POLITICS IN CENTRAL EUROPE

The Journal of the Central European Political Science Association

Volume 15 • Number 2 • September 2019 • ISSN 1801-3422

ESSAYS

METROPOLITAN
UNIVERSITY PRAGUE PRESS

POLITICS
in Central Europe

The Journal of the Central European Political Science Association

Volume 15 Number 2 September 2019 ISSN 1801-3422

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Politics in Central Europe – The Journal of Central European Political Science Association is the official Journal of the Central European Political Science Association (CEPSA).
Politics in Central Europe is a biannual (June and December), double-blind, peer-reviewed publication.

Publisher:

Metropolitan University Prague, o. p. s.
Dubečská 900/10, 100 31 Praha 10-Strašnice (Czech Republic)

Printed by:

Togga, Ltd., publishing house
Radlická 2343/48, 150 00 Praha (Czech Republic)

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or http://www.degruyter.com

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Koterovská 85, 326 00 Plzeň (Czech Republic)

Politics in Central Europe is an independent scientific journal.
The authors are solely responsible for the content of their contributions.

ISSN 1801-3422
MK ČR E 18556

**POLITICS IN CENTRAL EUROPE is listed
in the internationally recognised database Scopus and Erih.**

**POLITICS IN CENTRAL EUROPE is indexed
in the internationally recognised databases:
Baidu Scholar, CEJSH (The Central European Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities), Celdes, CNKI Scholar (China National Knowledge Infrastructure), CNPIEC, DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals), EBSCO (relevant databases), EBSCO Discovery Service, Google Scholar, J-Gate, JournalTOCs, KESLI-NDSL (Korean National Discovery for Science Leaders), Microsoft Academic, Naviga(Softweco), Primo Central (ExLibris), Publons, ReadCube, Summon (Serials Solutions/ProQuest), TDNet, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory/ulrichsweb, WanFangData, WorldCat (OCLC).**

**The articles published in this scientific review are also published
in Sciendo, http://www.sciendo.com**

ISSN 1801-3422 ČÍSLO REGISTRACE MK ČR E 18556

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Path Dependence and Local (Self-)Government Systems: A Comparison of three CEE Countries

DANIEL KLIMOVSKÝ, UROŠ PINTERIČ AND PETR JÜPTNER

Politics in Central Europe (ISSN: 1801-3422)
Vol. 15, No. 2
DOI: 10.2478/pce-2019-0015

Abstract: *Path dependence is a concept often used by scholars in fields such as economics, economic geography, political science, law and sociology to explain recent developments. In this article, we apply the concept to support the hypothesis that the democratic revival after 1990 in the examined Central and Eastern European countries and related set-up of local (self-) government institutions were more influenced by an earlier path taken than by a more recent one. For this purpose, we undertake a content analysis of relevant legal documents and apply an in-depth comparative approach.*

Keywords: ***local (self-)government systems, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, path dependence***

Introduction

The countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) have undergone several crucial shifts in the relatively short period since 1989. These states have had to make huge political, economic and administrative changes (Klimovský 2013). Nevertheless, Rupnik (2000) argues that it was naive to expect that the legacy of the communist regimes would disappear quickly from these countries. On the contrary, he stresses that this is a long-term process that can be compared to the fall of the Roman or Ottoman empire. If Rupnik is right – and we agree with him at least in part – then the accession of these states to so-called western structures was only one of the very first steps on a path with an unclear objective.

In the 1990s, most of the CEE countries introduced „new“ democratic systems of local self-government. In some cases, however, this change was arguably more of a revival of democratic institutions since the state concerned had previously enjoyed some kind of democratic local self-government system. If this interpretation is correct, then the path dependence concept may help explain some developments since any revival allows us to identify links between the present and past events.

Building on this background, this study aims to show that path dependence played an important role in the reforms leading to the revival of local self-government systems in the examined CEE countries. Furthermore, we argue that the post-1990 democratic revival in these countries and related set-up of local self-government institutions were more influenced by an early path taken than by a more recent one. For this purpose, we undertake a content analysis of relevant legal documents and apply a rigorous comparative approach.

Historical development of local systems of (self-)government

The former eastern bloc countries found themselves in very different circumstances when they embarked on the transition process. Among other things, these states had different historical and cultural legacies, geographies and economic and social structures. They also devoted different lengths of time to the central planning process and had different experiences of market reforms. Some countries – for example, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland –had an industrial economic base or had experimented with economic reforms and could more easily deregulate their economies (UN 2000: 10). In contrast, in other states, the pre-1989 economy depended on the saturation of other socialist bloc markets with „politically ordered“ products. Of all the former Soviet countries, the Baltic states were thought to have the most developed economies. On regaining independence in 1991, their governments undertook comprehensive economic and political reforms (Berengaut – Lopez-Claros 1998: 2). More generally, however, the CEE countries were ill-equipped to pursue change in the early 1990s; they remained encumbered by inadequate public administrative structures inherited from former regimes. Major political and economic structural changes, thus, failed to be accompanied by a steady stream of public administrative reforms (UN 2000: 11).

