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## The Case of 'Trust' – Research on Social Capital in V4 Countries

Iveta Kovalčíková & Martin Lačný\*

### Abstract

The purpose of this article is first to discuss the basic theoretical approaches used to interpret the concept of trust in the context of social capital and then to present the results of research conducted on trust. The analysis concentrates on elements related to trust in the literature, reflecting the methodological approaches for assessing and measuring trust. In theoretically conceptualising trust, we generally adopt Hardin's explanations (1991, 2002a, 2002b, 2006), which are then used as an interpretational framework for our research results. The paper mainly analyses and interprets subjective conceptual mental maps of trust developed on the basis of associations obtained in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia using the Associative Group Analysis Technique. The participants were management and economics students and there were 100 of them in each country (50 female and 50 male; 50 from each capital – Prague, Budapest, Warsaw and Bratislava; 50 from a smaller town in each country – Ostrava, Szeged, Olsztyn and Prešov). Altogether 400 students in four countries completed the tasks. In this article, we mainly present the results relating to the Slovak section of the research sample.

**Keywords:** social capital, trust, elements of trust, trustworthiness, AGA technique.

### Introduction

The role of social capital in economic activities is a recent and rapidly growing research area in economics and social sciences. Political scientists, psychologists, sociologists and philosophers are all concerned with social capital as a social phenomenon. Despite the growing number of attempts to produce a conceptual analysis, there is still no single definition of 'social capital'. The terms usually used to define this concept are *cooperative norms* (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993a; 1993b, 2000; Knack & Keefer, 1997), *trust* (Putnam, 1993a, 1993b; Knack & Keefer 1997), and *networks* that allow people to act collectively (Putnam, 1993a, 1993b, 2000; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000; Sobel, 2002). However, most definitions include one or more of the following concepts: networks, cooperative norms, trust, and associational activity (Baliamoune-Lutza, 2011; McLeod, 2014). The empirical literature on social capital emphasises networks, associational activity (Putnam, 1993a, 1993b, 2001) and trust (Knack & Keefer, 1997) as indicators of social capital.

Trust is an often used and frequently studied indicator of social capital. For example, Knack and Keefer (1997), Whiteley (2000), Zak and Knack (2001), Calderón et al. (2001), and Dearmon and Grier (2009) all use the trust variable used in World Values Survey 2 (WVS). Putnová and Seknička (2007) assume that trust, together with responsibility, forms one of three key segments of the Euro-American value system for economic practices. These values are considered important motivators of economic behaviour, the foundation of all contractual relations that create the conditions for fair competition as one of the essential components of the market mechanism. Knack and Keefer (1997) show that the indicator of trust correlates strongly with income. Using cross-sectional data from 48 countries over the period 1980-1994, Calderón et al. (2002) show that trust is correlated with financial depth

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and efficiency, and with stock market development. Zak and Knack (2001) find that social capital in the form of trust promotes economic growth. On the other hand, Woolcock (2001) argues that social capital is a consequence of trust. In either case, it seems that trust can serve as an adequate indicator of social capital since we are not concerned here with whether social capital causes trust or vice versa. Research by Brouwer (2014) shows the coherence of several theoretical variables (risk, accountability, encapsulated interest, autonomy, reciprocity, credentials, performance and context) that constitute trust as a socially constructed, multidimensional phenomenon.

The results presented in this study form part of a more complex research project carried out in the Visegrad Four countries (V4). The aim of this research was to examine the social capital of economics and management students from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia as a predictor of effective economic cooperation between future V4 economists. As well as dealing with other areas, the research focussed on these components of social capital: competitiveness, cooperation, responsibility and trust.<sup>1</sup> These components were examined using various research methods and techniques in separate research stages. One of the methods used was the Associative Group Analysis Technique (AGA). In this article, we focus on partial data obtained using AGA and related to one of the studied concepts – trust. First, we intend to discuss the basic theoretical approaches used to interpret the concept of trust as one of the key components of social capital and then to present the results of research conducted on trust. Subsequently, we analyse and interpret subjective conceptual mental maps of trust developed on the basis of respondent associations obtained in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia using the Associative Group Analysis technique. Analysis of other examined aspects of social capital in students of economics and management will be the subject of other publications.

## Concept of trust

There are many uses of the term 'trust'. It is seen in terms of a social construct and an element of social reality. Although some authors write about forms of trust that are not interpersonal, including 'institutional trust' (i.e. trust in institutions; see, e.g., Potter 2002, Govier 1997), trust in government (Hardin, 2002b), and 'self-trust' (Govier, 1993; Lehrer, 1997; Foley, 2001; McLeod, 2002; Goering, 2009), most would agree that these forms of 'trust' are coherent only when they share important features of, or can be modeled on, interpersonal trust. Thus, we agree with Carolyn McLeod, who assumes that the dominant paradigm through which trust is interpreted is an interpersonal one (McLeod, 2014).

The framework we use to interpret the results of our empirical research is Hardin's conceptualisation of trust, which is the focus of the following part of this article. According to Hardin (2002a, b; 2006), there are essentially *three distinct concepts of trust* in the current literature.

The first concept is known as *the encapsulated interest account* and is grounded in the assumption that the potentially trusted person has an interest in maintaining a relationship with the truster. This interest gives the potentially trusted person an incentive to be trustworthy – the trusted person counts my interests as his or her own qua my interests (see Hardin, 1991; 2002b; 2006; Mazur, 2002). The concept of encapsulated interest requires a mechanism through which a person's interests are encapsulated. There are three common mechanisms that can encapsulate interests. They are illustrated in the following example: we are in an ongoing relationship that I want to maintain because 1) it is valuable to me; 2) I love you or consider you my friend; and 3) I value my general reputation, which could be harmed if I am untrustworthy in my dealings with you.

<sup>1</sup> Research was carried out in cooperation with Marta Fülöp – leader of the research team (Hungarian Academy of Science, Hungary), Beata Krzywosc-Rynkiewicz (University of Warmia and Mazury, Poland) and Jelena Petrucijova (University of Ostrava, Czech Republic).

The second and third concepts of trust ground the trustworthiness of the potentially trusted person *in moral commitments*. These conceptualisations rely on the trusted person's disposition to be a kind of person who maintains trust.

