

## IDENTITY AND PERCEPTION OF CAPITAL CITIES BY THE CITY ELITES. THE CASE OF THE VISEGRAD COUNTRIES

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### **Identity and perception of capital cities by the city elites. The case of the Visegrad countries**

Capital cities are unique for being not only the centres of power but also the symbolic representatives of the nation and epicentres of national identity. The changes following the year 1989 brought unprecedented development of all four capital cities in the Visegrad group. They have not only altered the cities' appearance and mode of governance but they also resulted in greater diversity within the population structure, in people's attitudes as well as in their relationship to their capital city. Although the transformations that these cities underwent share many similarities, each city is unique and possesses its distinctive *genius loci*. The following study is based on qualitative research among the city elite representatives and references also number of findings from previous ISSP quantitative studies. The aim of the study is to compare four Visegrad group capitals in terms of the relation to the capital and reflection of its identity and image as a national and cultural centre of the country and as an actor shaping national identity. Furthermore, the paper draws attention to the expected differences between the capital city population and the rest of the country in terms of tolerance, openness and values. The data for the study was obtained in the focus group research conducted with the city elite representatives in each capital.

**Key words:** identity, image, uniqueness, nationalism, tolerance, values, V4 capitals

### INTRODUCTION

Cities are complex social organisms that consist of multiple layers: economic, cultural, or political, as well as physical and spatial ones. Capital cities represent special cities where yet another layer proves to be important. It relates to the fact that, by definition, capitals are the centers and seats of political power and the seat of its representatives. At the same time, they are focal points of national cleavages, conflicts and cohesion (Therborn 2008). Capital cities embody the fluid nature of political history, play a symbolic role for the country and are focal points of national identity.

However, the position of capitals has not always been clearly defined nor has their development been always so straightforward. Capital cities moved along numerous routes towards national modernity and have had various positions in the world of nation-states and global trends. Their distinctiveness may illustrate the fact that even if they were completely destroyed<sup>1</sup> there was a clear effort to not only restore the city itself but its status as well.

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<sup>1</sup> The case of Warsaw or Berlin after WW II.

Current mainstream sociology as well as related scientific disciplines largely preoccupied the issue of capital cities around the buzzword of “global cities” (Therborn 2006). This has to do with the claim that capital cities have been the cities most influenced by globalisation (Beaverstock et al. 2015). Globalization creates an area with identical mechanisms and processes which in turn have a unifying character, allowing them to emerge anywhere in the world. Such understanding still raises questions and doubts that globalization process might not always be of a unifying nature and might result in strengthening of spacial anchoring affecting regional and local levels. Notably in the Central European area after decades of living in a top-down governed society, the discovery of a place of one's own – a town, a village or a city – was for many people even “a highly emotional event, a turning point in their perceptions of the social space” (Surazska 1996, p. 134). Globalization processes bring the issue of identity and place even more to the forefront. Values and identities belong among frequently discussed and researched topics recently. Particularly the ideas of bounded territories, regions, places and, ostensibly, essentialist identities has arisen. In the following study, we tried to examine the issues of values and identity from the perspective of territorial, respectively municipal aspects. Specifically, we focused on the space of capital cities, which, as Meisel notes, ‘can serve as indicators of countries’ dominant values’ (Meisel 1993, p. 4). An important part of these processes is building emotional relationships with a place that gives people a sense of stability and good adjustment. No matter how mobile a person may be, some form of attachment to places is always present in our life. (Lewicka 2008, p. 211) This fact reinforces the sense to examine how residents perceive their capital.

## IDENTITY AND PLACE IDENTITY: CONTEXTS AND LIMITS

The issue of identity is one of the principal research subjects in social sciences and human geography. Various levels or types of identity (civic, gender, social, occupational, national, etc.) attract increasing attention in many disciplines and mirror the relevance of several collective forms of human existence that an individual is drawn into via various identification mechanisms. Thus, every person has multiplied identities. Some identities are ascribed (gender, age, ...) and unchangeable and some identities are achieved (place of living, family identity, ...) and it is possible to change them (Vlachová 2015).

Place and identity and their mutual interconnection has become more widely known after the 1970's with the rise of humanistic concepts of place. Place identity refers to people's bonds with places. There are many scholars who have contributed to the explanation and enrichment of the meaning and theory of place identity. From this earlier period we can mention an iconic work of K. Lynch “Image of the City” from 1960, in which he noticed what the form of a certain city means for its inhabitants. Lynch introduced terms “image” and “imageability”. An image implies its distinction from other things in the meaning of individuality or oneness and image. Imageability is a quality in a physical object which with a high probability evokes a strong image in any given observer. Lynch defined identity “not in the sense of equality with something else, but with the meaning of individuality or oneness” (Lynch 1990, p. 8).

One of the initial concepts of place identity comes from Proshansky, who defined place identity as “those dimensions of self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of

conscious and unconscious ideas, feelings, values, goals, preferences, skills, and behavioural tendencies relevant to this environment” (Proshansky 1978, p. 155). The Proshansky concept of place identity has been widely referred to. Another commonly accepted, albeit often criticized, concept of place and sense of place was brought around by Relph who chose phenomenological approach and described place as fundamental aspects of human existence in the world (Relph 1976). Relph focused people’s identity with a place as “persistent sameness and unity which allows that to be differentiated from others” (Relph 1976, p. 45). For him is the key word to place identity “insidness” and “outsidness”, the degree to which a person belongs and associates or does not with a place.

The notion of social identity as identification and bonding within the group (or place) have found interpretation in theories of Tajfel (1982) and Tajfel and Turner (1986). The basis of social identity in these models lay in the identification that a person makes with the group to which he or she wants to belong. Consistent with this understanding, Pol takes the issue of identity further and reminds that without sharing pototypical features and certain level of social cohesion, it is not possible to achieve city – identity – sustainability (Pol 2002).

Lalli (1992) offers an exhaustive analysis of the theoretical traditions of place identity and measurement instruments. Lalli underlines that indispensable distinction has to be drawn between subjective identity and the identity of the place itself. The latter is not directly derived from physical characteristics, but constitutes a social construction which is founded in the perception of individuals and groups (Lalli 1992, p. 291). Another dominant explanation of place identity can be found in several works of Paasi (1986, 2001 and 2002) who proposes it to be beneficial to analytically distinguish two aspects: identity of a region and the regional identity (or regional consciousness) of people living in it or outside of it. The former refers to nature, culture and people “that are used in the discourses and classifications of science, politics, cultural activism, regional marketing, governance and political or religious regionalization to distinguish one region from others” (Paasi 2003, p. 478). The latter refers to the identification of individuals with a place.