The Czech Republic

The beginning of local self-government in the Czech lands can be traced to the revolutionary year of 1848, which led to the abolition of bonds of servitude and replacement of a patrimonial administration with a state one (ČSÚ 2006: 9). Alongside the „higher“ spheres of district and regional municipalities, local municipalities were defined in detail and their powers were classified as innate or delegated (ČSÚ 2006: 11). Innate powers included powers associated with elections and self-government bodies' procedures, but their primary focus was economic matters. A new municipal law affected both the operation of municipalities and their structure; in particular, it facilitated and promoted the amalgamation of municipalities based on the limited resources in some areas and the integration of suburbs (Balík 2009: 40; Čopík 2014: 28). Local self--government bodies were established in the form of directly elected municipal committees and the municipal boards that they, in turn, elected. While these boards had decision-making and supervisory powers, they remained supporting and deputy bodies to a burgrave with powers of his own (Balík 2009: 30; Čopík 2014: 29). Municipal committees were elected for three years based on a simple voting majority. Voting was direct but also non-universal and unequal among the public with voters divided into clusters based on their tax payments (Balík 2003: 13); there was an oral ballot (Čopík 2014: 29). Shortly after the establishment of the local self-government system, the former absolutist regime was reinstated and the new system was temporarily restricted under so-called New Year's Eve patents (Čmejrek et al. 2010: 21). On the fall of this „Bach's absolutism," however, constitutionalism was restored and reinforced, and a second round of municipal elections took place in 1861 (Čmejrek et al. 2010: 21–22). The adoption of a new constitution and municipal legislation between 1861 and 1862 helped establish the local self-government system (Balík 2009, Schelle 2005), however this only covered the area that would eventually be Cisleithania; within the Habsburg monarchy, it included the Czech lands and present-day Slovenia but not Slovakia (the future Transleithania). After the abolition of the regional system in 1860, public administration occurred at the levels of the state, land (*země*), district and municipality (Čopík 2014: 21) The public administration system at municipal level may be describe as mixed. Municipalities had innate power over economic management, security, local infrastructure, social services for the poor and the performance of most police duties (Balík 2009: 42, Čmejrek et al. 2010: 23–24). At the same time, they were increasingly burdened with delegated power over administrative and financial matters (Balík 2009: 41–42; Čmejrek et al. 2010: 24).

From a local government perspective, the years after Czechoslovakia's foundation in 1918 were marked by continuity. No significant changes to the number of municipalities occurred, and nor was the decentralisation of operations reinforced (Schelle 1991a). Municipal institutions were, however, renamed, with municipal committees coming to be known as „boards" and municipal boards of directors as „councils" (Balík 2009: 48–49). The councils strengthened their position as administrative bodies and evolved into decision-making entities; the position of mayors was correspondingly weakened. Municipal elections were based on a proportional representation system with predetermined candidate lists; a relative majority system was used in small municipalities (Balík 2003: 15). The introduction of the proportional system was connected with the most significant change of the era, the adoption of universal suffrage including voting rights for women (Balík 2013: 14). Furthermore, since the municipal system included consensus-based and consociational elements, even minority parties had the chance to participate in the executive sphere (Balík 2009: 51). The inter--war period saw changes to the public administration system mainly at a higher level. Counties (in Czech: „*župa*“) were established as a level of power higher than districts. There were nine counties in Bohemia, five in Moravia and just one in Silesia (Schelle 1991a). Between 1927 and 1928, the politically controversial county system was replaced by a new land system. As a result, the Czech part of Czechoslovakia was divided into two lands: Bohemia and Moravia-Silesia (Čopík 2014, Schelle 1991b). The separate public administration systems used at the district and land levels were also replaced by a mixed system (Čopík 2014: 91). As in the pre-war years, public administration happened at the levels of the state, land, district and municipality.

Local self-government was gradually confined during the Second Republic, and under the subsequent German occupation, it vanished from both the annexed borderland and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (Balík 2009: 54–55). There was almost no sign of its reestablishment in the post-war years. At first, national committees were formed to serve as municipal institutions, but they were soon subordinated to national committees at a higher level of public administration. Any hopes of reviving local self-government were definitively put aside after the communist coup of 1948 when the dying democratic state was indisputably superseded by a centralist socialist regime. Around this time, the national committee system applied at the municipal and district levels as well as a newly established regional tier. Owing to amalgamations, the number of municipalities declined significantly between the 1960s and the 1980s. While in 1950 there had been 10,877 municipalities in the Czech lands (ČSÚ 2006: 34), by 1989, the figure was only 4,120 (Illner 2010: 223). From 1954, members of the general assembly of national committees were directly elected based on a voting majority in each (single mandate) electorate. In practice, however, these elections were merely a formality and deputies with a mandate could still be removed from office (Čmejrek et al. 2010: 35). As in the inter-war period, participating in elections was mandatory.