All three of the extant standard conceptions are therefore cognitive; they all depend on assessments of the trustworthiness of the potentially trusted person (Hardin, 2006). To put it differently, *if trust is cognitive*, once we have relevant knowledge of someone's moral commitments, psychological disposition or character, or someone's encapsulation of our interests, that knowledge constitutes our degree of trust or distrust. To say we trust someone means that we know or think we know relevant things about this person, especially about his or her motivations toward us (see, e.g., Sztompka, 1999 as mentioned in Hardin, 2006; McLeod, 2014).

## Assessing and measuring trust

Analysis of approaches to empirical research on trust indicates that there are three conceptual frameworks or levels within which the phenomenon of trust can be examined:

- 1) The methodological level/methodological approach – within this level it is possible to identify various methodological preferences in research on the concept.
- 2) The content level – within this level there are different approaches associated with the variability in the operational definitions of the concept examined (e.g., trust and derived terms). Approaches may vary as to whether they address the exploration of trust at the micro (interpersonal) or macro (institutional) level.
- 3) The level of theoretical and scientific approaches that act as a prism through which to survey trust – interpretational poles of, for instance, sociology, psychology or economics serve as the different filters through which trust is interpreted and surveyed.

**The methodological level – preferred methods of data collection.** Empirical metrics capture the value of trust by exploring people's behaviour or introspection to determine the perceived or expressed level of trust. These methods combine: theoretical background (determining what they use to measure it), a defined set of questions, and statistical processing of results. The findings of empirical measurement are essential to verifying the hypothesis and serve as the ultimate reference point in simulating human confidence in artificial environments. Surveys and experimental games are most frequently used as empirical metrics in researching trust.

Surveys capture the level of trust through both observation and introspection but do not involve experiments. Respondents usually provide answers to a set of questions or statements, and the responses are set out on a Likert scale, for example. Differentiating factors are 1) the underlying theoretical background against which the questions are formulated; and 2) contextual relevance. Surveys represent the most common way of measuring trust, at least at the societal level. This raises questions about the limits of current survey evidence for enhancing our understanding of the behavioural manifestations of trust.

Apart from directly asking people whether they trust (as surveys do), attempts to measure trust also involve game experiments. Economic 'trust games' are popularly used to empirically quantify trust in relationships under laboratory conditions (see, e.g., Fehr, Kirchsteiger & Riedl, 1993, Cook & Cooper, 2003; Cook, Hardin & Levi, 2005). The classic version of the game of trust is described in Berg, Dickhaut and McCabe (1995) as an abstracted investment game involving an investor and a broker. Trust is taken to be an important independent variable, although sometimes trust itself is the object of explanation. In relation to the reliability of experimental games seeking to explore the concept of trust, Hardin (2006) notes: if experiments on trust are to give us measures of trust as encapsulated interest or of any other standard concept of trust, they will have to include more of the knowledge

and motivations of the players. None of the results from such experiments can help us test for the encapsulated interest, psychological disposition, or moral commitment views of trustworthiness. It is remarkable that the vast body of experimental games and most survey research have not been driven by a theoretical concept of trust.

**The content level – preferences and problems in the operative definitions of trust and related elements surveyed – current research on trust.** As mentioned, recent research on trust has primarily been based on game experiments and surveys. The literature on experiments deals mostly with individual-level trust in other individuals, usually in dyadic interactions. This kind of research typically tests subjects' tendency to cooperate with each other, and trust is inferred from cooperative moves in games. Surveys have generally focused on citizens' stances toward government and other institutions, although some of them also address individual trust in others, often in the supposed general other (under the label *generalised or social trust*). The earliest research on the psychology of trusting was presented in the work of Rotter (1967; 1971; 1980).

There are two issues that survey research of trust typically focuses on:

- 1) levels of interpersonal trust, and
- 2) levels of so-called trust in government.

As with the experimental games research, the feature of survey work on interpersonal trust and trust in government is that the notion of trust is left untheorised. It is the respondent, not the social scientist, who implicitly defines it.

**The level of theoretical and scientific approaches as prisms through which to survey trust (sociology, psychology, economics as a filter for surveying trust).** Sociology is concerned with the position and role of trust in social systems. It tends to focus on two distinct views: the macro view of social systems and the micro view of individual social actors (where it meets social psychology). Similarly, views on trust follow this dichotomy. A behavioural approach to trust is usually assumed (Coleman, 1991) in which the actions of social actors can be measured, and subsequently trust can be statistically modelled. This systemic approach can be contrasted (Castelfranchi & Falcone, 2000) with studies on social actors and their decision-making processes. We anticipate that if we can understand these processes, then we will be able to explain (and model) how trust emerges.

In *psychology*, trust refers to a belief that the person we trust will do what is expected. Trust begins in the family and then spreads further. According to the psychoanalyst Erik Erikson, developing basic trust is the first stage in psychosocial development which occurs, or fails to occur, during the first two years of life. If it is successful, the result is feelings of security, trust, and optimism, while failure produces an insecure and distrustful outlook.<sup>2</sup> The 'psychology filter' conveys various points of view on the problem of social capital. Trust is sought as an integral part of social influence: it is easier to influence or persuade someone who is trusting. An increasing amount of research has delved into the notion of trust and its social implications (see, e.g., Colquitt, Scott & Lepine, 2007).

Trust in *economics* is seen as a way of explaining differences in human behaviour and behaviour in terms of the individual's desire to maximise utility. Trust is also seen as an economic lubricant, reducing the cost of transactions, enabling new forms of cooperation and generally furthering business activities, employment and prosperity. This observation, according to Fukuyama (1995), created significant interest in considering trust as a form of social capital and has led researchers to a closer understanding of the processes involved in the creation and distribution of social capital. It has been claimed that a higher level of social trust correlates positively with economic development (see e.g. Woolcock, 1998). There is also an interest in economics towards quantifying trust, usually in monetary terms. The level of correlation between an increase in profit margin or decrease in transactional cost can be used as an indicator of the economic value of trust (Resnick, 2006).

2 Stages of Social-Emotional Development – Erik Erikson. Retrieved from <http://www.childdevelopmentinfo.com/development/erickson.shtml>

Hardin (2006; 2002b) persuasively argues that most of the current research on social capital and on trust, using gaming and surveys, does not provide clear accounts of what is actually being measured in terms of *trust*. Yet, there are many studies of people's actual views that are based on in-depth interviews rather than mere responses to survey items. Many of these studies suggest that the views vary enormously. People give very different accounts of what they mean by trust and there is perhaps even greater variety in academic views on what trust is. In most of the academic research, trust is a term that is used as loosely as it is in the vernacular, where its meanings are many, varied, and often opaque. Trust is, therefore, treated as an atheoretical term. It is, for example, all of the things that survey respondents think it is.