The issue of identity could not be circumvented in the Slovak scientific discourse either, most often in sociology, psychology and human geography. In sociology, the issue of identity mostly resonates in connection with national identity. Here we can mention at least (Sedová 1997 and Bunčák and Piscová 2000) methodological problems of measuring national identity (Bahna 2019) and finally a problem of international comparison of national identity (Bahna et al. 2009). In human geography, the range of topics is relatively wide and the issue of place identity is explored from various territorial, regional and local perspectives including demographic one (Ondačková et al. 2018), as well as referring to identity as a place brand (Matlovičová 2015). Of particular importance are the works that deal with the theoretical aspects of territorial research (Matlovič and Matlovičová 2007 and Kasala 2020). The latter draws attention to the pitfalls of defining identity in the social sciences and humanities as well as in geography where the concept of identity is primarily connected with regional identity. As Kasala mentions, there are two main approaches to regional identity – traditional essentialist and constructivist approach. Kasala analyses both concepts and points out that “essentialist concepts of regional identity are displaced by social constructivist understanding used uncritically” (Kasala 2020, p. 349).

Let us make a short comment here. The newly published work of the authors (Peng et al. 2020) deals with an analysis of how researchers have conceived and deconstructed place identity. The analysis complements a deep survey on measuring methods and roles of place identity in academic articles to trace knowledge connections between different empirical understandings of place identity. Based on this analysis, we lean towards the authors' statement, that "intricate debates on the analytical interactions between place, people, and place identity make the meanings of place identity even more confusing" (Peng et al. 2020, p. 2). Another problem they mention is an unclear relation between place identity and environmental psychology concepts based on place attachment, place dependence or place satisfaction. The usefulness of an exclusive focus on global constructs, such as 'place identity', remains questioned also for Lalli and " 'place identity' should [rather] function as a superordinate category for a particular research paradigm" (Lalli 1992, p. 300).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A common feature in the most above-mentioned concepts is that specific character of place is not a result of stable self-referential process but it is a "result of dynamic, transcalar, material and nonmaterial interconnections" (Banini and Ilovan 2021, p. 4). Identity of place takes shapes from historical experience, practices, images social activities related to place and indicates a set of features they assure distinctiveness and continuity in time. Such a meaning associates with the concept of "genius loci", used to describe the impalpable, but generally agreed upon, unique character of a place (Lewicka 2008).

The research 'Values and identities of the Visegrad countries' capitals' was largely motivated by the findings from quantitative research modules 'National Identity' from 1996, 2003 and 2013 conducted within the international research programme ISSP<sup>2</sup>. The studies based on these data have suggested a few differences in perception of the capital city by their residents in V4 countries and in core values held by residents in capitals when compared to the rest of the population in the country. This knowledge led us to the idea to recognize more deeply how inhabitants perceive one's own capital city and its identity in the sense of uniqueness and distinctiveness from the others.

The research project was carried out in all V4 capital cities and was based on qualitative research design with subsequent comparative analyses. The research spectrum covered a broad array of topics ranging from self-assessment and self-identification with the capital, identity and uniqueness of the capital and its role in shaping national identity in each surveyed country, to the values ascribed to the capitals' inhabitants and to the rest of the country.

Data collection was performed via focus groups which took place in autumn 2019 and followed an identical script in all V4 capitals prepared by all research team (the author of the study was one of the team member). The script of the research panels was designed in the way allowing for mutual data comparison from all four capital cities.

<sup>2</sup> Data from the ISSP modules are available at <http://www.issp.org/data-download/by-topic/> or on the webpage of the Slovak Archive of Social Data <http://www.sociologia.sav.sk/old/archiv/>

When selecting the focus group participants, an increased attention was paid to selecting people of high personal integrity and competence above that of the general population. The selection of participants representing each capital was made in two steps. The first focus group of politician consisted of randomly selected local political representatives on the level of local municipalities. Participants were chosen for being in daily contact with their electorate and for their knowledge of the city from their local experience. The second focus group of experts represented various professions. The idea behind this choice was the contact of such representatives with people from different backgrounds representing various kinds of inhabitants. The composition of the second focus group consisted of people from following areas: business, culture, church, university, media, architecture, health, and sport. Despite the expected high competency of participants we are aware the limits that some perceptions of the city or its inhabitants might be limited by the environment or “bubble” in which an individual lives. (Jarabinský 2022). This can cause potential problems with the general and reliability of the findings. This is one of the reasons why, in some cases, we have relied on standardized measurements which makes some of the findings more reliable. Among the all capital cities the largest panel involved 10 participants and the smallest involved 6 participants<sup>3</sup>. The majority of participants were recruited by a research agency in cooperation with the project investigators. Proportionality in terms of gender, age, occupation and borough affiliation was an important requirement to observe when recruiting participants. A moderator from the research agency led a course of each research group. The participants were notified beforehand that the focus group audio would be recorded and were given a choice to either present themselves anonymously or use their real names. All participants selected the latter option. The duration of the panels was approximately 2 – 3 hours for both politicians and experts. All audio recordings were transcribed in the national languages and afterwards translated into English.

We observed several noteworthy differences between the self-presentation of the participants from the two panels. Local politicians had clearly better communication skills and tended to enrich their views by recounting their contributions to solve particular problems of their borough or city. Participants in the expert panel presented a more general statements and their attitudes were more often critical than in the first panel. Their views and attitudes were often framed by a historical context.

The twofold status of research participants as residents and as local political representatives of the capital enabled us to create an intricate mosaic of opinions. Personal attitudes and experiences of participants were intertwined with those of various opinions and political platforms and sometimes with personal ambitions. Despite their social and age diversity, the participants presented mutually consistent attitudes.

Despite that each researched city has unique history, all cities share rather similar story of their formation as capitals. However, this does not apply in Bratislava's case. Unlike its V4 counterparts, the story of Bratislava as a capital city has a dif-

<sup>3</sup> Number of participants in focus groups was following: Budapest 8 politicians and 6 experts, Bratislava 8 politicians 8 experts, Prague 8 politicians 10 experts, Warsaw 10 politicians 10 experts.

ferent historical context, which has proved to be significant for shaping Bratislava's identity as the capital and for shaping the identity of its inhabitants. For this reason we present a short historical excursion about the path of Bratislava to becoming the capital city of Slovakia.

## THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF BRATISLAVA'S STATUS AS THE CAPITAL CITY

The trajectory of Bratislava's development as the capital city has been marked by both discontinuity and historical ruptures and the complex process of forming the identity of the Slovak nation itself, winding through concepts of Pan-Slavism and united Czechoslovak nation to the concept of autonomous Slovak identity<sup>4</sup>.

In the course of modern history, the inhabitants of the remaining V4 capitals were not forced to concern themselves with the legitimisation of their capital city. Nor did they have to address the issue of establishing the capital's borders (e. g., Bratislava's borough of Petržalka in the past named Engerau or Ligetfalú), which in Bratislava's case, were also affected by unstable borders of the country itself. Being located at the borders of three countries, Bratislava's geographical position also resulted in the merging of three different language cultures – German, Hungarian and Slovak. Some authors emphasize the presence of 5 languages by adding Czech and Yiddish as well. In the past, the phenomenon of a trilingual population was idealised and mythicized (Salner 2012). It was believed to be a testament to the exceptional tolerance and multiculturalism of Bratislava's inhabitants. However, recent research findings have shown this belief to be rather problematic since they indicate that, "rather than by tolerance, the multiculturalism of inter-war Bratislava was characterized by co-existence and convergence of cultures within an ethnically differentiated society" (Luther 2012, p. 117).

The twentieth century represented a time of relevant change for Bratislava. The consequences of political turmoil altered Bratislava's status as a metropolis and a quasi-capital city. In the second half of the 20th century, Bratislava experienced a continuous quantitative population growth which also caused changes in its social but mostly in nationality structure. From an ethnically pluralistic, and a cosmopolitan city, it became culturally, politically, and ethnically homogeneous (Salner 2013, p. 106). The political events of 1989, which eventually led to the establishment of the independent Slovak Republic on 1 January 1993, brought a significant change to Bratislava's status as an authentic capital city.

<sup>4</sup> Despite its rich and important history dating mostly from the 16th century, Bratislava was never a prominent metropolis. Unlike the other V4 capitals, Bratislava did not possess any attributes of a metropolis, such as the concentration of important bodies of power and governance as well as educational and cultural institutions. The fact that from 1536, after the Turkish occupation, Bratislava became the administrative centre of the country, the seat of the king, the archbishop as well as the Diet of Hungary, and became a coronation city of Hungarian kings for the following 267 years, symbolizes the role Bratislava played in uniting almost the entire Central European area. Although at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Bratislava was the largest city in the Hungarian territory with a well-developed industry and an important river port, it did not have a significant position in the country and was a city of provincial importance. The end of the World War One rewrote the borders of several countries and, for a time, it was unclear whether Bratislava would be autonomous or would be annexed by another country. Bratislava's situation was very complicated after the establishment of The First Czechoslovak Republic in October 1918. In December 1918, President T.G. Masaryk stated: 'The city of Pressburg does not belong to the Hungarians or us either. It is a German city. We have a right to this city because it has Slovak background. We indisputably need the Danube.' Following successful diplomatic negotiations, Bratislava officially became a part of the newly established Czechoslovakia on 1 January 1919.

## MAIN FINDINGS

## Relationship to the city, uniqueness

The initial part of the empirical research was focused on determining the relationship and inner closeness of research participants to the capital city. A common feature of the V4 capitals is their current vigorous development<sup>5</sup>. The intensity, rate and impact of the ongoing changes, whether positive or negative, have affected not only the participants' relationship to the city but also their understanding of the city's history.

Almost without an exception, the participants described relationship to the city as very close in all capital cities included in the research. Modestly higher level of self-identification and closeness to capital has been identified in the group of politicians. One of the most befitting descriptions of a relationship to Budapest implied an almost instrumentally ardent relationship to the city, 'Budapest is beautiful, which makes life easier'. In the case of Prague, there was a very emotional comparison to 'Wahlheimat' leading to an almost ambivalent relationship of 'you either love Prague or you hate it'. In Warsaw, the comparisons were more traditional, such as 'like that of a peasant to his land'. Compared to the other capitals, the relationship to Bratislava has indicated greater difference based on the fact, whether the participants were born or lived longer in Bratislava or not. In the group of those who moved in, the participants admitted that despite their inner closeness to the city, they would be able to live elsewhere: *'I have a very positive relationship to all Bratislava boroughs. I can't really imagine living anywhere else, maybe with the exception of London, but that's very hard to compare. And that's despite the fact that Bratislava definitely isn't the most beautiful, richest and largest city.'* It is no coincidence that the representatives of the local political elites formulated their relationship to the city in a more personal manner, while local experts defined their relationship in broader contexts. An example of a great inner openness within the relationship to one's city was the view of one of the experts from Budapest. Although his ancestors have lived in the city for several generations, he opines that *'let's say in Zagreb or similarly in Bratislava, you will feel at home as well. I get a sense of a monarchist climate elsewhere as well. I can imagine living somewhere else.'* This statement is interesting because of the historical context of the monarchy which resonated often with the participants in Budapest. In other capitals it was mentioned only rarely and without any sentimental connotations. The ISSP survey, which researched the questions of national identity and closeness to a city, also confirmed that a very close relationship to the city was most often declared by the participants in Budapest. In the case of Warsaw, the research participants emphasized not only the diversity of the city itself but also the diversity in people's perceptions of the capital. Intergenerational identity and continuity have proved to be of a great importance in the relationship to Warsaw. According to the research participants, it does not suffice to say, *'I am from Warsaw. Because if your roots are*

<sup>5</sup> Inward foreign investment together with the appeal of the domestic market power and the concentration of political power have made the capitals of V4 the unquestionable winners in transforming the economies in the V4 countries. Data from as early as the start of the millennium show that GDP per capita in the V4 capital cities exceeds the average of the EU-25 countries by far. Calculations by some authors indicate that GDP per capita in Prague, for example, exceeded the EU-25 average by 58% and in Bratislava's case by a staggering 120%. At the same time, this indicator for the whole of Slovakia represented only 50% of the EU-28 average (Thernborn 2006).