The years after 1989 saw a resurgence of local self-government. In 1990, new legislation was adopted and the first free municipal elections were held. The centralised municipality system disintegrated and the number of municipalities grew rapidly as even small municipalities strove for autonomy in response to past bad experiences of amalgamation. By 1993, the number of municipalities had approximately doubled (Illner 2010: 223) and the Czech municipal structure had come to rival its French and Slovak counterparts as the most fragmented in Europe. The municipal system bore traces of First Republic legislation. A collective leadership model was used (Heinelt – Hlepas

2006: 31–32) that included a directly elected board, a council, which served as an executive body, and an indirectly elected mayor, who was head of the municipality. Mayors had no significant executive powers (Jüptner 2008: 23), however in small municipalities especially, their position was very strong (Kopřiva – Čopík – Čmejrek 2017: 499). This was due in part to the their status as the only full-time officials, the weak party system, the consensus-based political culture and their role in presiding over board proceedings. Councillors were elected for a four-year term based on proportional representation with the option of cross voting (Jüptner 2008: 22–23). At first, the state retained separate administrative powers, which were exercised primarily by district authorities. As a result of reforms, however, 73 district offices were abolished in 2003 and state duties were largely delegated to 205 municipalities with expanded powers (Postránecký 2004: 15). A system of mixed public administrative powers was therefore restored, with the municipalities being divided into three categories based on the extent of their delegated state powers. Back in 1989, the eight „communist" regions had been dissolved swiftly, and in 2000, 14 self-governing districts were established under the same name, i.e. as „regions." Their boards were directly elected and the public administration system was again mixed owing to the exercise of delegated powers. As at municipal level, a proportional representation system was implemented, but while independent candidates could be nominated for municipal positions, they could not stand for regional ones.

Turning to current issues, financing is an ongoing problem that affects local autonomy in multi-level governments, or the so-called vertical dimension (Heinelt – Hlepas 2006:21–22). In particular, small municipalities lack the resources to fund their own development and given the asymmetrical municipal structure, they often have diverging interests (Kruntorádová 2013: 64). Still, despite the financial barriers, both the decentralisation process and the restoration of local self-government have been relatively straightforward in the Czech Republic in contrast with the situations in Slovakia and Croatia (Jüptner 2009: 106–108). Except in the case of some specialist offices, public administration takes place at the levels of the state, region and several categories of municipality. Across the executive level of local government (or what Heinelt and Hlepas (2006) call the „horizontal dimension" (pp. 29–32)), discussions have focused on implementing a new system of direct election of mayors, with both centrist parties and mayors' groups advocating for this change (Jüptner 2017: 212–213).

At the same time, there has been talk of applying the Slovak model, which gives mayors a stronger position (Heinelt – Hlepas 2006: 31–32) including executive power. So far, however, all attempts to implement these direct elections have failed, however, and the traditional system of collective decision-making seems likely to be preserved.

Slovakia

At the end of 19th century, the right to self-govern was vested in all Slovak towns and recognised city municipalities. These entities were responsible for issues such as local roads, municipal schools, public security, local taxes and the administration of municipal property. Municipalities fell into three categories: 1) towns with their own magistrates, 2) large municipalities and 3) small municipalities. Towns with their own magistrates included all towns established by royalty or the nobility. For administrative purposes, these towns were directly overseen by regional governments but they had their own municipal directorates and their own appointed magistrates who were aldermen, police captains, leading notaries and municipal doctors. Large municipalities did not have their own magistrates but could independently enforce all relevant decisions approved by the central or regional government. The political and administrative leaders of these municipalities were known as mayors. In contrast, small municipalities were not allowed to implement decisions independently and they therefore had to cooperate within notarial districts. These municipalities were also led by mayors andrelevant notaries were elected to their positions for life (Sokolovský 1995a, 1995b).

During World War I, national committees were established to manage the municipalities in what is now Slovak territory (Kováč 1998). This was, however, a slow and uncoordinated process and matters at the local level remained highly messy between 1917 and 1919. Schelle (1991a, 1991b) observes the importance of reforms of the local administration system. The Local Elections Act (No. 75/1919) introduced key principles including universal and equal suffrage and the secret ballot. An amendment to the Municipal Establishment Act (No. 76/1919) changed the institutional structure of local self-government. National committees were dissolved and local councils were established as the main collective decision-making bodies. Their members were elected directly by the residents of the municipality, with the total number of councillors in individual municipalities ranging from nine to 60. The amendment also established other bodies at the local level, including executive and advisory committees and deputy mayors, who constituted individual bodies. The term of office for all municipal entities, including mayors and deputy mayors, was four years, but mayors were elected indirectly, i.e. by local councils.

A few key centralisation measures were implemented in 1933. The first of these was the extension of municipal councils' term of office from four to six years. The second took the form of a new requirement that the State Office or Interior Ministry confirm successful mayoral candidates. If these authorities did not confirm a candidate and the local council disregarded this situation, the council could be dissolved and the unconfirmed candidate banned from election for the next three years. This growing centralisation of power also led councils to shift their focus from self-government to state administrative tasks, especially in the areas of policing, agriculture and social, public health and trade administration (Táborský 1951).

A combination of international and domestic political developments between 1938 and 1939 led to the establishment of the independent Slovak Republic. Although officially an independent country, this republic was in fact a mere satellite state of Germany with a central national clerical government. In this context, the entire self-government system was dissolved (Klimovský 2014), and it was not until after the Slovak national uprising in August 1944 that national committees were re-established. The process lasted several months and after World War II, these committees were in place for all Slovak municipalities (Kováč 1998).