## Research on social capital in the Visegrad 4 context: the case of 'trust'

### Goal, method, participants

The main goal of this more comprehensive comparative research<sup>3</sup> conducted in Central Europe was to examine *social capital* in relation to *cooperation*, *competition*, *trust* and *responsibility* in the Visegrad countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia). The Visegrad Four countries (V4) share common historical, economic and social experiences, strengthened by their geographic proximity, which are crucial in terms of the need and opportunity to cooperate and compete effectively in business. Competing in a cooperative way requires mutual trust and responsibility and is based on the established social capital within the region (see, e.g., Gambetta, 2000; Dudinský & Dudinská, 2002; Beugelsdijk & Van Schaik, 2005; Remišová & Lašáková, 2014). As presented by Beilmann and Lilleoja (2015), the Social Trust Index in all V4 countries achieves a level between 4 and 5, which means the V4 countries achieve (despite minor differences) a comparable level of social trust. The research problem we set within this framework (as we stated above – of more comprehensive comparative research conducted in Central Europe) is encapsulated by the research question: *What is the quality of social capital in the V4 countries?* Social capital was operatively defined using four concepts: *cooperation*, *competition*, *responsibility* and *trust*. In this article, we present partial data from the research. We focus on one of the concepts in particular – trust. Our main intention was to detect:

- 1) How young people, future economists, managers and business professionals conceptualise the notion of trust,
- 2) What similarities and differences can be found in the meaning of trust among the Visegrad countries respondents.

The intention of the research presented in this study was to gain understanding and insight into the subtle and various ways in which respondents perceive the concept of trust. On the basis of understanding gained in this stage of research, the following research questions for further research into social capital in V4 countries were generated.

### Method

The main method used to determine the subjective meanings of trust was the AGA technique (Associative Group Analysis technique) (Szalay & Brent, 1967). This method is used in cross-cultural research and has proved to be successful in pinpointing cultural similarities and differences in the

3 Project 13084-2007 IVF 'Social capital within the Visegrad context: cooperation and competition seen by the future generation of business people'. Research was carried out in cooperation with Marta Fülöp – leader of the research team (Hungarian Academy of Science, Hungary), Beata Krzywosc-Rynkiewicz (University of Warmia and Mazury, Poland) and Jelena Petrucijova (University of Ostrava, Czech Republic). Data used in this study were collected as follows: Slovak Republic: Iveta Kovalcikova, Hungary: Marta Fülöp, Poland: Beata Krzywosc-Rynkiewicz, Czech Republic: Jelena Petrucijova.

representation of different social phenomena (e.g., Pecjak, Farkas & Plichtová, 1994). The Associative Group Analysis technique (AGA) was developed by Lorand Szalay in the late 1960s. It uses continuous free word associations to assess and compare the dispositions of different groups of respondents. Szalay and his associates initially used AGA to compare people from different countries and cultures, including Korea, Mexico, Iran, and the United

States; more recently he has developed the technique to compare those who abuse drugs with those who do not (Grenard, 2002). The approach has also been used to track changes in beliefs and perceptions towards managerial-enterprise concepts in Poland (Mroczkowski, Linowes & Nowak, 2002) and towards socialism in Slovenia and other countries (Pecjak, Farkas & Plichtova, 1994). Ross, Kuscer, Fülöp, Read, Pucko, Berkics, Hutchings, and Sándor (2004) applied AGA to search for teachers' understandings of citizenship and enterprise in Hungary, Slovenia and the UK. AGA is non-reactive: it measures perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs without directly asking the participants to identify these characteristics. During the assessment, participants have one minute to write down any words that come to their minds in free association in response to stimulus words ('themes') that are provided. The vocabulary that they use in the free associations is assumed to be a reflection of the person's dispositions. Analysis of the associations is done by scoring common responses, grouping similar responses, and calculating several measures as described by Szalay et al. (1999).

In our research, the stimulus word given was TRUST, and the respondents had to independently write as many free associations as they could within one minute. The associations were scored, based on the order in which the response was given: earlier responses were seen as more closely associated with the stimulus word and judged to carry more meaning. The words (associations) were scored (weighted) as follows. The first word – the immediate response – received a score of six, the second five, and the third four. The fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh words each received a score of three. The eighth and ninth words scored two points each. The tenth and all subsequent words scored just one point. Once each word was weighted it was categorised. Words with similar meanings were put together to form a category (Szalay calls this process content analysis). The total weight of the category was then calculated along with its percentage of all the associations (100 %). Thus, the significance of the different categories of meaning can be compared, as this method reveals the power, density and constraints of trust among respondents, though the interpretation of a word might be context dependent.

AGA assumes a close relationship between people's subjective understandings and their behaviour. The verbal associations are determined largely by a decoding of meaning reaction.

We can justify using this research method for examining the notion of trust as an element of social capital as follows:

- 1) As stated above, Hardin (2006; 2002b) points out that most of the current research on social capital and on trust, using empirical metrics, represented by gaming and surveys, does not provide clear accounts of what is actually being measured in terms of *trust*.
- 2) The method focuses on constructing mental maps. The mental map of the studied phenomenon (trust) consists of free associations. Free associations used as a projective technique (to project the internal 'world' of the person) are assumed to be a reflection of the person's dispositions. The method measures perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs without directly asking the participants to identify these characteristics. The words people use reflect not only their cognitions, but also their affections and behavioural intentions. In other words, the verbal tools people use reflect their thinking or feeling. Thinking, or more precisely the cognitive process, together with feeling, guides most of human behaviour. By using AGA, we are able to understand how different groups organise and integrate their perceptions and understandings.

Of course, to understand differences in psychological meaning across cultures, it is useful to analyse words in a language. For this reason, the research team is made up of researchers from all the V4 countries. Scoring and subsequent categorisation of terms was carried out together with the

qualitative analysis of terms, taking account of any culturally determined semantic shifts in meaning that may be felt by Czech, Hungarian, Polish and Slovak respondents. The Hungarian language belongs to a language group that is quite different from the Polish, Czech and Slovak languages, while the differences between these three Slavonic languages do not tend to cause significant semantic distinctions. Nevertheless, regarding the specific formulations of our respondents, we do not find this language impact as crucial in the case of most associations presented by Hungarian respondents. In addition, as part of the analysis of terms, all words/associations of respondents in the group discussion were first translated into English and then categorised.

