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FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND FINANCE

SELF-REPORT OF DISSERTATION

Ing. Andrea Lelovics



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Self-report of Dissertation

THE CREATION OF SOCIAL IMPACT THROUGH
NETWORKING AND SOCIAL NETWORKS OF INDIVIDUALS
AND ORGANISATIONS

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Submitted by: Ing. Andrea Lelovics
Department of Social Development and Labour of the
Faculty of Economics and Finance, EUBA

Supervisor: doc. Ing. Eva Pongrácz, PhD.
Department of Social Development and Labour of the
Faculty of Economics and Finance, EUBA

Reviewers: prof. PaedDr. Gabriela Korimová, PhD.
St. Elizabeth University of Health and Social Work in
Bratislava, n. o., branch Banská Bystrica

doc. Ing. Silvia Šipikalová, PhD.
Department of Social Development and Labour of the Faculty
of Economics and Finance, EUBA

Ing. Mirka Wildmannová, Ph.D., MBA
Department of Public Economics, Faculty of Economics and
Administration, Masaryk University

The self-report was distributed on.....

The dissertation defence takes place on at o'clock at the Faculty of Economics and Finance, EUBA, Dolnozemska cesta 1, 852 35 Bratislava, before the dissertation defence committee in the doctoral study programme Economics, field of study Economics and Management, appointed by the Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Finance, EUBA.

prof. Ing. Anetta Čaplánová, PhD.
chairwoman of the Doctoral Study
Subcommittee 1.1 Economics

1. An Overview of the current status of the issues addressed in the dissertation at home and abroad

Contemporary societies face complex social, economic, and environmental challenges that have exposed the limitations of both market-centred and state-centric approaches. The ongoing inability of the formal economy to resolve unemployment and social exclusion has prompted renewed interest in alternative economic models that prioritise social values, sustainability, and long-term development (Block, 2001; Polanyi, 1944; Stiglitz, 2001; Polanyi, 1957; Gareth, 2024; Roy & Grant, 2020; Csoba et al., 2007). In this context, the social economy has gained prominence by integrating economic activity with social objectives through organisations such as social enterprises and cooperatives (Pongrácz, 2021; Korimová, 2007). At the European level, the social economy makes a substantial contribution to employment, social inclusion, and regional development (European Commission: European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency et al., 2024; European Economic and Social Committee, 2017). Municipalities play a critical role in this context, particularly in Slovakia, where regional disparities necessitate targeted local interventions (Caldatto et al., 2020; Gustafsson & Wihlborg, 2016; Mitlin & Satterthwaite, 2014; International Monetary Fund. European Dept., 2024). Municipal social enterprises integrate public ownership, entrepreneurial activity, and a social mission to address local social and environmental challenges (Roy & Grant, 2020; Olmedo et al., 2023; Steiner & Teasdale, 2019). Spišský Hrhov serves as a prominent example of municipal entrepreneurship that advances social inclusion and local development (Lyman, 2017). While social enterprises have been extensively studied, the governance processes that create and disseminate social impact have received comparatively less attention. This dissertation conceptualises social impact as an emergent outcome of coordinated action embedded within networks of actors, resources, and institutions, and adopts networked governance as its principal analytical framework.

Social impact as a governance-relevant concept

Social impact is marked by conceptual ambiguity and a lack of universally accepted definitions or methodologies (Molecke & Pinkse,

2017; OECD, 2015, 2021). It is most commonly understood as changes in individuals' lives or broader social conditions that result from intentional actions (Feor et al., 2023; Fiandrino et al., 2022; Gómez et al., 2019; Impact Europe, 2023; Islam, 2022; Kah & Akenroye, 2020; Mair et al., 2023; Molecke & Pinkse, 2017). The literature encompasses a spectrum of approaches, ranging from instrumental and technocratic perspectives to constructivist interpretations of impact (Aledo-Tur & Domínguez-Gómez, 2017; Hurst et al., 2023; Lauronen, 2022; Molecke & Pinkse, 2017). Despite conceptual diversity, social impact is typically operationalised through measurement practices. The literature identifies methodological fragmentation, challenges in attribution, and limitations of current assessment tools, while increasingly recommending mixed-methods and stakeholder-based approaches (Alomoto et al., 2022; Hervieux & Voltan, 2019; Impact Europe, 2024; Molecke & Pinkse, 2017; OECD, 2015, 2021; Spaapen & van Drooge, 2011; Vanclay, 2002).

Social impact as process

The literature differentiates among inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts (Feor et al., 2023; Impact Europe, 2023; Kah & Akenroye, 2020; Molecke & Pinkse, 2017; OECD, 2015). Unlike linear logic models, a process-oriented perspective conceptualises social impact as a dynamic and iterative phenomenon that emerges through adaptation, feedback, learning, and stakeholder interaction (Abma et al., 2017; Alomoto et al., 2022; Hurst et al., 2023; Impact Europe, 2024; Lauronen, 2022; Vega, 2024). Informed by systems thinking and complexity theory, this perspective regards social innovation and impact creation as non-linear processes shaped by interaction, learning, and knowledge co-production (Benneworth et al., 2022; Carvalho & Mazzon, 2019; Hervieux & Voltan, 2019; Mair et al., 2023; Molas-Gallart & Tang, 2011; Spaapen & van Drooge, 2011). Although this approach addresses challenges related to attribution and time lags, it also introduces uncertainty and tensions regarding accountability (Abma et al., 2017; Arce-Gomez et al., 2015; OECD, 2015, 2021).