The national committee system was somewhat modified between 1949 and 1950 when the system of bodies was elaborated in more detail. National committees were defined as public authorities responsible for the administration of internal matters, including education, culture, public health, social and financial issues and labour protection. A strict hierarchy system was introduced for public administrations such that national committees for local areas were directly controlled by the central government. There were two kinds of collective bodies in each national committee: a national committee council and specialist committee(s). The national committees also two featured kinds of individual participants: the national committee chair and other civil servants (Schelle 2005).

The year 1954 saw the adoption of more legislation about the national committees responsible for local areas. The National Committees Act (No. 13/1954) largely confirmed rigid existing hierarchies and entitled national committees to authorise their own legal actions. A new National Committees Act (No. 65/1960) established the general assembly of national committees as the most important decision-making body, and an executive committee was introduced as the main executive body. Since the national committees were responsible for many state administrative tasks, a decision was made to reduce the overall number of municipalities. This proved unsuccessful, however, and as a result, „nodal" municipalities were introduced into the local government system in 1982. This meant that there were three different categories of national committees operating at the local level: 1) national committees for nodal municipalities; 2) national committees with responsibility for several other kinds of municipalities and 3) national committees with other local concerns. Similarly, three kinds of urban national committees were responsible for towns.

Under the Municipal Establishment Act (No. 369/1990), municipalities regained their self-governing status and their main role became the administration of public affairs not classified as state administration issues. In this way, Slovak municipalities became fully-fledged policy-makers at the local level (Klimovský

2010: 240) and the national committee system was abolished. Significantly, commentators such as Čapková (2010) and Nižňanský (2005) have characterised the period between 1992 and 1998 as one of disjointed public administrative reforms. These reforms continued with a massive devolution between 2002 and 2004 (Klimovský 2009) and „fiscal decentralisation" became a catchphrase in the public debate over the next few years (Buček 2006; Čavojec – Sloboda 2005). In response, all major political parties pledged to decentralise power over public funds, and a fiscal decentralisation policy was introduced in 2005 (Kling – Nižňanský 2003). A municipal amalgamation proposal was also announced for 2004–2005, but it was never implemented, and the structure of local government therefore remains very fragmented (Buček – Nemec 2012). Municipalities are entitled to co-operate with one another if this will allow them to perform their tasks better or more efficiently. This also covers potential cross-border partnerships.

The main local (self-)government bodies in Slovakia are mayors (executive entities) and municipal councils (collective decision-making entities). Mayors are directly elected based on a first-past-the-post system, and their term of office is four years, i.e. the same period provided to municipal councils. Mayors are the most influential actors in the local self-government system. Other bodies include executive and advisory committees though some of these only apply to larger municipalities. Municipalities exercise extensive powers regardless of their population or area. The state may also transfer other powers to the local level provided that it allocates the necessary financial resources to the municipality.

Slovenia

Slovenian territory has changed considerably over the course of modern history. In 1845, the Slovene lands were located between Istria, Carniola, Styria, Croatia, Carinthia and Hungary. Individual lands were divided into administrative provinces and smaller administrative units (districts, municipalities). The leaders of these provinces were strictly bound by the orders of the central administration. Lower-level administrative systems were also developed within the tax system and military service (Grafenauer 2000: 86; Vlaj 2006: 33). Nevertheless, before 1849, local self-government only existed to a limited extent in Slovenia and the concept only has meaning if it is understood to describe an autonomous medieval city (Grafenauer 2000: 87; Šmidovnik 1995: 146); otherwise it would be more accurate to speak of a deconcentrated system for fulfilling supranational tasks at the lowest possible level. Grafenauer (2000: 87–89) notes that the autonomy of medieval cities diminished over the 18th and 19th centuries but increased under the Habsburg monarchy with its administrative district system (Šmidovnik 1995: 147). In 1914, the area that is now Slovenia was split into eight Austro-Hungarian lands. According to Grafenauer (2000), since

1850 the municipalities had also been ruled by lands, which set the principles for managing local issues. However, beginning from 1862, in at least two of the larger regions of present-day Slovenia, the municipalities had roughly the same powers as the territories. As such, their responsibilities included managing the local budget, maintaining local roads, ensuring local peace and order and providing social security (Grafenauer 2000: 113).

In the inter-war period, Slovenian territory was subject to three different state entities: the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs; the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes; and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Moreover, various parts of present-day Slovenia were still ruled by Italy, Austria or Hungary. At the same time, a local self-government system was implemented under which the national government systematically controlled lower levels of government (Grafenauer 2000: 175). Under this system, higher-ranking leaders could block lower level activities, the Ministry of Finance could control local finances and the national assembly could take over local level tasks (Grafenauer 2000: 175). Even so, municipalities' basic powers did not differ significantly from those established 50 years earlier when it came to local finance and local road management or social and general municipal security. As in the past, the centralised control and leadership of municipalities remained basic features of the local (self-)government system. Or, to be more accurate, such centralisation increased since while the lands had controlled the municipalities in the Habsburg period, national level institutions could now interfere in local matter.