## Participants

The research was conducted in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. The participants were 100 management and economics students from each country (50 female and 50 male; 50 from each capital – Prague, Budapest, Warsaw and Bratislava; 50 from a smaller town in each country – Ostrava, Szeged, Olsztyn and Prešov). Altogether 400 students in the four countries completed the task. In this article, we present the results relating mainly to the Slovak section of the research sample. The Slovak research sample consisted of 25 male and 25 female students from the University of Economics in Bratislava, and 25 male and 25 female students from the University of Prešov, all of whom were studying for an MA in management.

## Research results

The main part of our article deals with the analysis and interpretation of subjective conceptual mental maps of *trust* developed on the basis of the associations. As mentioned above, the main method used to determine the subjective meanings of trust was the AGA technique (Szalay & Brent, 1967). As Table 1 shows, the overall number of associations relating to trust (in the Slovak sample) was 419, which means that each respondent provided an average of 4.19 associations for the word *trust*. The total weight of associations obtained was 1,771. The lowest average number of associations was produced by women from the smaller town (Prešov).

The weighted associations (in total 419 words) were grouped into categories on a semantic basis. We then used the semantic analysis to create 9 categories, some of which were divided into subcategories. The categories and subcategories for trust are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

As Table 2 shows, the percentage of associations with the greatest weight in descending order relating to trust refer to: *the relationship as a social category* (26.5%), *the characteristics of the trustworthy person* (17.29%), *pro-social behaviour* (12.72%). For the sake of clarity, we also provide the distribution of the individual categories for trust within the Slovak sample in Figure 1.

We can also identify particular associations with the highest weight. They were as follows: *identical goal* (total weight 86), *partner* (total weight 79), *reliability* (total weight 66), *certainty* (total weight 57), and *friendship* (total weight 53).

When analysing the weight of the categories of trust and comparing respondents from Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic (Table 3, Figure 2),<sup>4</sup> we noted a salient difference. Polish perceptions and the associations they made in the trust categories mainly relate to the features of a trustworthy person, the type of relationship and pro-social behaviour when compared with Slovak, Hungarian and Czech respondents. We also noted a higher weight of associations relating to market/economy/work among the Slovak and Hungarian respondents. We can deduce that the Hungarian and Slovak respondents extended their perceptions of the relations of trust beyond close personalised contacts to the work environment.

4 When interpreting the results of the research, we use two ways of visualising the data: tables that give precise figures and charts which are more illustrative.



**Table 1:** The number of associations, the average number of associations and the total weight of the associations for the word 'trust' in Slovakia

Respondents	Number of respondents	Number of associations	Average number of associations	Weight of associations
Slovakia male capital	25	111	4.44	477
Slovakia male town	25	105	4.2	441
Slovakia female capital	25	111	4.44	475
Slovakia female town	25	92	3.68	378
Slovakia total	100	419	4.19	1,771

Source: authors' calculation

**Table 2:** The distribution of the weighted associations among the different categories in percentages. Categories / subcategories (Slovak sample)

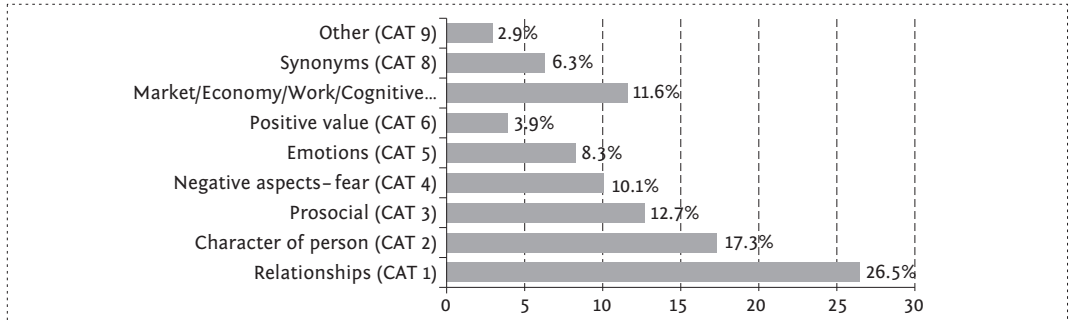
Categories	Prc.
Relationships (CAT 1)	26.50%
Close	10.54%
Distant	15.95%
Character of person (CAT 2)	17.29%
Moral	6.52%
Reliable	10.77%
Pro-social (CAT 3)	12.72%
Cooperation	5.91%
Helping /Sharing	1.84%
Positive acknowledgement of the other	4.96%
Negative aspects – fear (CAT 4)	10.10%
Immorality	0.02%
Fears/Danger	9.65%
Emotions (CAT 5)	8.25%
Positive value (CAT 6)	3.93%
Market/Economy/Work/Cognitive aspects (CAT 7)	11.62%
Synonyms (CAT 8)	6.30%
Other (CAT 9)	2.94%

Source: authors' calculation

**Table 3:** The distribution of associations among the different categories in percentages. Categories / subcategories, comparison of Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic

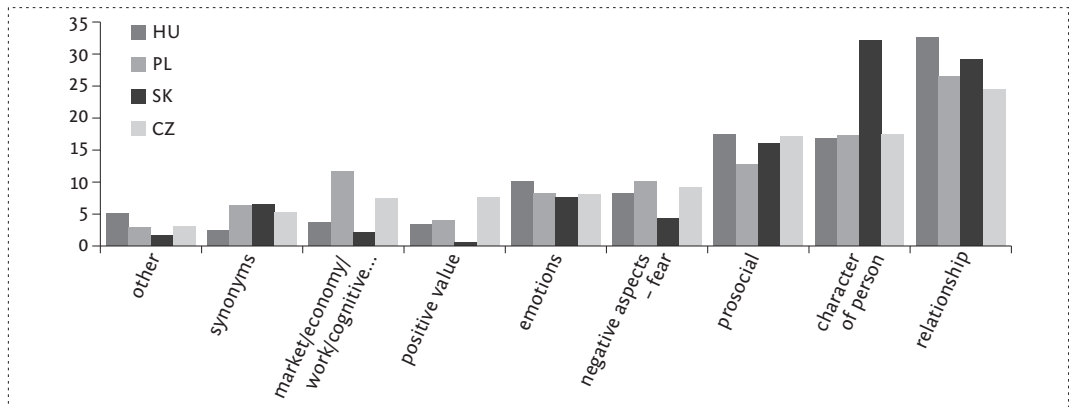
Category	HU	PL	SK	CZ
Relationships	24.5	29.16	26.5	32.6
Characteristics of person	17.5	32.15	17.29	16.83
Pro-social	17.17	15.95	12.72	17.45
Negative aspects – fear	9.1	4.24	10.1	8.26
Emotions	8.1	7.65	8.25	10.07
Positive value	7.6	0.5	3.93	3.37
Market/Economy/Work/Cognitive aspects	7.5	2.14	11.62	3.75
Synonyms	5.2	6.48	6.3	2.5
Other	3	1.67	2.94	5.13