*not in Warsaw, then you are not from Warsaw.*' We can assume that such limiting definitions are the legacy of a turbulent and initially unregulated influx of population to Warsaw after the Second World War, which in turn formed the basis for a large differentiation within Warsaw's population. Although responses regarding the relationship to Warsaw were predominated by a close relationship to the city, the participants also presented critical attitudes more often than elsewhere. There were some isolated thoughts of leaving the city which were nonetheless contradicted by the uniqueness of Warsaw as a city with '*a capital C*' and a city '*which facilitates success that prevents people from leaving...it is a toxic relationship, a Stockholm-Warsaw syndrome.*'<sup>6</sup>

There was a wide range of historical events that participants considered to be the most important for their cities. These included not only historical milestones but also changes to the structure and the mode of city governance. The Warsaw Uprising during the Second World War resonated the most within Warsaw, and the Hungarian Revolution and the events following the year 1956 dominated in Budapest. The establishment of the New Town quarter was mentioned in Prague, followed by uniting the city with its suburbs in 1922 and its further expansion in 1974. In Bratislava, the years 1918 – 1919 when it finally became part of Czechoslovakia were identified as very important, but mostly it was the year 1993 when it became the *de iure* capital city. The year 1989 was generally perceived as a significant milestone, as were the subsequent political and social changes which, for example, caused '*Prague to become the cultural Mecca of the entire Europe*'. These findings confirm that also new historical events are the foundation upon which the participants defined their relation to capital and its identity.

In Prague and Budapest we have identified a set of persisting metaphors that respondents used to describe their relationship with the city, e.g., '*golden Prague*', '*a city of hundred spires*', '*the heart of Europe*', '*the Rome of the North*', '*the mother of cities*', '*magical*', '*mysterious*.' With Budapest, the participants used comparisons such as '*Cuba of Europe*', '*the mixture of Mediterranean*', '*Balkan and Western European way of life*'. In Bratislava and Warsaw there was no clear symbolism or use of metaphors when characterizing the city.

The responses of research participants show that the uniqueness of the capital was strongly associated with its geographical location, visual aspects, diversity of architectural styles and the city panorama. This was the case in Budapest, Prague and Bratislava as well. The uniqueness of Warsaw was perceived mostly through its dissimilarity from other cities in Poland. According to the research participants, Warsaw is not only a thriving city but it is also remarkably diverse, dynamic and open, without the closed structure that supposedly characterizes other capitals. The panellists considered Warsaw to have been distinctive and unique especially in the 1980s and 1990s when an '*entrepreneurship epidemic*' started in the city. Although entrepreneurship has expanded into other cities and parts of Poland, it maintains a much higher level in Warsaw. The same is true of Warsaw's culture which the participants believe is far more advanced and progressive when compared to other cities in Poland.

<sup>6</sup> This statement paraphrases the so-called Stockholm syndrome. In this context, it represents the state of attachment to Warsaw as a city but at the same time tiredness and anger with the city as well as a belief in its adverse effect on one's life.



The assessment of the atmosphere in the capital cities has shown that the differences between the capitals are not negligible. While *'mild optimism'* prevailed in Prague, in Warsaw *'critical optimism'* was more dominant. In Bratislava and especially in Budapest, the views were not so clearly defined, with positive and negative aspects overlapping. A common feature in the assessment of the atmosphere in all capital cities was the cleavage between generations, where optimism was associated with younger population groups. In Bratislava and Budapest, partly in Prague and Warsaw as well, the context of national character also entered into the assessment the city's vibe: *'Overall, Hungarians are more pessimistic and so is Budapest'*, and similarly in Prague *'... the Czech mentality, we are needlessly negative'*. Pessimism was felt in Bratislava as well, *'When I consider Bratislava as such, simply Slovakia as such, it's more negative, more dramatic; the negativity already runs in their blood.'* Panellists in Warsaw emphasized the diversity in the city's atmosphere but also the fact that *'complaining is in their DNA'*. In Warsaw, complaining is not perceived as just something negative but it is also seen as a means for achieving a change. Some optimism participants attributed to Bratislava as well, *'Bratislava has taken a breath towards a more optimistic tomorrow.'*

#### The identity of capital cities and their inhabitants

Research participants viewed the identity of their capital cities mostly from two perspectives. The first was associated with the location as such. The study has confirmed that the cities' geographical and visual characteristics were key elements of their identity. This was the case especially in Budapest and Prague, partly in Bratislava. The participants attributed great importance to certain buildings and especially monuments, which perform the role of historical memorials and convey powerful political messages. In Warsaw, the identity of the capital was mostly associated with notable sights such as the National Stadium or even the controversial building of the Palace of Culture. However, 'civilian' and commercial buildings can play a similar role. One example is Prague, where many architecturally modern buildings were built after the establishment of the First Czechoslovak Republic. According to the participants, besides their intended purpose, these buildings were supposed to symbolize the detachment of the new republic from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Similar needs, however, seems to have not appeared after 1989.

The second perspective reflected on the population's social structure and values. The socio-structural aspect of the city appeared especially significant in Budapest, where the forming of the city's identity in the past was often linked to the existence of petite bourgeoisie as an important social force. However, according to the participants, unlike in Prague, this social group has vanished in Budapest and that is why *'Budapest is simply Budapest, that is its identity'* and *'... Budapest is a more powerful trademark than Hungary'*. A finding about the shift in social structure is found in another international comparative research, claiming that "Budapest used to be the most segregated city in East Europe, but this is not the case anymore" (Tammaru et al. 2016, p. 21).

The views on a capital's identity were also shaped by the differences between individual city boroughs which may segregate the city in terms of values. The size of the city plays a significant role here. Fragmentation and poor cooperation among boroughs appeared especially in Budapest and Warsaw, less so in Prague. This problem was not at the forefront in Bratislava due to the city's size. However, poor

cooperation between the city centre and peripheral boroughs was present here as well.