After World War II, Slovenia took seven years to normalise its local administration system. Under a 1952 statute, the country was divided into cities (*mesto*), counties **(***okraj***)** and municipalities *(občina***)** (Grafenauer 2000: 285). Celje, Maribor and Ljubljana were each defined as cities. There were also 19 counties and another nine municipalities inside the B-zone in the Trieste area. This brought the national total to 386 municipalities including 44 city municipalities. In 1955, many of these municipalities were changed into „communes," a concept taken from the Paris commune model, which held that these were the cells of a future socialist society (Grafenauer 2000: 300–301; Vlaj 2006: 36–42). The total number of municipalities, thus, dropped from 386 to 130. The commune idea was gradually abandoned, however the number of municipalities continued to fall steadily; in 1960, there were 83 municipalities and in 1964, there were just 62 (Grafenauer 2000: 312; Šmidovnik 1995: 153). The constitutional reforms of 1974 redefined the municipalities and gave them broader powers. Among other things, they were made responsible for ensuring good living conditions, directing social development, supporting the interests of residents, meeting local population needs and performing various government operations and other societal roles (Grafenauer 2000: 325). Based on the different organisation system in place from 1974 to 1990, the number of municipalities rose to 66, but it was reduced again to 62 before 1994 (Grafenauer 2000: 34–347; Šmidovnik 1995: 153–155).

In 1991, the independent Republic of Slovenia adopted a new constitution that restored local government to its classic role. Municipalities were seen as the foundation of the system and the place for dealing with public issues of local importance (Vlaj 2006: 41). The constitution also identified local self--government as a significant part of the Slovenian political system.

In terms of sheer numbers, the recent history of the Slovenian municipalities highlights a move to decentralise local self-government, with responsibilities being assigned to the smallest units possible. Slovenia has undertaken five reforms of local government divisions, which have increased the number of municipalities by more than 340 % – from 62 before 1994 to 212 in 2014.

Under the country's Local Self-government Act, municipalities are afforded various powers so they can provide relevant services to their residents. Nevertheless, the devolution has been limited in comparison with the situation in some other CEE countries, and Slovenia is significantly less decentralised than, for instance, Slovakia. In addition, the state may delegate some of its responsibilities to the local level. The tasks in question may be assigned to a specific type of municipality, to all municipalities or to one municipality in particular. In all such cases, however, the state must ensure the necessary funding.

Mayors (executive entities) and municipal councils (collective decision--making entities) are the main municipal institutions in Slovenia. Mayors are elected every four years based on a voting majority in a two-round process. Municipal councils are elected every four years as well. There are, however, different election systems depending on the population size: a simple majority applies in smaller municipalities while proportional representation is used in larger municipalities.

Methodology

Since our analysis addresses the potential impact of various historical developments on current social, economic and political phenomena, the path dependence concept is highly relevant. This concept was initially very popular among economists and economic geographers (see, e.g., Arthur 1994; Boschma – Martin 2010; Garrouste – Ioannides 2001) but in recent decades, it has also been used by lawyers, sociologists, historians and political scientists (see, e.g., Crouch – Farrell 2004; Liebowitz – Margolis 1995; Pierson 2000, 2004). Anyone applying the concept in the context of social (including political) research must, however, be mindful of its limitations (David 2001). In this regard, Kay (2005) points out three general limits of the framework: 1) it fashionably reflects the intuition that „history matters“ without giving any clear or convincing account of decision-making over time; 2) it explains only stability and not change and 3) its normative implications are confusing and have mostly been left unexplored. Given the difficulties that also surround the operationalisation and empirical testing of the concept, social scientists should be highly cautious when formulating conclusions.

In defining path dependence and the forms it may take, we draw on the framework provided by Page (2006):

> A process is path-dependent if the outcome in any period depends on history and can depend on its order.
> A process is independent if the outcome in any period does not depend upon past outcomes or upon the time period.
> […]
> A process is initial outcome-dependent if all subsequent outcomes depend only on the first outcome.
> A process is early path-dependent if the outcome in any subsequent period depends only upon the history up to some period T.
> A process is recent path-dependent if the outcome in any subsequent period depends only upon the outcomes and opportunities in the recent past.
> […]
> A process is outcome-dependent if the outcome in a period depends on past outcomes or upon the time period.
> A process is state-dependent, if the outcome in any period depends only upon the state of the process at that time.
> (pp. 92–105)

Our analysis compares three CEE countries, i.e. the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia. This selection is justified based on the historical similarities among these countries, i.e. each one has experienced the Habsburg monarchy, inter-war democracy, a socialist period and subsequent transition. Based on these historical divisions – an initial period, the distant history, the recent past and the present – we developed a comparative assessment tool that focused on certain basic criteria. The goal was to identify and explore historical similarities and differences in the local self-government systems in these countries.