Social economy, social enterprises, and municipal social enterprises

The social economy encompasses economic activities that prioritise collective and social needs over profit maximisation. Drawing on Polanyi's concept of embedded economic activity, the social economy integrates reciprocity, redistribution, and exchange to promote social cohesion and sustainable development (Polanyi, 1957; OECD, 2007; Roy & Grant, 2020). In Slovakia, this sector was formally institutionalised through Act No. 112/2018 on the Social Economy and Social Enterprises (Brozmanová, Gregorová & Murray Svidronova, 2020; Polačková, 2021). Social enterprises constitute a central organisational form within the social economy. These entities pursue social objectives through entrepreneurial activities, reinvest profits in their mission, and integrate economic, social, and civic goals (Dees, 1994; Defourny and Nyssens, 2017; Haugh, 2005; Mair and Marti, 2004; Seelos et al., 2011). In Slovakia, registered social enterprises are required to demonstrate social impact and engage stakeholders in governance (Placek et al., 2021; Polačková, 2021). Municipal social enterprises integrate municipal ownership with entrepreneurial activity and a social mission. In contrast to traditional municipally owned corporations that focus primarily on service provision, these enterprises employ market-based instruments to address social and environmental challenges while remaining embedded within local governance structures (Homsy & Warner, 2020; Minoja & Romano, 2021; Tavares & Camões, 2007; Voorn et al., 2017).

Governance roles of municipalities in local social impact creation

Contemporary governance literature acknowledges the limitations of hierarchical government in addressing complex social problems (Howlett & Ramesh, 2014). As a result, municipalities increasingly serve as coordinators of interactions among diverse stakeholders. Participatory governance has emerged as a complementary approach that involves non-state actors in collaborative problem-solving (Börzel & Risse, 2010; J. M. Bryson et al., 2014; Rhodes, 1996). Through mechanisms such as participatory budgeting, workshops, and citizen engagement, municipalities aim to enhance legitimacy, foster consensus-building, and promote collective action (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Kurkela et al., 2024;

Newig et al., 2018). Governance arrangements increasingly integrate hierarchical and network-based forms of coordination, although concerns regarding inclusion, accountability, and unequal participation persist (Ferlie et al., 2011; Papadopoulos & Warin, 2007).

Networked governance as a mode of coordination in the social economy

Networked governance facilitates coordinated action in contexts where hierarchical and market mechanisms are inadequate for addressing complex challenges (Klijn, 2008; Powell et al., 1996; Provan & Kenis, 2008; Rhodes, 1996, 2007). Networks support knowledge exchange, trust-building, collaboration, and resource mobilisation, although their effectiveness is influenced by structural characteristics such as brokerage, centrality, and diversity (Ahuja, 2000; Brass et al., 2004; Provan & Kenis, 2008). Social innovation is conceptualised as a collective and processual phenomenon that emerges through changes in social practices, relationships, and governance arrangements (Domanski et al., 2020; Mair et al., 2023; Phills et al., 2008). Networks advance innovation and social impact by facilitating learning, collaboration, and dissemination (Barrutia & Echebarria, 2019; Kovanen, 2021; Ojo & Mellouli, 2018). Municipalities serve as orchestrators of these processes by facilitating collaboration among public, private, and civil society actors, supporting innovation, and shaping local development through governance, policy, and funding instruments (Baker & Mehmood, 2013; Bock, 2016; Klijn, 2008; Mair et al., 2023).

The role of relationships in driving innovation, social impact, and economic outcomes

Relationships and networks foster innovation, social impact, and economic outcomes by enabling the exchange of information, knowledge, and resources (Pittaway et al., 2004). Trust, cooperation, and network position shape access to knowledge and opportunities, while collaborative exchanges increasingly supplement hierarchical coordination (Ahuja, 2000; Davern, 1997; Iorio, 2022; Thompson, 2018; Weaver, 2009; Xie et al., 2022). These dynamics are especially pertinent

to social innovation and local development. Inter-organisational collaboration facilitates learning, entrepreneurship, and dissemination, establishing networked governance as an economically significant coordination mechanism within the social economy (Morgane Le Pennec & Raufflet, 2018; Siemieniako et al., 2021).

Research gap and analytical framework

This dissertation addressed research gaps at the intersection of social impact, social economy, and networked governance. Existing literature often conceptualises social impact as an outcome rather than a process, under-theorises the role of municipalities as governance actors, and seldom examines municipal social enterprises as actors embedded within governance networks. Research on networked governance for social impact in post-socialist Central European municipal contexts remains limited.

2. Aim and focus of the dissertation

The dissertation sought to identify both opportunities and barriers encountered by active networks of individuals and organisations implementing social innovations to generate social impact, with a specific focus on the role of municipalities and municipal social enterprises in Slovakia. Social impact was defined as an emergent and relational process that develops through interaction, coordination, and learning among multiple actors. Consequently, the research focused on the mechanisms and conditions that facilitate the creation of social impact, rather than on measuring impact outcomes.