Source: authors' calculation



**Figure 1:** Categories of associations for the word 'trust'. Slovak sample, %

Source: authors' calculation



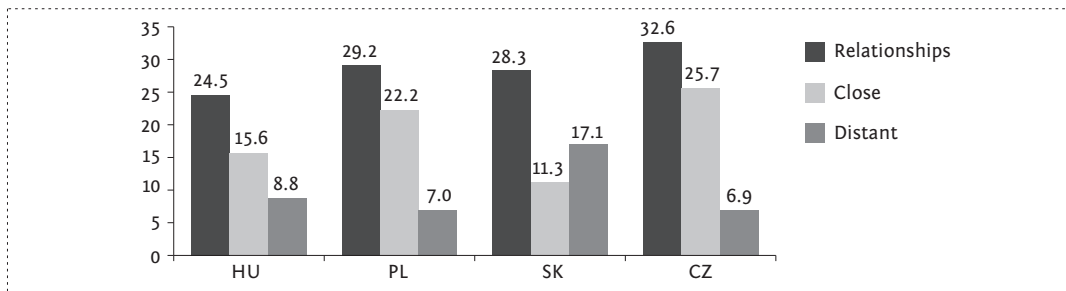
**Figure 2:** The distribution of associations among the different categories in percentages. Categories / subcategories, comparison of Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic

Source: authors' calculation

### A) Relationship (close/distant) as the basis of trust

Conceptually, since trust is a social construct, it can be attributed to relationships within and between social groups (families, friends, communities, organisations, companies, nations, etc.). In a social context, trust has several connotations. One of the basic connotations or attributes that exist alongside the determinants of trust as a form of social behaviour is a relationship or social relationship. If we think about trust/distrust, it is always as part of a 'relationship' with someone on the micro or macro level. As stated by Hardin (2006), we trust only those with whom we have a rich enough relationship to judge them trustworthy, and even then we trust only over certain ranges of actions. It is, therefore, possible to say that a 'relationship' is the framework or basis of trust. The highest percentage of associations relating to trust in our research probably reflects the social-relational connotation of trust. Associations that address this aspect of trust have been included in the relationship category, which was further subdivided into the subcategory of close/distant. Our initial intention was to title this category 'People'. The reason for such a nomination was as follows: we included respondents' statements/associations made in relation to a human agent into this category. The associations the respondents made indicated that they consider *close* people to be potential partners or trustees – those with whom they consider it possible to have a relationship of trust. However, some of the

associations were also linked to the sphere of work contacts. The category of relationships also included associations relating to the type of relationship, e.g., *intimate, long-term, based on friendship, based on a fellowship, based on a partnership, personal and mutual*. The majority of associations recorded in this category refer to close relationships and proximity in the private sphere (*family, friends, a small group of people, partner, mother, me/myself, husband, wife, etc.*). Trust projected onto a more distant relationship is predominantly associated with a work team (e.g., associations – *colleague, boss, manager, business partner, employee, employer, associate, etc.*). It is interesting to compare the associations of Slovak students with those of Polish, Hungarian, and Czech students (see Figure 3 and Table 4). In the case of the Slovak students, we recorded associations with a greater weight relating to more distant relationships than was the case with Polish, Hungarian, and Czech students. To a greater extent, Polish and Czech students associate trust only with people they are in close contact with (*family, friends, a small group of people, a partner or mother*) and also the corresponding type of relationship – *intimate, based on a partnership or personal*. We might ask whether another social capital profile exists among the Slovak students who relate and associate trust with partners outside private and family relationships as well. A 'distant relationship' – one with a *colleague, boss, manager, business partner, employee, employer or associate* had a higher weight among Slovak students than among other V4 students. A relationship based on *friendship or fellowship* is more commonly found in the associations made by Slovak respondents. The analysis of terms in the relationship category does not show that there is automatically trust between work contacts among Slovak respondents and, on the other hand, there is a lack of confidence in this environment among respondents from other V4 countries. Relationships in the workplace are often very personal and the question of confidence is crucial here, as is the case with other relationships dependent on cooperation and the sharing of personal interests with the interests of others. The data only allow us to say that among Slovak respondents more than other respondents, the prompt word 'trust' produces a higher weight of associations identifying people from outside the close family environment. The concept of the



**Figure 3:** Deeper analysis of the category of close/distant relationships. Comparison of Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic

Source: authors' calculation

**Table 4:** Deeper analysis of the category close/distant relationships. Comparison of Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, %

Category	HU	PL	SK	CZ
Relationships	24,5	29.16	28.32	32.6
Close	15.6	22.21	11.27	25.65
Distant	8.8	6.95	17.05	6.94

Source: authors' calculation

*encapsulated interest account* (mentioned in the previous part) is grounded in the assumption that the potentially trusted person has an interest in maintaining a relationship with the truster; the trusted person counts my interests as his or her own (Mazur, 2002). The associations of *mutuality* give reason to believe, as is also the case with our respondents, that the encapsulated interest concept requires a mechanism via which a person's interests can be encapsulated. Describing a relationship as *long-term*, as recorded in the associations of this category, is consistent with another element of encapsulated interest: the desire for the relationship to continue, for whatever reason ranging from mere financial interest, through deeper emotional ties, to the reputational effects on other relationships. We also found that for our respondents, in relationships built on trust, perception of a long-term mutual, common, future-oriented interest is a prerequisite to a high axiological determinacy.