To this end, we selected three main groups of characteristics that were then compared across the three countries in the stated eras. The first group included traits related to „centralisation" (the extent of local subordination to the national level); „layers of sub-national government" (the distance between the national level and the lowest rung of local authority); „state administration tasks" (the number of tasks delegated by national administrators to their local counterparts); „scope of regulation" (the extent of national interference in local issues) and „concentration" (trends, i.e. increases or decreases, in the number of municipalities). The second group focused on „fiscal autonomy vis-à-vis the state" (the local level's capacity to independently manage financial issues within its budget) and „possibility of introducing own local taxes/fees or modifying their rates" (municipalities' autonomy over their own revenue in addition to their budget). The third group considered the factors „main decision-making body," „main executive body" and „power relations between the main decision--making body and the main executive body" (potential for the subordination of either body in different decision-making practices) (Table 1).

Table 1: Comparative indicators

	1	2	3	4	5
Centralization	Minimal state	Decentralized state	Government dominated local government	Centralized state	Absence of local level
Concentration trend	Deep decrease in number of municipalities (more than 20%)	Moderate decrease in number of municipalities (up to 20%)	Stable	Moderate increase in number of municipalities (up to 20%)	High increase in number of municipalities (more than 20%)
Performing state administration	No delegated tasks	Few delegated tasks	Majority or/ major state tasks delegated	Minimal state	/
Degree of regulation of competences	No influence on public policy	Possibility to propose and partly influence public policy	Possibility of influence on public policy in less important matters	Co-deciding on all matters of public policy	Municipalities are absolutely autonomous in public policy making
Possibility to introduce own local taxes or to modify their rates	No possibility to influence own tax revenues	Possibility to introduce some local taxes	Possibility to modify tax rates within the limit	Municipalities can introduce some regulated taxes for and influence levels of state taxes for their budget	Municipalities can autonomously define new taxes
Possibility to introduce own local fees or to modify their rates	No possibility to influence own fee revenues	Possibility to introduce some local fees	Possibility to modify tax rates within the limit	Municipalities can introduce some regulated fees for	Municipalities can autonomously define new fees
Main decision making body	Mayor	Municipal council	Supervisory board	Executive committee	/
Main executive body	Mayor	Municipal council	Supervisory board	Executive committee	/
Power relation between the main decision making body and main executive body	Municipal council-centric	Mayor-centric or Executive committee-centric	Supervisory board-centric	/	/
Layers of sub-national government	No local self-government	Municipalities	Municipalities + regions	Municipalities + regions 1 + regions 2	/

Source: authors

Our assumptions were as follows:

1) Signs of path dependence can be detected in the development of local self-government systems in the selected countries.
2) While the development of these systems in the selected countries was outcome-dependent after 1990, it was fairly state-dependent in the socialist period.
3) The post-1990 development of local self-government systems in these countries was early path-dependent. This dependence is mainly tied to the inter-war period.

In order to test these assumptions, we undertook a content analysis of relevant legal documents (statutes dating back to approximately the mid-1850s) and applied a rigorous comparative approach. Our conclusions are supported by qualitative data and the arguments of relevant scholars, including recent work by Bakoš, Soukopová and Selešovský (2015). Our analysis considers neither the performance of local self-government nor issues in local politics. In other words, our goal is not to compare the efficiency or effectiveness of these systems, and we therefore do not consider the issue of the replacement of local political elites, for example. Our research focuses only on the set-up of institutions and relevant legal provisions. As such, we are aware that our conclusions have some limitations, and we accept that different interpretations of these developments might also apply.

Comparative analysis of historical developments

Despite the general historical similarities among the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia, a comparison of developments in these countries and their current local self-government systems reveals significant differences (Tables 2–8).

Table 2: A comparison of features of (self-)government systems during the Habsburg monarchy

Period	Period of Habsburg monarchy		
Country	**Slovenia**	**Slovakia**	**Czech Republic**
Centralization	Government dominated local government	Government dominated local government	Government dominated local government
Concentration trend	Deep decrease in number of municipalities	Moderate increase in number of municipalities	Moderate increase in number of municipalities
Performing state administration	No delegated tasks	Few delegated tasks	Majority or/major state tasks delegated
Degree of regulation of competences	No influence on public policy	Co-deciding on all matters of public policy	Co-deciding on all matters of public policy
Possibility to introduce own local taxes or to modify their rates	No possibility to influence own tax revenues	Possibility to introduce some local taxes	Possibility to introduce some local taxes
Possibility to introduce own local fees or to modify their rates	No possibility to influence own fee revenues	Possibility to introduce some local fees	Possibility to introduce some local taxes
Main decision making body	Municipal council	Municipal council	Municipal council
Main executive body	Mayor	Magistrate	Mayor
Power relation between the main decision making body and main executive body	Municipal council-centric	Magistrate-centric Executive committee-centric	Municipal council-centric
Layers of sub-national government	Municipalities + regions 1 + regions 2	Municipalities + regions 1 + regions 2	Municipalities + regions 1 + regions 2

Source: authors (based on relevant legal provisions)

Table 3: A comparison of features of local (self-)government systems in the inter-war period

