, practical implementation, performance measurement, and the consideration of cultural and geographical contexts remain key areas for further research and development in both Hungary and Slovakia.

Keywords: project management, projects in the corporate environment, project challenges

Áron Kovács¹

SPATIAL INTERPRETATION OF THE CENTRE–PERIPHERY RELATIONSHIP IN BALKAN AND CENTRAL EUROPEAN ROAD TRANSPORT NETWORKS

This study explores the spatial patterns of road accessibility across selected Central European and Balkan states, with particular emphasis on the regional dimensions of the centre–periphery relationship. Transport infrastructure—frequently described as the “circulatory system” of the economy—plays a crucial role in shaping competitiveness, economic connectivity, social cohesion, and the persistence or mitigation of territorial inequalities. Accordingly, the configuration and efficiency of road transport systems strongly affect the spatial integration of national territories.

The analysis covers Hungary and eleven Balkan countries, focusing on the internal road accessibility of national capitals. The empirical assessment relies on more than 12,000 route-planning observations obtained from Google Maps, allowing for a detailed and comparable evaluation of accessibility patterns. Beyond conventional accessibility measures, Hansen-type gravitational potential models are employed to assess the capacity of capital cities to integrate national space and to reveal spatial concentrations as well as peripheral deficiencies.

The findings demonstrate that states with centrally positioned capitals—such as Hungary and Serbia—tend to exhibit more cohesive and balanced transport structures, which support nationwide territorial integration. By contrast, countries with capitals located at the margins, including Romania and Bulgaria, show marked internal disparities, largely attributable to physical constraints and infrastructural shortcomings. In smaller states, such as Slovenia and Kosovo, limited territorial extent and compact networks enable relatively rapid access to the capital from most parts of the country.

Favourable natural and socio-economic conditions are essential for the development of an effective transport subsystem. In this context, Budapest emerges as a leading example, displaying the strongest accessibility performance among the analysed capitals, with the exception of those

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situated in very small countries. Conversely, irregular territorial configurations and peripheral capital locations are associated with significantly weaker accessibility outcomes compared with centrally located capitals and small-state contexts. Physical barriers may stem from mountainous landscapes—such as the Dinaric Alps or the Carpathian arc—as well as from major rivers or large lakes, including the Danube, Lake Ohrid, and Lake Prespa. Socio-economic disadvantages arise where capital regions are characterised by low levels of economic activity, limited foreign investment, and insufficient infrastructure provision. The analysis indicates that the absence of favourable conditions diminishes the accessibility of the capital—typically the most advanced node within the national spatial structure—and constrains its capacity to attract population and economic functions.

Within the examined region, Budapest exhibits exceptionally strong accessibility indicators: approximately 70% of Hungary's population can reach the capital within two hours by road. This pronounced centrality reinforces Hungary's position as a major transport and logistics hub in Central Europe. Overall, the results confirm that advanced road transport systems not only stimulate economic development but also alleviate peripheral disadvantages, thereby enhancing regional cohesion across Central and South-Eastern Europe.

Keywords: Budapest, Hungary, motorway network, Balkans, accessibility

Ildikó Laki¹

SOCIAL CHANGES IN HUNGARY TODAY

In my study, I aim to briefly present the social changes taking place in Hungary. The transition to a knowledge-based economy, the promotion of innovation, addressing demographic challenges and reducing regional inequalities are key to Hungary's future. Improving the quality of education, making the family support system more effective and promoting sustainable development are essential for long-term prosperity.

In recent decades, we have witnessed significant social and economic changes in Hungary. These include population decline, emigration, rising mortality rates and the socialisation of various economic decisions. Society and the economy are inextricably linked: when one changes, the other responds. In recent decades, both areas have undergone rapid transformation in Hungary. These include new technologies, problems generated by neighbouring countries and the wider world, changes in lifestyle, and new developments and mechanisms in the economy. Hungary, like other European countries, is undergoing continuous change—whether political, economic, or social. The crises of recent years—the coronavirus pandemic, the Russian-Ukrainian war, inflation, and the energy crisis—have had profound social and economic impacts on Hungary as well. „These shocks did not just affect economic structures but also significantly influenced social attitudes, lifestyles, and coping mechanisms. Different social strata were able to treat crises as opportunities, actively responding to changes: increasing their savings propensity, enhancing financial awareness, and adapting flexibly.” (Századvég, 2025)

Unfavourable demographic trends continue to dominate Hungarian social processes. According to data from the Central Statistical Office, the population declined again in 2024: there were 88,800 births and 133,900 deaths, resulting in a natural decline of 45,000 people (KSH, 2025). Although the positive international migration balance slowed this process somewhat, it was not enough to reverse the trend.

Life expectancy at birth improved slightly: from 75.5 years in 2023 to 75.8 years in 2024 (Eurostat, 2025), but it still lags far behind the EU average for 2024 (81.5 years). The improvement may be due to better access to healthcare and stabilisation in the post-COVID period, but the pace of change remains slow.

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Social inequalities in Hungary are persistent. The dominance of the capital has existed for decades, but in recent years the difference has become even more striking: Budapest and a few other large cities are the centres of economic and cultural power, while most smaller towns struggle with demographic and employment disadvantages.

The causal relationships behind the decline in Hungary's population, the specific characteristics of social inequalities, with particular regard to the differences between rural and urban areas, and the social processes that reveal the dissonance between mobility and integration will be discussed.

Overall, Hungarian society is characterised by significant inequalities. The gap between the capital and the countryside is constantly growing: most economic activity is concentrated in the capital, while small settlements are becoming depopulated and their services are shrinking.

The population is ageing, which is putting pressure on the health and pension systems. Poverty and social exclusion remain significant problems, especially in Roma communities and in the eastern and northern regions of Hungary. Equal opportunities for disadvantaged children are limited, and ageing and social poverty are becoming increasingly prevalent.

Keywords: social change, regional differences, demographic change, equality

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