The dissertation was structured around four research questions: (1) In what ways do municipalities and municipal social enterprises achieve social impact through networked governance arrangements within the social economy? (2) Which governance mechanisms and participatory practices facilitate the translation of networking into social impact at the local level? (3) How do inter-municipal networks contribute to the dissemination of social innovation and the creation of social impact beyond individual localities? (4) What role do municipal social enterprises play as

institutionalised actors within networked governance systems oriented toward social impact?

The first research question addressed the processes by which social impact emerges within networked governance arrangements. The second examined governance mechanisms and participatory practices, such as coordination, brokerage, and learning. The third analysed dissemination processes across municipalities, including the adoption, adaptation, or rejection of knowledge, practices, and innovations. The fourth investigated how the organisational form, public ownership, and local embeddedness of municipal social enterprises influence their capacity to generate social impact and mediate between governance arrangements and implementation.

3. Methodology of work and research methods

A multi-layered research design was adopted to explain how social impact is created through networked governance arrangements in the social economy. This design was grounded in a process-oriented and relational understanding of governance, conceptualising social impact as an emergent outcome of interaction, coordination, and learning among actors. The research employed an explanatory rather than descriptive approach, focusing on identifying and reconstructing the mechanisms through which networked governance contributed to social impact. Particular attention was given to coordination, brokerage, learning, and dissemination as key governance mechanisms. The study combined qualitative and quantitative elements within a triangulated research framework. Qualitative interviews, documentary analysis, and structured datasets were employed in a complementary manner to strengthen analytical inference. The research design comprised three empirical components. The first component involved a structural analysis of municipal social enterprises in Slovakia to identify the institutional and spatial conditions influencing governance arrangements. The second component consisted of a qualitative case study of Spišský Hrhov, which examined the identification, resolution, and translation of social problems into social impact through local governance practices. The third component entailed an analysis of inter-municipal networks to investigate knowledge exchange, learning, and the

dissemination of practices among municipalities. Collectively, these components established connections among structural conditions, governance practices, and dissemination processes, thereby facilitating the analysis of the creation of social impact as a multi-level governance process.

Structural analysis of municipal social enterprises

The structural analysis utilised data from the Register of Social Enterprises, supplemented by ownership records, Finstat data, and the 2021 Population and Housing Census. This analysis encompassed 142 municipal social enterprises across 140 municipalities and compared them with private social enterprises. Descriptive and spatial analyses, including cluster detection methods, were employed to examine the distribution, organisational characteristics, and territorial patterns of these enterprises. This component established the structural and institutional context in which municipalities and municipal social enterprises functioned as governance actors. One limitation is that the Register of Social Enterprises includes only officially registered entities and does not capture the full extent of social economy activity in Slovakia.

The case study of Spišský Hrhov

This study employed a qualitative case study approach, utilizing the extended case method (Babbie, 2017; Burawoy, 1991; Tavory & Timmermans, 2009). Spišský Hrhov was selected as a theoretically informed revelatory case based on its documented social innovation practices, municipal social entrepreneurship, and the highest concentration of municipal social enterprises in Slovakia within a 20 km radius (Bumalová et al., 2021; Fáziková & Melichová, 2016; Holubová et al., n.d.; Using Economic Activities to Solve Social Challenges in Roma Communities | ROMACT, n.d.). Empirical data were collected through seven semi-structured interviews conducted in September and October 2025 with key stakeholders involved in municipal governance and local development. The interviews explored the identification of social problems, the development of responses, and the implementation of these responses in practice. The interview data were analysed interpretively to reconstruct

governance processes and to identify recurring mechanisms, including coordination, participation, learning, and institutional embedding. Documentary sources supplemented the analysis by providing contextual background. The objective was to achieve analytical, rather than statistical, generalisation by linking observed governance mechanisms to broader theoretical frameworks of networked governance, social innovation, and social impact creation (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Network-oriented analysis

Inter-municipal relations were analysed using survey data collected from municipalities in the vicinity of Spišský Hrhov. The study emphasised interaction patterns, knowledge exchange, dissemination of practices, and the specific roles of municipalities within the network.

Despite the inherent limitations of self-reported data, these sources offered valuable insights into informal relationships and learning processes that are not accessible through administrative records.

Integration of methods, validity and limitations

The three methodological components were combined within a unified analytical framework that connects structural conditions, governance practices, and network dynamics. Structural analysis delineated the empirical field, the case study reconstructed governance processes and mechanisms, and network analysis investigated the dissemination of knowledge and practices among municipalities. The integration of administrative data, interviews, and network data enhanced the robustness of analytical inference and facilitated cross-validation of findings.

4. Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation consists of seven chapters. Following the Introduction, Chapter 1 develops the study's theoretical and conceptual foundations by examining social impact, the social economy, social enterprises, and networked governance, and by presenting the analytical framework. Chapter 2 defines the research aim and research questions. Chapter 3 outlines the methodological design, data sources, and analytical procedures. Chapter 4 analyses the institutional context of the Slovak social

economy and maps the distribution and characteristics of municipal social enterprises. Chapter 5 presents the qualitative case study of Spišský Hrhov and examines networked governance processes in practice. Chapter 6 analyses inter-municipal networks, knowledge exchange, and dissemination processes. Finally, Chapter 7 discusses the findings in relation to the theoretical framework, presents the Model of Social Impact Creation through Networked Governance, and concludes with recommendations for research and practice.