Period	Inter-war period		
Country	**Slovenia**	**Slovakia**	**Czech Republic**
Centralization	Centralized state	First decade government dominated local government, later centralized state	First decade government dominated local government
Concentration trend	Moderate decrease in number of municipalities	Moderate increase in number of municipalities	Moderate increase in number of municipalities
Performing state administration	Few delegated tasks	Majority or/major state tasks delegated	Majority or/major state tasks delegated
Degree of regulation of competences	Possibility to propose and partly influence public policy	Possibility of influence on public policy in less important matters	Possibility of influence on public policy in less important matters
Possibility to introduce own local taxes or to modify their rates	Possibility to introduce some local taxes	Municipalities can introduce some regulated taxes for and slightly influence levels of state taxes for their budget	Municipalities can introduce some regulated taxes for and slightly influence levels of state taxes for their budget
Possibility to introduce own local fees or to modify their rates	Possibility to introduce some local fees	Possibility to introduce some local fees	Possibility to introduce some local fees
Main decision making body	Municipal council	Municipal council	Municipal council
Main executive body	Mayor	Mayor	Executive committee
Power relation between the main decision making body and main executive body	Municipal council-centric	Municipal/local council-centric	Executive committee-centric
Layers of sub-national government	Municipalities + regions 1 + regions 2	Municipalities + regions 1 + regions 2 (later without regions 2)	Municipalities + regions 1 + regions 2

Source: authors (based on relevant legal provisions)

Table 4: A comparison of features of local (self-)government systems in the socialist period

Period	Period of socialism		
Country	**Slovenia**	**Slovakia**	**Czech Republic**
Centralization	Government dominated local government	Centralized state	Centralized state
Concentration trend	Stable	Deep decrease in number of municipalities	Deep decrease in number of municipalities
Performing state administration	Majority or/major state tasks delegated	Majority or/major state tasks delegated	Majority or/major state tasks delegated
Degree of regulation of competences	Possibility of influence on public policy in less important matters	Possibility of influence on public policy in less important matters	Possibility of influence on public policy in less important matters
Possibility to introduce own local taxes or to modify their rates	Possibility to modify tax rates within the limit	No possibility to influence own tax revenues	No possibility to influence own tax revenues
Possibility to introduce own local fees or to modify their rates	Possibility to modify fee rates within the limit	No possibility to influence own fee revenues	No possibility to influence own fee revenues
Main decision making body	Municipal council	Local national committee	Local national committee
Main executive body	Mayor	Chair of the local national committee	Chair of the local national committee
Power relation between the main decision making body and main executive body	Municipal council-centric	Mayor-centric Executive committee-centric	Mayor-centric Executive committee-centric
Layers of sub-national government	Municipalities + regions	No self-government, only state administration: municipalities + regions 1 + regions 2	No self-government, only state administration: municipalities + regions 1 + regions 2

Source: authors (based on relevant legal provisions)

Table 5: A comparison of features of local (self-)government systems in the post-1989 era

Period	Period after 1989		
Country	**Slovenia**	**Slovakia**	**Czech Republic**
Centralization	Centralized state	Decentralized state	Decentralized state
Concentration trend	High increase in number of municipalities	Moderate increase in number of municipalities	High increase in number of municipalities
Performing state administration	Few delegated tasks	First decade majority or/major state tasks delegated, later a shift to almost minimal state	Few delegated tasks
Degree of regulation of competences	Co-deciding on all matters of public policy	Municipalities are autonomous in public policy making	Co-deciding in some matters of public policy and autonomous in other matters
Possibility to introduce own local taxes or to modify their rates	Municipalities can introduce some regulated taxes for and influence levels of state taxes for their budget	Municipalities can introduce some regulated taxes for and influence levels of state taxes for their budget	Municipalities can introduce some regulated taxes for and influence levels of state taxes for their budget
Possibility to introduce own local fees or to modify their rates	Possibility to introduce some local fees	Possibility to modify fee rates within the limit	Possibility to modify fee rates within the limit
Main decision making body	Municipal council	Municipal council	Municipal council
Main executive body	Mayor	Mayor	Executive committee
Power relation between the main decision making body and main executive body	Municipal council-centric	Mayor-centric	Mayor-centric / executive committee-centric in bigger municipalities
Layers of sub-national government	Municipalities	In the first decade just municipalities, later municipalities + regions	In the first decade just municipalities, later municipalities + regions

Source: authors (based on relevant legal provisions)

Table 6: Historical development of the local (self-)government system in Slovenia

	Habsburg monarchy	Inter-war period	Period of socialism	Period after 1989
Centralization	Relatively decentralized	Centralized	Relatively decentralized	Centralized
Layers of sub-national government	3-4	3-4	2-3	1
Performing state administration	Medium	Medium	Medium/high	Low
Fiscal autonomy in relation to the state	None	None	None	None
Possibility to introduce own local taxes or to modify their rates	None	None	None	None
Concentration trend	Increasing number of municipalities	Stable number of municipalities	Decreasing number of municipalities	Increasing number of municipalities
Major competences	Local infrastructure, Local safety and social security, Local financial management	Local infrastructure, Local safety and social security, Local financial management	Common life matters, Directing of social development, Enabling inhabitants to fulfil their interests, Accomplishing of common needs of population in the area, Carrying out of different functions of government, Performing other societal roles	Local infrastructure, Local safety and social security, Local financial management, Local development, Performing other societal roles
Degree of regulation of competences	Low	Low	Medium	High
Main decision making body	Municipal council	Municipal council	Community committee	Municipal council
Main executive body	Mayor	Mayor	Mayor	Mayor
Power relation between the main decision making body and main executive body	Domination of executive body	Domination of executive body	Relative equality with moderately stronger position of the chair	Depending on local politics (party balance between municipal council and mayor)