The identity of capitals' residents is substantially affected by the new phenomena that have intensified in recent years. This is primarily the issue of increasing number of commuters and new residents in the city. This phenomenon creates tensions in all capital cities and, according to participants, alters and disrupts social and value patterns. Although the influx of newcomers helps the city's development, there have been perceptions of many negative economic repercussions such as labour market distortions. In Warsaw, for example, new residents '*lower the salary rates, increase prices of the real estate, do not pay city taxes and do not register their cars in the city in order to pay lower insurance*'. Similarly, in Bratislava '*many people who live here don't feel at home in the city and therefore treat the city that way*'. This attitude was perceived the most often in Bratislava where the ratio of people who live in the city only temporarily due to their work is exceptionally high. Those who have a permanent residence in the city and wish to live there realize that cooperation with commuters and temporary residents is vital for shifting the city towards a better quality of life. The absence of such cooperation promotes a situation which is not conducive to building a closer relationship to the city. Tensions between established residents and newcomers may lead to the creation of large insulated enclaves that do not interact with the rest of the population. This appeared particularly salient in Warsaw where the newcomers were perceived as demanding, disrespectful of long-term residents and enforcing their own demands regardless of others.

#### National identity, nationalism and patriotism, national pride

A particularly important part of the research was to verify the assumption that capital cities, as cultural and historical centres, play a significant role in shaping the national identity of the country's inhabitants. The research has confirmed that national identity is undoubtedly anchored in the historical context. Capital cities which have over time evolved into centres of national culture (e. g., Budapest, Warsaw and Prague) were presented as key players in shaping the nation's identity. This was reflected in powerful statements such as '*... the history of Czech lands is a little like the extended history of Prague, all the important events happened in Prague*' or '*Budapest is more than a capital, Budapest is the capital of the nation, it's in our hearts.*' According to the participants, the status of Budapest as the symbol of identity and national centre was strengthened even more after the Treaty of Trianon when other Hungarian cities, until then thriving, sank into lengthy stagnation. The strength of Budapest's identity was also manifested in its impact on personal identity: '*when I'm abroad, I feel like nobody.*' The perceptions of Warsaw's role were slightly different. The city's role in shaping national identity was viewed from two aspects. The first one relates to history and especially the Warsaw Uprising when Warsawians united in a display of outstanding courage. The second aspect of the city's importance reflects on the fact that Warsaw sets trends which are followed by other parts of Poland. These views were more common for those born in Warsaw. In Bratislava's case, the city's historical limitations in being a capital have affected its role in forming national identity. Bratislava's position in the context of national identity was mostly restricted by the fact that from the historical point of view it has been a capital city for only a short time. The participants pointed out that Bratislava, unlike other capitals, does not represent a historically genu-

ine national centre (also due to its eccentric geographic location within the country) and due to the city's multicultural development and historical transformations, the identity of Bratislava's residents is only loosely anchored and they are still seeking it.

The research participants believe that the unique role of capital cities in forming the national identity has been in most countries strengthened by a lack of other centres that could at least partly serve as a counterbalance to the capital. A small exception is Czechia and the city of Brno in particular. In Slovakia, the city of Košice could have served this purpose but these efforts eventually failed.

Another area of our research was nationalism. Previous ISSP studies on national identity have shown that the presence of nationalism in the capital cities of V4 countries is, with few exceptions, generally lower than in the rest of the country<sup>7</sup>. This dividing line has been changing with time and its intensity varies by country and capital, but it still persists. The ISSP research data from 1995, 2003 and 2013 indicate that the largest statistically significant shift in the incidence of nationalism between the capital and the rest of its country occurred in 2003. In 2013, this difference was no longer statistically significant except for Bratislava which remained statistically less nationalist also in 2013. Our research participants have linked the reasons for such developments in Bratislava to two factors: a higher level of education among the city's residents and the subsequent higher concentration of the intelligentsia which is less susceptible to populist and nationalist tendencies. The second factor is a higher standard of living in the capital, and hence the absence of the feeling of threat to one's livelihood. A higher level of education has proved to be a means for slowing down the spread of nationalism in the remaining capitals as well. In Warsaw, participants admitted that while nationalist rhetoric is present in the city, it is not a significant trend. While reflecting on the reasons why nationalism is less successful in Warsaw, the participants argued that life in Warsaw is fast-paced and challenging, forcing people to work hard and thus leaving them with no time to worry about such problems. Moreover, *'each resident of Warsaw should feel equal...because the city offers opportunities for everybody, with no exceptions.'* In the 1990s, Warsaw was a breeding ground for nationalism, imported into the city by new residents. However, this has now changed and, according to participants, people with nationalist rhetoric would now be ostracized by society. On the other hand, people also seem to apply certain *self-ostracism* when they try to keep control of themselves and prefer not to say anything and remain silent. The relativity of freedom and tolerance in relation to the trend of self-ostracism was clearly hinted at by one of the experts, *'when you are gay, you come across encouraging attitudes that it's great that you share with others publicly. However, being a Catholic in Warsaw, politically on the right and a nationalist is not cool at all... it's much easier to be modern!'*

The research has shown that the line between nationalism and patriotism is very thin. In Warsaw, being a good citizen is perceived to be a certain form of patriotism. The openness of Warsawians was also reflected in the fact that, more than elsewhere, the participants emphasized that they identify not only with their community but feel they are a part of something larger which transcends the borders of

<sup>7</sup> ISSP data from 2003 showed an exception in case of Prague where nationalism was statistically significantly higher.

their own country. Yet they also stated *'we are Polish rather than citizens of the world'*. In Budapest, the situation was more complex. The research participants in Budapest were the only ones to admit that their capital city is nationalist, but argued that nationalism is stronger in the country than in the cities. Nationalism is fuelled by power and as the research participants pointed out the sentiment of being a big nation *'whose arms and legs had been amputated'* still lives on in many Hungarians. They also stated that although discussing patriotism would be much needed in Hungary, it is impossible since there is only one nationalist language. The politicians have also seized many values and the sense of *'being able to feel good as a Hungarian'* has thus been lost. The participants have also pointed out that the absence of discussion is a consequence of a broader problem, namely the fact that the representatives of political elites do not communicate with one another and overall Budapest lacks the culture of cooperation. Critical remarks were also addressed at the quality of politicians, stating that the country's problem is that *'political elites have been below-average for a very long time'*.

The study of the relationship between the identity of capitals and national identity has shown that, despite some dissimilarities, the local identity of the residents from individual city boroughs is becoming increasingly important. Local identity intensifies either with the development of new city boroughs that new residents move into (Warsaw, partly Bratislava) or with further development of the historically anchored local identity (Buda and Pest). The latter partly applies also to the historical centre of Prague and the rest of the city. A rise in local consciousness and local identity has been most often mentioned in Prague, mostly as a result of rich community life and development in many boroughs. This, on the contrary, was lacking in Budapest where *'people do not have the skills to take the initiative ....and do something together'*.