5. The results of the work

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the dissertation, focusing on the structural characteristics of municipal social enterprises, governance processes in Spišský Hrhov, and the role of inter-municipal networks in the creation and dissemination of social impact.

Municipalities and municipal social enterprises in the Slovak social economy

The institutionalisation of the social economy in Slovakia establishes the context for analysing the participation of municipalities and municipal social enterprises in networked governance arrangements. A significant milestone was the adoption of Act No. 112/2018 on Social Economy and Social Enterprises, which formally introduced the concept of the social economy into Slovak legislation and created a legal framework for social enterprises (Brožmanová Gregorová & Murray Svidronova, 2020; Placek et al., 2021; Polačková, 2021; Polonyová & Pongrácz, 2022; Strečanský & Strečanská, 2023). The Act defines social economy entities, regulates registered social enterprises, and establishes support mechanisms administered by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic through the Register of Social Enterprises and regional social-economy centres. These provisions establish institutional conditions that facilitate collaboration, knowledge exchange, and coordination among local actors. Despite these legislative developments, municipal social enterprises remain limited in number, with approximately 5% of Slovak municipalities owning at least one. Their uneven territorial distribution

indicates varying opportunities for interaction, learning, and dissemination across different regions.

Spatial distribution and territorial patterns of municipal social enterprises in Slovakia

A total of 682 registered social enterprises were identified in Slovakia, including 142 municipal social enterprises owned by 140 municipalities. The development of these enterprises was marked by rapid growth after the adoption of Act No. 112/2018 on the Social Economy and Social Enterprises, followed by a period of stabilisation. During the observed period, only two municipal social enterprises were deregistered. All municipal social enterprises were registered as integration enterprises and were predominantly structured as limited liability companies. Ownership and governance were highly concentrated within municipalities, with most enterprises fully owned by local governments and frequently managed by elected municipal representatives.

The spatial distribution of municipal social enterprises was uneven. These enterprises were considerably more prevalent in rural areas than in towns and cities, indicating a stronger role for municipalities in addressing local needs where alternative providers are scarce. In contrast, private social enterprises were more concentrated in urban environments. Municipal social enterprises were also more prominent in structurally disadvantaged regions, although their presence varied substantially even among the least developed districts.

Several significant spatial clusters of municipal social enterprises were identified. The most pronounced concentration occurred in Eastern Slovakia, where 14 municipal social enterprises were located within a 20 km radius of Spišský Hrhov, including Hrhovské služby, s.r.o., the first registered social enterprise in Slovakia. Spatial analysis confirmed that the distribution of municipal social enterprises was non-random and revealed additional clusters in west-central Slovakia and near the Czech border.

The findings suggest that municipal social enterprises constitute a distinct yet relatively small segment of the Slovak social economy, present in approximately 5% of municipalities. Their development has been influenced by institutional support, local conditions, and spatial dynamics. The observed patterns of rural concentration, clustering, and strong

municipal involvement define the structural conditions that facilitate interaction, learning, dissemination, and the emergence of networked governance.

Networked governance in practice: The case of Spišský Hrhov

The municipality of Spišský Hrhov was selected for sustained experience with participatory governance, municipal entrepreneurship, social innovation, and collaboration among diverse actors. The analysis focused on the configuration of actors, governance mechanisms, and the processes through which social impact emerges.

Networked governance in Spišský Hrhov developed in response to challenges such as long-term unemployment, housing issues, and tensions between Roma and non-Roma residents. A participatory strategic planning process, supported by external actors and implemented by the municipality, established conditions for collective problem identification and collaboration. Leadership, trust, community participation, and external connections were key enabling factors, while resource limitations and infrastructure constraints influenced the scope of local action.

The municipality held a central position within the network, serving as the primary orchestrator of interaction and coordination. The municipal social enterprise acted as an institutionalised actor, linking governance and implementation through employment creation and service provision. The network comprised residents, local organisations, educational institutions, and external partners. Governance was structured through both formal and informal relationships, with strong and weak ties facilitating cooperation, knowledge exchange, and access to resources.

Four governance mechanisms were identified. Coordination aligned actors, resources, and activities through participatory planning and ongoing collaboration. Brokerage connected actors across organisational and social boundaries, facilitating access to external resources and knowledge. Learning resulted from experimentation, experience, and adaptation of external practices to local conditions. Dissemination supported the transfer and adaptation of local practices through inter-municipal cooperation, professional networks, and study visits. These mechanisms operated collectively to support collective action.

Social impact was developed through a cumulative process involving problem identification, collaboration, experimentation, institutionalisation, and stabilisation. Participatory processes enabled collective problem definition, while collaboration and experimentation produced locally adapted responses. Successful practices were institutionalised, particularly through the municipal social enterprise, and later stabilised through ongoing implementation and adaptation. This process was gradual, path-dependent, and influenced by local conditions.

The analysis demonstrated that social impact resulted from sustained interaction rather than isolated interventions. Key outcomes included improved employment opportunities, increased social inclusion, strengthened local capacities, and changes in community relations. These developments arose from the combined operation of governance mechanisms and the ongoing involvement of diverse actors. Social impact thus emerged as a relational process embedded within local governance arrangements.

