

In my research, I explored how Catholic Social Teaching (CST) can contribute to strengthening social cohesion in Slovakia. Social cohesion refers to the bonds that hold human groups together and the degree of connectedness and solidarity among members of a society. It acts as a “social glue,” encompassing various dimensions such as mutual trust, willingness to cooperate, and readiness to make sacrifices for the common good. In Slovakia, social cohesion is often measured through levels of horizontal and vertical trust. Horizontal trust refers to trust among members of a community - such as family, neighbours, colleagues, or even strangers. Vertical trust, on the other hand, refers to trust in public institutions, including state authorities, academic institutions, banks, non-governmental organizations, media, and Church institutions. According to the World Values Survey¹, horizontal trust in Slovakia is generally very low and has fluctuated between 21% and 26% since the fall of communism.² Slovakia ranks at the lower end of Europe within the Visegrad group, followed by the Balkan countries and the states of the former Yugoslavia. In contrast, the Scandinavian countries exhibit the highest levels of horizontal trust.³ As of 2024, only 21,30% of Slovaks agreed that most people can be trusted, indicating a concerning level of social fragmentation.⁴ Low vertical trust in political institutions - such as the government, political parties, and parliament - stands at just 18,90%, highlighting low social cohesion. In contrast, non-state institutions such as NGOs, universities, and banks enjoy significantly higher levels of trust, at 63,8 %.⁵ Through studying CST, I came to understand the importance of key principles such as solidarity, the common good, participation, and values such as truth and justice in fostering social cohesion. The Church has long empowered families and local communities, acting as a unifying force in society. Through its teachings and activities, the Church fosters social cohesion by promoting horizontal cohesion - through healthy family life and strong local communities - and

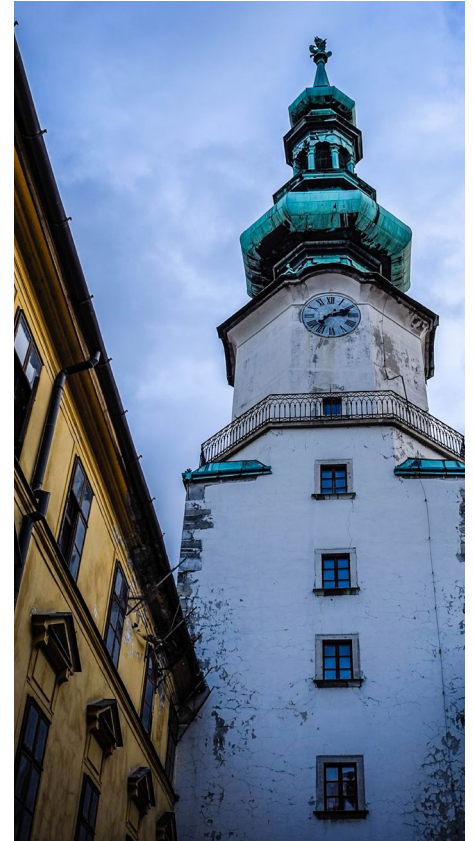
vertical cohesion - by encouraging personal initiative and active participation in cultural, economic, social, and political life. Dialogue and encounter - central themes of Pope Francis’ pontificate - are essential for rebuilding social cohesion in an increasingly polarized and individualistic world. The synodal journey initiated by Pope Francis serves as a model not only for the Church but also for society at large. Synodality, understood as shared prayer and walking together, especially with those on the margins, presents both a challenge and an opportunity to renew the spirit of community and solidarity in our time. In an increasingly secularized and fragmented society, the key challenge will be to build bridges and implement the synodal process across diverse social groups.

Beyond academic enrichment, I am grateful for the visits to the dicasteries and various embassies to the Holy See that were part of the program. Gaining a glimpse behind the walls of the Vatican - into the inner workings of the dicasteries and organizations - I came to appreciate the depth of the wisdom that Christianity offers to today’s polarized society. I hope to contribute to this mission in some way. Let us see what plans the Lord has for me.

Finally, I feel deep gratitude for having been in Rome during such a significant time for the Church in the spring of 2025. The Jubilee Year, the funeral of Pope Francis, the conclave, and the first pontifical week of Pope Leo XIV profoundly deepened my devotion to the Catholic Church and its universality. The beauty of the Eternal City gradually transformed my initial dislike of its chaos into genuine admiration and affection. In conclusion, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my professors and peers who accompanied me on this journey. The CREATE Toolbox experience was a unique moment in my life - a meaningful puzzle piece in the mosaic of my professional vocation and personal development.

Social Cohesion in Slovakia

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NOTES

1. World Values Survey: Q57 *Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?*, <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV7.jsp>
2. DEKK Inštitút, Trendy nedôvery 2025, chrome-extension://efaidnbmn-nnibpcajpcgglefindmkaj/<https://www.dekk.institute/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/dekk-report-trendy-nedover-2025-rev2.pdf>
3. <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/self-reported-trust-attitudes>
4. DEKK Inštitút, Trendy nedôvery 2025, chrome-extension://efaidnbmn-nnibpcajpcgglefindmkaj/<https://www.dekk.institute/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/dekk-report-trendy-nedover-2025-rev2.pdf>
5. Kosnáč a Hugo Gloss (eds), Súdržnosť na Slovensku: Čo drží krajinu pokoje a na čom sa rozpadá?, Bratislava: DEKK Inštitút, 2023