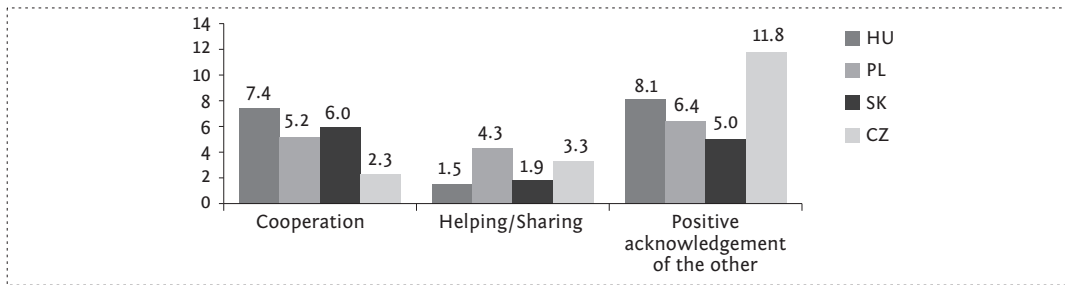
## B) Characteristics of a trustworthy person

Analysis of the number of associations included in this category indicates that the Polish respondents indicated almost twice as many associations linked to the characteristics of a trusted person (32.15%) than did the Slovak (17.29%), Hungarian (17.5%) and Czech respondents (16.83%). Despite the fact that semantically the associations made by all respondents refer to a trustworthy person as having the same characteristics, in the association chain created by Polish respondents there are considerably more of them. All the respondents characterised a trustworthy person as having the following features: *honesty, frankness, a sense of fair play, loyalty, openness, reliability, responsibility, tolerance, sensitivity and good will*. As mentioned above, the precondition for trust is that once we have some knowledge of the person, specifically, that we know that person's moral commitments, psychological or character disposition, or encapsulation of our interests. That knowledge constitutes our degree of trust or distrust. To say we trust someone means that we know or think we know relevant things about him or her, especially about his or her motivations toward us. Based on the results of our analysis, we can conclude that the basis of a trusting relationship for our respondents is reputation as well as honesty, frankness, a sense of fair play, loyalty, openness, reliability, responsibility, tolerance, sensitivity and good will from one's potential partner.

In the category of *market, economy, work and cognitive aspects*, associations are seen that may relate to the cognitive aspects of trust and, in keeping with Hardin's theory, serve to demonstrate that trust is a cognitively saturated category. We also referred to the reputational effect of trust as a background element of trust. In the associations made by our respondents, these aspects of trust are addressed in terms of *information, knowledge, experience, impression, credibility, intuition, communication, contact, brain, background, knowing, history, and circumstances*.

## C) Trust related to pro-social behaviour

Regarding the weight of associations, pro-social behaviour appears to be the third most important characteristic in relation to the concept of trust (after associations relating to a close and a distant relationship and the characteristics of a trustworthy person). However, among Slovak respondents we recorded a lower weight in the associations relating to pro-social behaviour than was the case with the Polish, Hungarian, and Czech respondents (Figure 4, Table 5). Pro-social behaviour as a presupposition of trust is expressed in the subcategories of *cooperation, helping/sharing, and positive acknowledgement of others*. The conceptual associative map on cooperation is primarily weighted with associations such as *identical thinking, identical goal, and cohesion*. In relation to this, in the concept of 'trust as encapsulated interest', encapsulated interest refers to the fact that in relation to someone we may trust, our right intentions are to want to take *our* interests as our interests into account in our actions. We and the other person may have coincidental interests, so that, while



**Figure 4:** Weight of associations related to trust as pro-social behaviour. Comparison of Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic

Source: authors' calculation

**Table 5:** Trust as encapsulated interest – weight of associations related to trust as pro-social behaviour. Comparison of Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, %

Category	HU	PL	SK	CZ
Pro-Social	17.17	15.95	12.87	17.45
Cooperation	7.4	5.17	5.98	2.31
Helping/Sharing	1.5	4.33	1.86	3.31
Positive acknowledgement of the other	8.1	6.43	5.02	11.82

Source: authors' calculation

that person acts in his or her own interests, he or she also happens to serve ours. If we know only this and no more about your intentions, we can be confident of your actions, but we cannot be said to trust you. There must be a similar logic for distrust. If we distrust you, it is because we think that your interests conflict with ours and that you will not take our interests into account in your actions. In this view, trust and distrust are cognitive notions. They belong to a group of related terms that includes knowledge and belief (Hardin, 2006). The behavioural manifestations of trust, which can be interpreted as characteristics of trustworthy behaviour, that appeared in the association chains of our respondents were *agreement, cohesion, commitment, activity, cooperation, coordination, definiteness, devotion, justice, solving problems, helping, sharing, support, positive acknowledgement of others manifested in discussion, empathy, intuition, consideration, will, affection, and tolerance*. These are the elements of the mental map of pro-social behaviour related to trust produced by our research sample. We observe that these associated contours of how trust is perceived by our respondents reveal elements of trust as encapsulated interest.

It is important to note that the associations included in the categories interpreted above, *Relationship, Characteristics of trustworthy person, and Trust related to pro-social behaviour*, represent more than 50% of the weight of all registered associations aggregated into 9 categories. In other words, if we ask 360 future economists and managers from the V4 countries what they mean by trust, they primarily link it to:

- 1) the type of relationship in which trust can be considered;
- 2) the characteristics of a person who may be perceived as trustworthy;
- 3) the definition of behavioural acts of pro-sociality, peculiar to a relationship of trust.

## D) Emotions related to trust

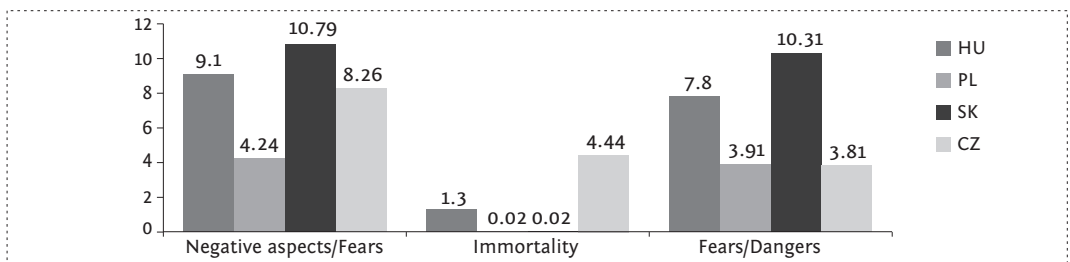
The weight of associations related to emotions cannot be ignored. In the Trust as a Positive Value category (for associations weight see Figure 5), respondents mentioned positive feelings such as *security, love, hope, satisfaction, pleasure, peace, serenity, and well-being* as being associated with the concept of trust. We can state that the relationship of encapsulated interest, leading to, or trust manifested in encapsulated interest can be charged with a range of positive emotions. With each act of trust, however, there exists a certain risk in the sense of: 'I put my vulnerability at your disposal'. According to Mayer's definition, trust is 'one side's will to be vulnerable'. Trustworthiness is a feature one side has, which makes the other side willing to be vulnerable (Levin & Cross, 2004).