The case study demonstrated that social impact was generated through interactions among the municipality, municipal social enterprises, residents, and external actors within networked governance arrangements. The municipality served as a network orchestrator, while the municipal social enterprise translated governance objectives into operational practice. Coordination, brokerage, learning, and dissemination constituted the core mechanisms that organised collective action and generated social impact. Governance processes remained dependent on leadership, resources, trust, and sustained participation. These findings offered an empirical explanation of how networked governance contributes to the creation of social impact in local social economy contexts.

Inter-municipal networks and the dissemination of social impact creation

This part of the research broadened the scope of analysis from local governance in Spišský Hrhov to inter-municipal relations. It investigated the circulation of knowledge, practices, and social innovations among municipalities and their role in disseminating social impact beyond single localities. The analysis centred on municipalities within a 20 km radius of

Spišský Hrhov, an area that included 14 municipal social enterprises, accounting for approximately 10% of all such enterprises in Slovakia.

The empirical analysis utilised a survey distributed to 80 municipalities, of which 41 responded (response rate 51.25%). The resulting dataset comprised 104 reported inter-municipal ties concerning local development, social inclusion, municipal services, and socially innovative practices. Municipalities and their relationships were analysed as a networked governance system facilitating the circulation of information, knowledge, and experiences.

The network demonstrated low density (0.016) and a fragmented structure. While the largest connected component comprised 49 municipalities, 23 remained isolated. These results suggest that opportunities for interaction and learning were unevenly distributed, with most concentrated within a subset of municipalities. Nevertheless, the presence of a large, connected component enabled indirect knowledge exchange and dissemination across the region.

Centrality measures revealed that several municipalities held structurally significant positions within the network. Levoča was identified as the most central actor, while Spišský Hrhov also held a prominent position, characterised by numerous direct ties and a strong intermediary role. Other municipalities, including Bijacovce and Uloža, served as connectors between different network segments. These positions facilitated information exchange and learning beyond immediate neighbours. Qualitative analysis indicated that inter-municipal interactions were typically recurrent rather than sporadic. Most contacts occurred multiple times per year, with many municipalities reporting monthly or weekly engagement. Learning outcomes were generally moderate to high, suggesting that these relations served as effective channels for knowledge exchange. However, direct adoption of practices was uncommon. Municipalities more often adapted external practices to local contexts, discussed them internally, or used them as inspiration for alternative solutions. Consequently, dissemination primarily occurred through adaptation rather than replication.

Spišský Hrhov held a structurally significant position within the network. Its relatively high degree, betweenness, and eigenvector centrality

demonstrate that it was both well-connected and embedded within the network core, while also linking different network segments. This position enabled active participation in knowledge exchange and dissemination processes extending beyond the local context.

Survey results further underscored the relational dimension of dissemination. Personal relationships among local actors were identified as the primary factor supporting the spread of practices between municipalities. Informal information exchange and occasional consultations were more prevalent than formal long-term partnerships. Respondents also emphasised the significance of leadership, trust, and contextual adaptation. Approaches were considered transferable only when adjusted to local conditions, rather than directly replicated.

The analysis also identified significant barriers to dissemination and cooperation. Municipalities most frequently cited insufficient financial resources, limited personnel capacity, and administrative burden. In contrast, low trust was seldom identified as a major obstacle. These findings indicate that dissemination was constrained primarily by institutional capacity rather than by reluctance to cooperate.

In summary, dissemination within the social economy occurred through selective, relational, and context-dependent processes. Inter-municipal networks served as channels for learning and knowledge exchange, yet the spread of practices depended on network position, leadership, interpersonal relationships, and local capacities. These findings support the dissertation's argument that social impact creation extends beyond individual municipalities through networked governance arrangements that facilitate learning, adaptation, and dissemination.

Discussion

The findings indicate that social impact within the social economy arises from structured interactions embedded in networked governance arrangements, rather than from isolated interventions or solely measurable outputs. Coordination, brokerage, learning, and dissemination shaped the interactions among municipalities, municipal social enterprises, and other actors, thereby supporting the creation of social impact as a relational and processual phenomenon.

This dissertation contributes to debates on social impact by redirecting attention from impact as a measurable end-state to its creation as a governance process. Consistent with process-oriented perspectives (Impact Europe, 2023; Lauronen, 2022), the findings demonstrate that social impact develops incrementally through cooperation, learning, and institutional embedding within governance networks, rather than through isolated intervention. The results further support theories that conceptualise social innovation as a collaborative and networked process (Baker & Mehmood, 2013; Mair et al., 2023; Phills et al., 2008). In Spišský Hrhov, responses to unemployment, housing, and social exclusion emerged through interactions among municipalities, municipal social enterprises, residents, and external organisations. Participatory governance was primarily enacted through routine coordination and repeated engagement, rather than through highly formalised mechanisms.

This dissertation also advances the literature on networked governance by demonstrating that governance effectiveness depends not only on the existence of network ties but also on the quality and continuity of interactions. Although the inter-municipal network was fragmented and relatively sparse, repeated interaction, trust, legitimacy, and brokerage facilitated learning and dissemination. Municipalities occupying central or brokerage positions played a significant role in connecting otherwise weakly linked localities and supporting the circulation of practices.

The findings suggest that dissemination occurred primarily through adaptation rather than direct replication. Municipalities selectively interpreted and adjusted governance approaches to local conditions, indicating that dissemination operated through relational learning and contextual translation rather than uniform policy transfer.