#### Values, tolerance, openness to change, dividing lines

As we have mentioned earlier, the study of core values held by the inhabitants of capital cities has indicated two dividing lines: the capital vs. the rest of the country<sup>8</sup> and native residents vs. newcomers. However, in practice, these lines intersect and can hardly be separated. Labels such as 'old Bratislavan' or 'old Warsawian' have no true information value and are difficult to define, complicating the situation even further. Therefore, in some areas, it is challenging to trace the dividing line in values shared by native, autochthonous residents and newcomers. After all, the results of our research do not even allow this. However, the overall differences are not that fundamental and are caused by diverse life situations. This was also confirmed by research participants in Bratislava when they pointed out that, unlike native residents, newcomers are forced to make compromises which in turn affect their behaviour. The 'natives' have also acknowledged some positive effects, namely the fact that new residents bring values which push the city forward and develop it further. Although the line of values between Bratislava and the countryside may seem to be more important than in other capitals, according to the partici-

<sup>8</sup> The division of basic human values and the national identity between Prague's inhabitants and countryside is presented by the study *'Do Praguers differ from Czechs? Selected topics of recent intergroup antagonism attempts'* (Jarabinský 2021). The study was prepared within the same project *'Values and identities of the Visegrad countries' capitals'*.

pants, these differences are often artificially inflated by politicians, especially before the elections. As one of the experts points out *'election results reflect the fact that residents of Bratislava prefer opportunities and the people in rural areas prefer guarantees.'*

Warsaw was an example of a city where two different lines emerged within the relationship to new residents who form two distinct groups – people from other parts of Poland and immigrants from abroad (Ukraine, Vietnam, etc.). While the relationship to the first group shows elements of certain antagonism, in the case of the latter, there is hospitality towards these new residents who are appreciated for saturating many of the city's fundamental needs.

Warsaw turned out to be unique also in terms of values. On the one hand, there was a forceful statement that *'Warsaw is definitely different from the rest of the country'* but without identifying any specific reasons for this or listing values typical for Warsaw's residents. Instead, some attributes that are seen as characteristic for Warsawians were mentioned. The participants stated that Warsawians are more tolerant, creative and especially more independent in decision-making, while at the same time, they are also more self-centred and less altruistic. A large influx of people from the countryside, the rapid development of the city and, above all else, anonymity, have contributed to the fact that *'people who were not born in Warsaw feel worse here'*. Compared to other Polish cities, Warsaw provides many opportunities for everyone and more personal freedom. Warsawians are open to change but it very much depends on the type of change. Courage and bravery have repeatedly proved to be highlighted as deep-rooted traits in Warsaw's residents. Participants strongly emphasized that they passed these on from previous generations. Courage and bravery were not mentioned in any other city, but in Warsaw's case, they appeared in several contexts and connections.

The great dynamics of Prague and Warsaw have produced similar results in terms of the perceived differences in values between the residents of capitals and the rest of the country. The differences between residents of Prague and Warsaw and the rest of the country do not relate to values as much as they reflect the possibilities that these cities offer. In Prague, more than in other cities, a significant difference between the residents of individual city boroughs emerged and is reflected in the openness to change. This openness is considerably lower in the historically older city boroughs: *'in each resident of Prague, there is also a piece of a Czech, who, as a Western European, is not open to changes.'* Long-term residents do not welcome changes, but newcomers do. The participants also pointed out that unlike in other cities, social differences in Prague are not so vast. However, this was not the case in Budapest, where participants underlined the existing deep social differences among the city's residents. As Kovács and Wissner (204, p.24) point out, the differences between the new rich and the new poor collide most strongly in the capital of Budapest, where the effects of the transformation are the strongest. Moreover, some participants opined that the differences between Budapest and the rest of Hungary are even greater than differences among the V4 countries. According to them, *'Budapest and Vienna are much closer to each other in terms of lifestyle than, for example, Budapest and Szolnok.'* Despite a large generational, income, ethnic and social differentiation in Budapest, even *'newcomers soon become Budapestans.'* Local consciousness has recently become more important in Budapest as well and, interestingly, local patriotism has been on the rise not only in old historical districts but also in the newer districts founded in the 1970's.

Conservatism and openness to changes was another area of our research. In all four cities, the research participants perceived the values and opinions of inhabitants of capital cities as more open, appreciating individualism and greater tolerance than in the rest of the country. However, the research participants emphasized that greater openness and tolerance are relative when compared to Western capitals.

Nevertheless, differences between the individual capitals do exist. In terms of the population's openness and willingness to change, an admissible simplification would allow us to place Prague and Warsaw to one side with Budapest on the other. Bratislava would find itself in the middle. The participants often compared the individual cities to one another, most often Bratislava with Prague which was perceived as much more tolerant and open: *'if Bratislava's liberals, as we say, the coffee-shop liberals went to Prague, half of them would still be quite conservative compared to what's going on there.'* The research participants described the residents of Prague and Warsaw as tolerant, with great openness towards new trends and changes. On the other hand, a reserved attitude towards change resonated in Budapest, stemming from a reluctance to take risks. The representatives of the local political elite were perhaps the most critical in this respect, making a rather expressive statement that Budapest's inhabitants are not only conservative but even backwards, *'the city is not innovative...but backwards... A conservative knows what values he or she respects but being backwards is more of an attitude... it's the basic attitude; we were born into the world of these values; we are a part of it and cannot break free from it.'* This statement reveals some elements of scepticism, which appeared also in the assessment of Budapest's atmosphere. The research participants compared Budapest to other cities as well. They considered Prague, Warsaw but also Bratislava to be much more exciting, their residents more open and tolerant, and the intellectual life of Prague and Warsaw to be richer. In their view, Prague indisputably represents the benchmark for a successful city. It can attract more visitors than Budapest, hosts large international events and conferences and is generally highly in demand. According to the participants, Budapest does not make use of and develop its huge potential and according to one of the experts, *'the problem is that Budapest is too big for this small country'* and unlike the other capitals, has not been able to adapt to social changes after the year 1989.

## CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Despite sharing many similarities, each of the V4 capital cities is unique and possesses its distinctive *genius loci* given by location, social and political relations and in particular history. All these constitute the specific environment for the local population with their everyday needs and habits. The traditional monopoly of power and authority held by capital cities currently finds itself at the intersection of two processes. The first process became apparent in Central Europe after 1989 and involves the trend to decentralize power to support local and regional decision-making level. The second one is the emergence and development of supra-national institutions such as the European Union which have added yet another level of political power to the capital cities over the nation – state. Capital cities thus increasingly find themselves in a complicated hierarchy of multiple political centres of power (Campbell 2000), in the triangle of relations between the local, national and global level.

The changes following the year 1989 have brought unprecedented development of V4 capitals. This development resulted in the increased diversity of the social structure of inhabitants, level of selfidentification with the capital and in diversity of the values. The research has confirmed that the residents strongly acknowledge the importance of capital cities as symbols of their countries and that the importance and identity of capital grows from historical experiences Therborn (2006). In all four capital cities, respondents described their relationship to the capital as very close, even ardent and often as very emotional. The higher closeness to the capital among the group of local politicians indicates justification of the thesis of positive relationship between emotional ties to a location and political activity in the community (Winter and Church 1984). The research also has shown that the relationship to the city is reinforced by the continuity of residents' family background in the capital. This was most apparent in Warsaw and Budapest. However, autobiographical significance, namely place of birth in connection with rootedness or closeness appeared relatively significant only in Bratislava. This is in agreement with earlier findings that place of birth has significance only if a person has spent at least their childhood and adolescence there (Treinen 1965). Another factor that has proved to have an impact on the inner closeness to the capital is the level of satisfaction with life in the capital as well as with living conditions that the city offers, including the proper functioning of institutions and city administration.

Great pride in the capital city is a very significant feature shared by inhabitants in all capital cities. The pride is mostly associated with the city's history and important historical events which had a significant impact on the entire country. It is through these events that capital cities are attributed great importance in the forming of national identity. According to our research participants, both cities, Prague and Budapest (less Warsaw), are considered to have an almost existential significance for national identity and both are perceived as strong national centres and symbols. Bratislava's impact on forming national identity has turned out to be less influential, the city does not represent a historically genuine national centre and its role as a national symbol is less relevant.

The responses of research participants gave us the grounds to argue that the impact of capital city on the formation of national identity is stronger in those capitals where the phenomenon that we could name "the identity of native residents" continues to exist. This is despite the fact that the expression 'native resident' has now become relative in all four cities and its meaning is no longer as clear as it was in the past. Such tendencies were most noticeable in Bratislava which, as the youngest capital city in our study, grapples with its perceived historical inadequacy due to which its current residents are still seeking their identity. The residents' search for identity in capital cities has also shown the increasing importance of local identity i.e., identification with a city borough or district, which was very visible in Budapest, Warsaw and Prague. It confirms the previous finding that the larger the city is, the higher role local identity use to play (Nikischer 2013, p. 245).

The findings based on quantitative research comparing several types of spatial identity in V4 countries (Nikischer 2015) acknowledge that generally regional identity in V4 does not play a significant role and is below the average within the European context. Subsequently Nikischer presents a significant difference and higher intensity in the level of local, regional and national identity between the culturally homogenous inhabitants in Hungary and Poland compared to Slovakia (Nikischer 2015).

It has been largely confirmed that the relation of the city's identity is important in the context of the physical environment. Research participants associated city's identity – besides the geographic and visual features – with physical creations and objects which perform the role of historical memorials and convey powerful political messages and are an important elements of the identity of capital cities. While the first dominated in Bratislava, Budapest and Prague, the latter significantly prevailed in Warsaw.

The belief that a capital should offer possibilities and chances to everyone was shared across all cities<sup>9</sup>. The research participants consistently acknowledged that people have incomparably more opportunities in the capital city than in the rest of the country. However, newcomers are forced to try much harder, must be more self-sufficient in making decisions and make more compromises than the native residents. Extensive development of a capital city can result in tensions, which appeared in all capitals within the study. Our research participants suggested that despite these tensions, the prevalent attitude is that newcomers bring new impulses. Gradually, the values of native residents and newcomers intersect. However, in Budapest, the original values held by native residents distinctly dominated over the values of newcomers. In Warsaw, on the other hand, a large influx of people from the rest of Poland and from abroad has led to a greater variety of attitudes – positive or negative – towards new residents.

One of the main research questions concerned the division between the capital inhabitants and rest of the country in terms of attitudes and value perception. The data from several quantitative studies performed within the ISSP suggest the existence such a division line dividing the residents of capital cities from the rest of the population. Our research data in this field were very limited and do not allow to make any general statement. However, it has been confirmed that division line is only very slight and can be recognised in such values as tolerance and openness. The most pronounced difference relates to voting behaviour. Possible explanation resulting from our finding is that the residents of capital cities prefer more opportunities and people in the rest of the country prefer more guarantees. However, it is not possible to speak of a significant division. As Jarabinský points out, in case of Prague it appears that the division between Praguers and non-Praguers is rather artificial and “based on inaccurate perceptions and/or interpretations” (Jarabinský 2021, p. 154 ). We did not recognise any consistent division in other capitals too.

The occurrence of nationalism is also an area of research where disparities between the capital and the rest of the country might be expected. According to our findings, capital cities do not provide a breeding ground for nationalism and its incidence and intensity significantly change over time. Nationalism and strong local patriotism resonated the most in Budapest and the least in Bratislava. From the historical perspective, the capital cities share a certain similarity that the nationalist sentiment peaked in the 1990s and has been in decline ever since. This decline is the result of many transformations, such as changes of social structure and social situation of the city residents and their increasing openness and tolerance. The research participants admitted that residents of capital city distance themselves from the rest of population in the country and have an attitude that we could describe as

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<sup>9</sup> This belief did not resonate in Budapest so much.



‘indulgent disregard’. This attitude stems from their belief in the uniqueness and importance of the capital and its indispensability for the country.

In the eyes of the participants, the term ‘success’ is the common feature in all capital cities. The only exception is Budapest where the participants did not mention the term success or successful at all. On the grounds of our research (while allowing for some exaggeration) we could use metaphorical comparisons and describe Warsaw as a city of diversity and opportunities for everyone, Prague as a city of successful internal mobilization and ambivalent emotions, and Budapest as a city experiencing both nostalgia and an effort to break free of the old clichés. In Bratislava’s case, our findings show that the city is perceived, above all, as a city of success and successful people. The city benefits from its status of the capital city as well as its geographical position. Although Bratislava’s status as the main centre of the country is indisputable, compared to other metropolises such as Prague, Budapest and Warsaw, it remains a ‘little big city’ or ‘the biggest village’ (Salner 2013, p. 112). Now it is up to its residents which of the city’s features they can develop further in the future, to help Bratislava become a true metropolis comparable to its counterparts and a genuine national centre.