From the perspective of psychology and everyday experience, trust seems to involve more than what has been mentioned in terms of positive emotions and the encapsulation of interest. People trust others even when there is no guarantee that the trustee will respond benevolently. Trust implies an awareness of being vulnerable to and dependent on the trustee, and still taking the risk of being exploited. In line with this reasoning, Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, and Camerer (1998, p. 395) suggest that trust is best defined as 'a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or the behaviour of another'. In keeping with the above interpretations, our respondents also associate negative feelings, possible risks and disillusionment with trust. The most commonly associated negative emotions relate to potential *immorality*, manifested in *infidelity and deception*. The idea that immoral behaviour may feature in unrequited trust is expressed in statements such as *there is no trust in the world, blind trust does not pay, trusting someone can be a mistake, trust is associated with uncertainty and primarily cannot be measured*. Phenomena that evoke negative feelings relating to trust carry the following associations: *circumspection, alertness, self-denial, disillusion, weakness, stagnation, possible loss, and naivety* (see Figure 6 and Table 6).



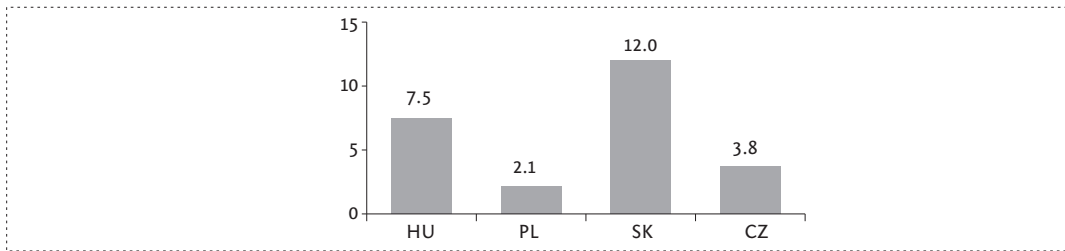
**Figure 5:** Trust as a positive value – weight of associations. Comparison of Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic

Source: authors' calculation



**Figure 6:** Perceptions of the negative aspects of trust – weight of associations. Comparison of Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

Source: authors' calculation



**Figure 7:** Percentage of associations related to market, economy and work. Comparison of Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic

Source: authors' calculation

A separate category of associations related to positive and negative emotions/phenomena and perceptions of *Trust as a value* has revealed differences in the weight of the associations of respondents from Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. In the category of negative emotions, the weight of associations among the Polish and Czech respondents is lower than among Slovak and Hungarian respondents. Therefore we ask: What is it that determines the lower level of expected risk and negative emotions among Polish and Czech students? Could it have something to do with the abovementioned tendency of Poles and Czechs to view trust as being mainly associated with a relationship with a close person in a family setting or more intimate contact? If someone approaches trust cautiously in relationships with people in a broader context (work or business), the level of negative emotions experienced will probably be higher – as is the case with our findings. Equally, we recorded differences in the weight of associations with a positive value. The Polish students referred to the positive value of trust less. As documented by our data, trust is associated more with the private sphere and less with work and business (see Figure 7). On the basis of our results, it can be concluded that in the associations made by Slovak respondents the concept of trust is extended beyond simply close and family relationships. This may result in a higher perceived risk and negative emotions such as fear of betrayal in a relationship where trust is expected. However, like the Hungarian respondents, the Slovak students attach a higher value to trust than the Polish and Czech respondents. In the Polish and Czech associations, we also register a lower weight and lower proportion of negative emotions than may be found in social situations requiring acts of trust. This phenomenon probably relates to the type and proximity of relationships (family) that are associated with trust among the Poles and Czechs.

## Conclusions

In this final section of the article, we will consider two areas: 1. the methodological aspects of the research into trust and 2. conceptualising trust as a social element.

In our investigation into the concept of trust, there are two methodological aspects that may affect the validity and reliability of data. The first is the construct validity of the instruments used. Most of the surveys on trust implicitly assume that the notion of trust is commonly understood. Therefore, *it does not test* for different concepts or theories of trust. According to Gibson (2001), some surveys distinguish groups of respondents and then ask questions. The respondents may include various professional and occupational groups and staff of various government levels and agencies. The diversity of the sample may cause diversity in the perception and operationalisation of the concept of trust. This may be for cognitive (knowledge and knowledge base) and affective-social (motivation, attitudes, the varying levels of experience, etc.) reasons. Another problem with surveys

and experiments may be the analysis of the results. Over time, large demographic changes may have changed the meaning of the responses to the standard trust questions (e.g., *Can you trust people?*). Increasing urbanisation means people interact with larger numbers of people, so 'most people' is a much larger category for current generations than it was for their contemporaries 40 or 50 years ago. Increasing immigration and increased mixing across ethnic groups suggest that 'most people' is a more diverse category than it was earlier. Note, however, that younger people are less likely to say that most people can be trusted (Putnam, 2000, p. 253). Their lives are more diversely urban than were the lives of previous generations. Their lives are also less settled and stable, so they may have fewer relationships (Hardin, 2006, p. 46-47). On the basis of these interpretations, we can ask whether the degree of social trust or the recorded fall in the level of social capital and degree of social trust are connected with the fact that the degree of social trust is changing following socio-economic changes, with migration and mobility opportunities and the disruption of close neighbourhood ties? Can the degree of trust be considered and interpreted as a natural social development or as a negative tendency in social behaviour?

The research presented in this study goes beyond the question of whether our respondents trust people in their vicinity, or institutions in the broader social context. We focus specifically on:

- 1) How do young people, future economists, managers and business professionals conceptualise the notion of trust today?
- 2) What similarities and differences can be found in the meaning of trust among Visegrad country respondents?

The topicality of the research is justified by the sociological and psychological perception of trust as a social phenomenon – society needs trust because it increasingly finds itself operating on the margins between confidence in what is known from everyday experience and the contingency of new possibilities. Misztal (1996) highlights *three basic things that trust does in the lives of people*. It makes social life *predictable*, it creates a *sense of community*, and it *makes it easier for people to work together*.