The dissertation repositions municipalities as network orchestrators within local governance systems. In addition to service provision and administration, municipalities functioned as facilitators of cooperation, brokers between sectors, coordinators of local development processes, and providers of legitimacy. Municipal social enterprises emerged not only as employment-generating organisations but also as institutionalised governance actors, enabling municipalities to operationalise and sustain socially innovative practices.

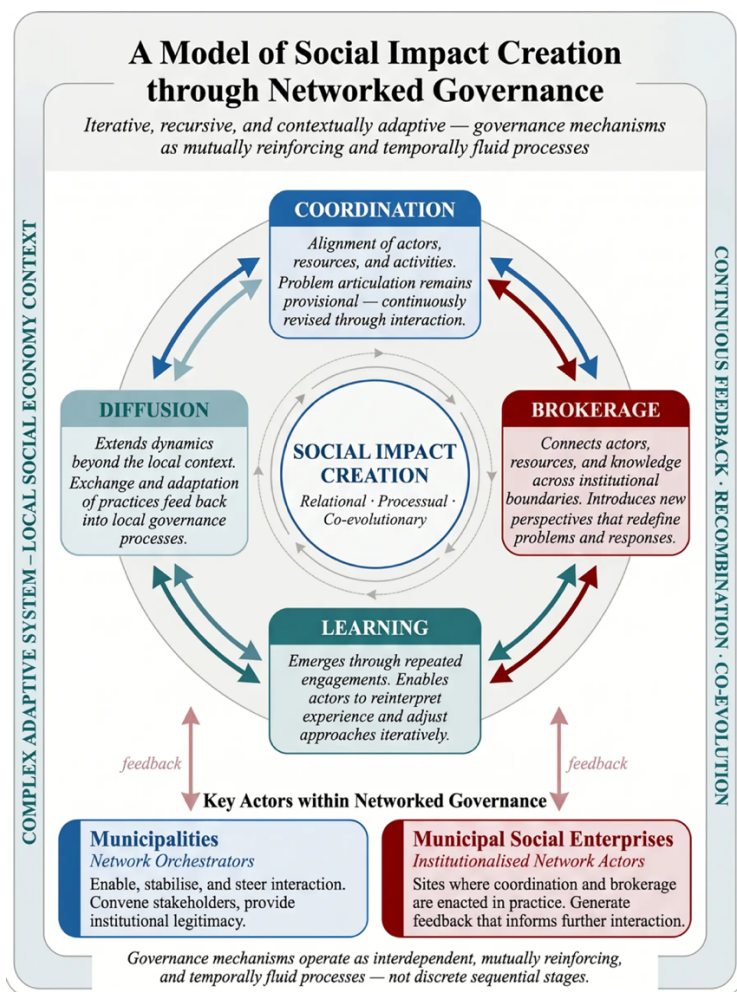


Figure 1 A Model of Social Impact Creation through Networked Governance. Source: Author's own elaboration; visualisation generated with the assistance of Skywork (Skyworks Solutions, Inc., 2026) based on an author-defined prompt

Drawing on the empirical findings, the dissertation developed the Model of Social Impact Creation through Networked Governance (Figure 1). This model conceptualises the creation of social impact as an iterative and

adaptive process that emerges through the interaction of coordination, brokerage, learning, and dissemination mechanisms. Municipalities and municipal social enterprises occupy central positions within these governance arrangements as network orchestrators and institutionalised governance actors.

Several limitations warrant acknowledgement. The research design does not permit causal attribution of measurable impact outcomes to specific governance mechanisms. The analysis may overrepresent municipalities inclined towards cooperation and innovation, while less visible forms of fragmentation or resistance may be underrepresented. Additionally, governance networks did not provide equal access to learning and dissemination opportunities, as municipalities occupying more central positions exercised greater influence than peripheral actors.

In summary, the dissertation demonstrates that the creation of social impact within the social economy is best understood as a networked governance process that operates through interactions among municipalities, municipal social enterprises, residents, and external actors. Social innovation and social impact emerged through participation, learning, brokerage, and institutional embedding, while remaining dependent on local contexts, governance capacities, and leadership. These findings extend existing understandings of networked governance by illustrating that governance relationships themselves constitute a key mechanism through which social impact is created, sustained, and disseminated.

6. Conclusion

The dissertation addressed four research questions. It demonstrated that municipalities and municipal social enterprises create social impact through networked governance arrangements, identified governance mechanisms and participatory practices that enable these processes, showed that dissemination occurs through learning, brokerage, and adaptation within inter-municipal networks, and confirmed the role of municipal social enterprises as institutionalised governance actors linking municipal strategies with practical implementation.

This dissertation contributes to the literature by conceptualising social impact creation as a relational and processual phenomenon, positioning

municipalities as network orchestrators, and demonstrating the governance functions of municipal social enterprises. Drawing on empirical findings, it developed the Model of Social Impact Creation through Networked Governance, which conceptualises coordination, brokerage, learning, and dissemination as iterative and mutually reinforcing processes.

The dissertation further contributes to the field of economics by demonstrating how networked governance supports local development through resource mobilisation, knowledge dissemination, coordination, employment creation, and social inclusion.