#### Additional note

We are aware that the research data we obtained and analysed are limited and cover only small part of the capitals’ identity and identity of their inhabitants. In fact, these problems are very complex and wide. Our study is a first step to understanding the similarities and differences between all four Visegrad metropolis after 30 years after the political turnover.

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## IDENTITA A VNÍMANIE HLAVNÝCH MIEST MESTSKÝMI ELITAMI. PRÍPAD KRAJÍN VIŠEGRÁDSKEJ ŠTVORKY

Hlavné mestá ako centrá moci sú stelesnením premenlivosti politickej histórie, rozličných druhov a zdrojov moci a spôsobov ich organizácie. Nesú v sebe spoločnú historickú pamäť, reprezentujú kontinuitu tradície daného miesta, sú emocionálnym a kultúrnym spojivom medzi generáciami. V tomto zmysle hlavné mestá majú významnú symbolickú funkciu vo vzťahu ku krajine, ktorú reprezentujú. V súčasnosti aj hlavné mestá prechádzajú veľkými zmenami, ktoré menia status tradičných, národne formovaných hlavných miest a narúšajú zaužívanú centralizáciu moci v hlavných mestách. Všetky tieto procesy majú svoje dosahy na obyvateľov hlavných miest, avšak tieto doteraz stoja akosi mimo koncentrovaného výskumného záujmu.

V štúdiu sa venujeme problematike vnímania hlavného mesta očami jeho obyvateľov, v komparatívnom pohľade predstaviteľov lokálnych politických elít a expertov v hlavných mestách krajín V4. Všetky štyri hlavné mestá prešli v ostatných rokoch búrlivým vývojom. V štúdiu prezentujeme výsledky z medzinárodného výskumného projektu “Values and identities of the Visegrad countries’ capitals“, ktorý bol riešený v rokoch 2018 – 2020. Výskumný projekt bol založený na kvalitatívnom výskume. Zber údajov bol organizovaný cez fókusové skupiny, ktoré sa uskutočnili na jeseň 2019 podľa jednotného scenára vo všetkých hlavných mestách krajín V4. V štúdiu prezentujeme poznatky týkajúce sa vnímania hlavného mesta ako národného a kultúrneho centra a jeho dôležitosť pri formovaní národnej identity. Zaoberáme sa tiež otázkami hodnôt, tolerance a otvorenosti obyvateľov hlavného

mesta. Výsledky ukázali, že spoločnou a výraznou črtou vo všetkých skúmaných hlavných mestách je veľká hrdosť na hlavné mesto, ktorá bola spájaná predovšetkým s históriou mesta, s historickými udalosťami, ktoré sa v meste odohrali a ktoré zásadným spôsobom ovplyvnili celú krajinu. V prípade Prahy a Budapešti sa ukázalo najsilnejšie spojenie hlavného mesta ako národného symbolu a ako významného činiteľa pri formovaní národnej identity. V prípade Bratislavy sa vo viacerých smeroch prejavil jej historický deficit v pozícii hlavného mesta. Aj preto nie je vnímaná ako historicky prirodzené národné centrum a ako národný symbol a aj jej rola pri formovaní národnej identity je omnoho slabšia.

Potvrdilo sa, že pre identitu mesta sú okrem jeho geografických a vizuálnych daností veľmi dôležité aj materiálne výtvyry a objekty, ktoré zohrávajú úlohu silných historických a politických posolstiev. Zatiaľ čo prvé prevažovali v Bratislave, Budapešti a Prahe, druhé významne prevažovali vo Varšave. Spoločným menovateľom vo všetkých štyroch hlavných mestách bolo presvedčenie o tom, že hlavné mesto by malo poskytovať rovnaké možnosti a šance pre každého. A o tom, že hlavné mesto to naplňa, boli presvedčení účastníci výskumu vo všetkých mestách, o niečo menej boli o tom presvedčení respondenti v Budapešti.

Vo výskume sme sa zamerali aj na to, či existuje názorové a hodnotové štiepenie medzi obyvateľmi hlavných miest a obyvateľmi v iných častiach krajiny. Vyjadrenia účastníkov výskumu nepotvrdili prítomnosť významnejšieho štiepenia. Jedinou oblasťou, kde sa podľa nich rozdielnosť najviac prejavuje, sú odlišnosti vo volebnom správaní. Účastníci výskumu dôvody rozdielnosti spájali s tým, že obyvatelia v hlavnom meste viac preferujú šance, kým obyvatelia zvyšku krajiny viac uprednostňujú istoty. Pripúšťali však, že existuje určitý odstup vo vzťahu obyvateľov hlavného mesta k obyvateľom iných častí krajiny, ktorý by sa dal označiť ako postoj zhovievavého dešpektu. Tento pramení najmä z pocitu obyvateľov, že hlavné mesto je výnimočné, dôležité a pre krajinu nezastupiteľné.

Na základe poznatkov z výskumu si dovoľíme opísať identitu skúmaných miest v metaforických prirovnaniach. Tak by sme mohli Varšavu onačiť ako mesto rôznorodosti a príležitostí pre každého, Prahu ako mesto úspešnej vnútornej mobilizácie a ambivalentných emócií a Budapešť ako mesto prežívajúceho sentimentu, ale aj snahy vymaniť sa zo starých klíšé. Pokiaľ ide o Bratislavu, získané poznatky svedčia o tom, že Bratislava je vnímaná predovšetkým ako mesto úspechu a úspešných ľudí, ktoré ťaží z pozície hlavného mesta, z jeho geografickej polohy a dokáže to aj využiť. Aj keď je postavenie Bratislavy ako centra krajiny nespochybniteľné, v porovnaní s metropolami, akými sú Praha, Budapešť a Varšava, však stále zostáva „malým veľkým mestom“. Budúci vývoj ukáže, či Bratislava dokáže rozvinúť svoj potenciál tak, aby sa stala skutočnou metropolou a prirodzeným národným centrom.



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