The theoretical framework used here to define the concept of trust in our research was Hardin's (2006) concept of trust, which holds that trust is an expression of encapsulated interest and moral commitments. The conditions for trust include: 1) reputation; 2) reliance; 3) expectations and interest in future interaction. In our interpretation of our research results, we highlight the fact that the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data show that the highest percentage of the weight of associations within the concept of trust in our research sample refers to *the relationship as a social category* (26.5%), *the characteristics of the trustworthy person* (17.29%), and *pro-social behaviour* (12.72%). *Relationship*, *Characteristics of the trustworthy person* and *Trust related to pro-social behaviour* represent more than 50% of the weight of all registered associations aggregated into 9 categories. In other words, the mental map of trust for the 400 future economists and managers from the V4 countries is primarily linked to:

- 1) the type of relationship in which trust can be considered;
- 2) the characteristics of a person who may be perceived as trustworthy;
- 3) the definition of behavioural acts of pro-sociality, peculiar to a relationship of trust.

Free association as a projective technique used in this research reflected the participants' dispositions. The data gathered indicated perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of the participants. The words/associations students used revealed their cognitions, affections and behavioral intentions. In other words, the verbal tools people used represented verbal manifestaion of their thinking or feeling. Thinking, or more precisely the cognitive process, together with feeling, guides most of human behaviour. By using AGA, we were able to reveal how different groups organise and integrate their perceptions and understandings of the concept of trust.



The associations with the highest weight were as follows: *identical goal* (total weight 86), *partner* (total weight 79), *reliability* (total weight 66), *certainty* (total weight 57), and *friendship* (total weight 53). If we compare our results with Hardin's conceptual pillars of trust defined above, it is clear that trust is perceived as encapsulated interest and as a moral commitment underpinned by the characteristics of the trustworthy person. Hardin found that the person's reliance and future goal orientation are of high importance. In our research, we found that reliance/reliability and close relations/friendship were some of the elements significant in perceptions of trust.

While analysing the weight of particular categories within trust in our comparisons of respondents from the Slovak Republic, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, we noted a specific difference. Compared to the Slovak, Hungarian, and Czech respondents, Polish respondents' perceptions and associations of trust in the category analysis were highly personalised and related to the features of a trustworthy person, the level of the relationship and pro-social behaviour. We also noted a higher weight of associations relating to market/economy/work among the Slovak and Hungarian respondents. We can deduce that the Hungarian and Slovak respondents were extending their perception of relations of trust beyond close personalised contact and into the working environment. The highest percentage of associations related to trust in our research probably reflects the social relational connotation of trust. The majority of associations recorded in the Relationship category refer to close relationships and expressions of proximity in the private sphere (family, friends, a small group of people, partner, etc.). Trust projected into a more distant relationship is predominantly associated with a working team. In the case of the Slovak students, we recorded associations with a greater weight in relation to more distant relationships than was the case with the Polish, Hungarian, and Czech students. To a greater extent, Polish and Czech students associate trust only with people they are in close contact with. The semantic analysis of the associations has enabled us to conclude that a trustworthy person is seen as a *person who behaves morally and is reliable*. Regarding the weight of associations, the third most important one in relation to the concept of trust as a characteristic appears to be pro-social behaviour (after associations relating to a close and a distant relationship and the characteristics of a trustworthy person). Pro-social behaviour as a presupposition of trust is expressed in the subcategories of *cooperation*, *helping/sharing* and *positive acknowledgement of others*. The conceptual associative map relating to cooperation is weighted with associations such as *identical thinking*, *identical goals*, *cohesion*, *mutuality*, *helping*, *sharing*, *support*, *positive acknowledgement of others manifested in discussion*, *empathy*, *intuition*, *communication*, *consideration*, *will*, *affection*, *tolerance* and *commitment*, which are all elements of the mental map of pro-social behaviour in a relationship of trust. We observe that these associated contours of how trust is perceived by our respondents indicate aspects of trust as encapsulated interest. The weight of associations related to emotions cannot be ignored. Respondents suggested that positive feelings are associated with the concept of trust, such as *security*, *love*, *hope*, *satisfaction*, *pleasure*, *peace*, *serenity*, and *well-being*. Our respondents also associate negative feelings, possible risks and disillusionment with trust. However, all the respondents and especially the Slovak ones considered trust to be accompanied by negative emotions and fear. The weight of associations of negative emotions is almost three times the weight of associations related to the positive emotions accompanying trust. The most commonly associated negative emotions relate to potential *immorality*, manifested in *infidelity* and *deception*. The possibility that there may be immoral behaviour in relation to unrequited trust is expressed in such statements as *there is no trust in the world*, *blind trust does not pay*, *trusting can be a mistake and trust is linked to uncertainty and cannot be measured*. Phenomena that evoke negative feelings relating to trust carry the following associations: *circumspection*, *alertness*, *self-denial*, *disillusion*, *weakness*, *stagnation*, *possible loss*, and *naivety*. A separate category of associations related to positive and negative emotions/phenomena and the perception of *trust as a value* has revealed differences in the weight of associations made by respondents from Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. The weight of associations made by the Polish and Czech respondents is lower in the category of negative emotions than by

Slovak and Hungarian respondents. In other words, even without being asked 'Do you trust?' Slovak and Hungarian respondents (more than the Czech and Polish respondents) would say 'I am scared to trust, and so even if I wanted to trust, I feel there are barriers in the way'. Based on the results of our research presented above, however, we are able to conclude what conditions are necessary for our respondents to be willing to enter into a relationship of trust and thereby build their social capital.

The main aim of the research presented in this study was to gain understanding and insight into the subtle and various ways respondents perceive the concept of trust. The research was purely descriptive in character and did not examine any causal links. On the basis of understanding gained in this research, the following research questions for further research into social capital in V4 countries were generated. Specifically, using the 'scenario' technique, we created the following situation: Imagine that you are going to do business with partners from V4 (in case of Slovak respondents 3 options were offered – Czech, Polish and Hungarian partner). Whom would you trust? Whom not? Why not, why yes...). The scenarios were administered to a certain group of respondents. Insight into perception of the trust concept in respondents considerably helped increase the level of interpretation of scenario results.

We assume that the outcome of examining the concept of trust using the AGA method presented in this study could be used in subsequent research, especially in formulating operational definitions of trust, at least in the context of Visegrad countries.

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