Future research should examine governance processes, dissemination mechanisms, and the long-term sustainability of networked governance arrangements in diverse institutional contexts. Comparative and longitudinal studies would provide deeper insights into how social impact is created and sustained over time.

From a practical perspective, the findings underscore the importance of strengthening cooperation, knowledge exchange, and participatory governance within municipalities and the social economy. Municipal social enterprises should be recognised not only as instruments for employment, but also as strategic governance actors that support local development and social innovation.

Overall, this dissertation demonstrates that social impact creation in the social economy is best understood as a networked governance process that emerges through interactions among municipalities, municipal social enterprises, residents, and external actors. Governance relationships constitute a key mechanism through which socially innovative practices are created, embedded, and disseminated across local contexts.

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8. List of published outputs

V2_01 From Overexposure to Exclusion: Rethinking Digitalisation Through an Intergenerational Knowledge Management Lens / Andrea Lelovics. – VEGA 1/0226/23. In: Digital & Sustainable Financial Literacy for Inclusive Social Development: Challenges, Innovations & Impact [elektronický zdroj]: Book of Proceedings: 132nd esd Aveiro 2026 / Review Committee / Recenzentski odbor: Marina Klacmer Calopa, Ana Aleksic ... [et al.]. - Varazdin; Aveiro: Varazdin Development and Entrepreneurship Agency; GOVCOPP - University of Aveiro, 2026. – ISBN 978-953-6125-41-8. - Pp. 30-37. [LELOVICS, Andrea (100%)]

V2_02 Governance Formalisation, Board Diversity, and Social Value Orientation in Slovak Public Enterprises: A Comparative Analysis of State- and Municipally Owned Corporations / Andrea Lelovics. - VEGA 1/0226/23. In: Challenges of Corporate Governance in State-Owned Enterprises: Between Accountability, Efficiency, and Social Value: Book of Proceedings: 14th OFEL Conference 2026 / Editors: Darko Tipuric, Lana Cindric, Davorko Obuljen; Reviewers: Ana Aleksić, Danica Bakotić ... [et al.]. - Varazdin: Varazdin Development and Entrepreneurship Agency; Dubrovnik: University of Dubrovnik, 2026. – ISBN 978-953-6125-42-5. - Pp. 140-149. [LELOVICS, Andrea (100%)]

V2_03 Riešia sociálne podniky nezamestnanosť v menej rozvinutých okresoch a na Slovensku? = Do Social Enterprises Solve Unemployment in Less Developed Districts in Slovakia? / Andrea Lelovics. - VEGA 1/0851/21, VEGA 1/0226/23. In: Sociální politika 2024: budoucnost a proměny trhu práce = Social Policy 2024: The Future and Transformation of the Labor Market: Anthology of Contributions of the Social Policy 2024 International Conference: sborník vědeckých textů z mezinárodní konference Sociální politika 2024 / sborník recenzovali: Vladimír Barák, Lucia Bartůsková ... [et al.]. - Praha: Národohospodářská fakulta VŠE v Praze: Nakladatelství Oeconomica, 2025. - ISBN 978-80-245-2561-7. - S. 28-36. [LELOVICS, Andrea (100%)]

V2_04 Information Flow and Transaction Costs in Social Networks / Andrea Lelovics. - VEGA 1/0851/21. In: Economic and Social Development in Period of Global Instability: Book of Proceedings: Special Issue: Selected Papers: 118th esd Conference; Hosted by: Faculty of Economics, Uzhhorod National University, Ukraine: 119th esd Conference; Hosted by: Lusofona University - Lisbon, Portugal / Review Committee / recenzentski odbor: Sergio L. B. Franca, Marcelo J. Meirino ... [et al.]. - Varazdin; Koprivnica: Varazdin Development and Entrepreneurship Agency: University North, 2024. - ISBN 978-953-6125-21-0. - Pp. 7-14. [LELOVICS, Andrea (100%)]

V3_01 Magyarok a szlovákiai társadalmi innovátorok térképén / Andrea Lelovics. In: Önkéntes szemle [elektronický zdroj]: Elmélet-Gyakorlat-Módszertan = Volunteering Review: Theory-Practice-Method. - Budapest: Alapítvány a Magyar Önkéntesség Fejlesztéséért. - ISSN 2786-0620. - Évf. 5, sz. 1 (2025), o. 150-157. [LELOVICS, Andrea (100%)]

9. Summary

This dissertation investigated the creation of social impact through networked governance arrangements in the social economy, focusing on the roles of municipalities and municipal social enterprises in Slovakia. Utilising qualitative case study research, descriptive analysis, and social network analysis, the research identified governance mechanisms,

participatory practices, and relational processes that facilitate social impact and the diffusion of socially innovative practices across municipalities. The findings advance understanding of social impact as a relational, process-oriented phenomenon that emerges through cooperation, learning, and institutional embeddedness within governance networks.

10. Extended abstract in the Slovak language

Táto dizertačná práca skúmala tvorbu sociálneho dopadu v sociálnej ekonomike prostredníctvom sieťového riadenia, so zameraním na úlohu obcí a obecných sociálnych podnikov na Slovensku. Výskum vychádzal z predpokladu, že sociálny dopad nevzniká izolovane ako výsledok jednotlivých intervencií, ale je formovaný vzťahmi, interakciami a spoluprácou medzi rôznymi aktérmi. Sociálny dopad je preto chápaný ako proces, ktorý sa rozvíja v rámci sietí aktérov zapojených do riešenia spoločenských problémov.

Cieľom tejto dizertačnej práce bolo objasniť vznik sociálneho dopadu v sociálnej ekonomike prostredníctvom sieťového riadenia, so zameraním na úlohu obcí a obecných sociálnych podnikov na Slovensku. Výskum sa sústreďoval na identifikáciu mechanizmov riadenia, participačných praktík a vzťahových procesov, ktoré podporujú tvorbu sociálneho dopadu na miestnej úrovni, ako aj na analýzu šírenia sociálnych inovácií a skúseností medzi samosprávami.

Teoretická časť práce čerpala z literatúry o sociálnej ekonomike, sociálnych inováciách, sociálnom dopade, sieťach a sieťovom riadení. Osobitná pozornosť bola venovaná konceptualizácii sociálneho dopadu ako relačného a procesného fenoménu. Na rozdiel od prístupov zameraných na meranie výsledkov sa práca sústreďovala na mechanizmy a procesy, ktoré vedú k tvorbe sociálneho dopadu. Sieťové riadenie bolo definované ako forma koordinácie založená na spolupráci, dôvere, zdieľaní znalostí a spoločnom riešení problémov.

Metodologický prístup práce bol založený na triangulácii dát a metód. Boli využité administratívne údaje o registrovaných sociálnych podnikoch, dokumentová analýza, kvalitatívne rozhovory a dotazníkový prieskum medzi obcami. Kvalitatívna časť výskumu bola realizovaná prostredníctvom teoreticky informovanej prípadovej štúdie obce Spišský

Hrhov, analyzovanej rozšírenou prípadovou metódou. Kvantitatívna časť zahŕňala deskriptívnu analýzu obecných sociálnych podnikov na Slovensku a prvky analýzy sociálnych sietí zamerané na vzťahy medzi obcami v regióne Spišského Hrhova.

Výsledky výskumu potvrdzujú, že obce zohrávajú kľúčovú úlohu pri tvorbe sociálneho dopadu nielen poskytovaním služieb a výkonom verejnej správy, ale aj ako koordinátori, facilitátori a sprostredkovatelia spolupráce medzi rôznymi aktérmi. Sociálny dopad vzniká prostredníctvom kombinácie participačných procesov, miestneho líderstva, budovania dôvery, spoločného učenia a schopnosti prepájať rôzne zdroje a záujmy.

Výskum identifikoval obecné sociálne podniky ako významných inštitucionalizovaných aktérov sociálnej ekonomiky. Tieto podniky neplnia iba funkciu zamestnávania alebo poskytovania služieb, ale pôsobia aj ako organizačné mechanizmy umožňujúce dlhodobé ukotvenie sociálnych inovácií v miestnom prostredí. Obecné sociálne podniky prepájajú logiku verejnej správy, sociálnej ekonomiky a podnikateľského prístupu, čím podporujú stabilizáciu a rozvoj inovatívnych riešení sociálnych problémov. Analýza registrovaných sociálnych podnikov na Slovensku identifikovala 682 subjektov, z ktorých 142 bolo vo vlastníctve obcí. Výsledky poukazujú na výraznú koncentráciu obecných sociálnych podnikov vo vidieckych oblastiach a identifikujú tri geografické klastre ich výskytu. Približne päť percent slovenských obcí vlastnilo aspoň jeden registrovaný sociálny podnik. Tieto zistenia potvrdzujú, že obecné sociálne podniky sa stali významnou súčasťou rozvoja sociálnej ekonomiky, najmä vo vidieckom prostredí.

Výskum medzimestských a medziobecných vzťahov ukázal, že šírenie sociálnych inovácií medzi samosprávami prebieha najmä prostredníctvom vzťahového učenia, výmeny skúseností a opakovaných interakcií. Úspešné riešenia neboli mechanicky preberané, ale prispôbované miestnym podmienkam jednotlivých obcí. Kľúčovú úlohu zohrávali centrálné postavené obce, ktoré dokázali prepájať rôzne časti siete a sprostredkovať prenos poznatkov a skúseností.

Práca rozširuje poznatky o tvorbe sociálneho dopadu v sociálnej ekonomike z pohľadu sieťového riadenia. Prispieva k teoretickej diskusii interpretáciou sociálneho dopadu ako relačného a procesného javu

vznikajúceho v rámci sietí spolupráce. Zároveň poskytuje nové poznatky o úlohe obcí a obecných sociálnych podnikov ako aktérov sociálnej ekonomiky a prináša empirické poznatky o mechanizmoch šírenia sociálnych inovácií medzi samosprávami.

Na základe získaných poznatkov možno konštatovať, že tvorba sociálneho dopadu je výsledkom komplexných procesov spolupráce a učenia medzi aktérmi. Efektívne usporiadania sieťového riadenia, založené na dôvere, participácii, líderstve a zdieľaní poznatkov, vytvárajú podmienky pre vznik a šírenie sociálnych inovácií. Obce a obecné sociálne podniky v tomto procese predstavujú kľúčových aktérov, ktorí dokážu prepájať lokálne potreby s dostupnými zdrojmi a prispievať k riešeniu spoločenských problémov na miestnej aj širšej úrovni.