Source: authors (based on relevant legal provisions)

Table 7: Historical development of the local (self-)government system in Slovakia

	Habsburg monarchy	Inter-war period	Period of socialism	Period after 1989
Centralization	Relatively decentral-ized	First decade decen-tralized, later rather centralized and during WWII strictly centralized	Centralized	First decade rather decentralized and later highly decen-tralized
Layers of sub-national government	3	3 later 2 with utiliza-tion of unified model (authorities were responsible for both self-government and state administration)	3 with existence of no self-government in fact	2 with utilization of dual model (division between self-gov-ernment and state administration)
Performing state administration	Medium	High	Total	Medium
Fiscal autonomy in relation to the state	Low	Low	None	Low in the first decade and later medium
Possibility to introduce own local taxes or to modify their rates	Low	Low	None	Low in the first dec-ade and later high
Concentration trend	Increasing number of municipalities	Increasing number of municipalities	Obligatory (coordi-nated by the state) decreasing of num-ber of municipalities	Increasing number of municipalities in the early 1990s and later stabile number of them
Major competences	Local infrastructure, local safety and social security, public health and local education, local financial man-agement	Local infrastructure, local safety and social security, public health, local educa-tion local financial man-agement	All public issues that were not recognized as the issues that should be managed / administered by some higher author-ity	Local infrastructure and transport, local safety and social se-curity, public health and local educa-tion, protection of environment, local financial manage-ment
Degree of regulation of competences	Low	Medium (moderately controlled by the state)	Medium but con-trolled by the state	Rather low in the 1990s and later even lower
Main decision making body	Municipal council	Municipal council	Local national com-mittee	Municipal council
Main executive body	Magistrate	Mayor	Chair of the local national committee together with board of the national com-mittee	Mayor
Power relation between the main decision making body and main executive body	Domination of magistrate	Domination of municipal council	Relative equal-ity with moderately stronger position of the chair	Domination of mayor

Source: authors (based on relevant legal provisions)

Table 8: Historical development of the local (self-)government system in the Czech Republic

	Habsburg monarchy	Inter-war period	Period of socialism	Period after 1989
Centralization	Relatively decentralized	First decade decentralized, later rather centralized and during WWII strictly centralized	Centralized	First decade rather decentralized and later highly decentralized
Layers of sub-national government	3	2 later 3 with utilization of unified model (authorities were responsible for both self-government and state administration)	3 with existence of no self-government in fact	2 with utilization of dual model till 2001, later rather fusion model
Performing state administration	Medium	High	Total	Medium
Fiscal autonomy in relation to the state	Low	Low	None	Low in the first decade and later medium
Possibility to introduce own local taxes or to modify their rates	Low	Low	None	Low in the first decade and later higher
Concentration trend	Increasing number of municipalities	Increasing number of municipalities	Obligatory (coordinated by the state) decreasing of number of municipalities	Increasing number of municipalities in the early 1990s and later stabile number of them
Major competences	Local infrastructure, local safety and social security, local education, local financial management	Local infrastructure, local safety and social security, local education local financial management	All public issues that were not recognized as the issues that should be managed / administered by some higher authority	Local infrastructure and transport, local safety and social security, local education, protection of environment, local financial management
Degree of regulation of competences	Low	Low-medium (moderately controlled by the state)	Medium but controlled by the state	Low in the 1990s and later even lower
Main decision making body	Municipal council	Municipal council	Local national committee	Municipal council
Main executive body	Mayor	Municipal board	Chair of the local national committee and board of national committee	Executive committee (mayor in the small municipalities)
Power relation between the main decision making body and main executive body	Domination of mayor	Domination of municipal board	Relative equality with moderately stronger position of the chair	Domination of executive committee (or mayor in the small municipalities)

Source: authors (based on relevant legal provisions)

Several international classification systems have addressed local (self-) government or related issues since the 1980s but they have either put the CEE countries in a single box or omitted these countries altogether (e.g. Denters – Rose 2005; Hesse 1991; John 2001; Page – Goldsmith 1987). If we look, however, at the fairly recent taxonomy produced by Swianiewicz (2014), we find that each of the countries examined in our study falls in a different country group. According to Swianiewicz, Slovakia, like Poland and Hungary, is one of the central European „champions of decentralization." The Czech Republic, on the other hand, is grouped together with Estonia and Latvia; these are countries whose local self-government systems are similar to those in the above decentralisation group but whose municipalities have far less financial autonomy and whose local leadership is fairly collective. Similarly, Slovenia, Romania, Croatia and Bulgaria belong in a „Balkan" group which conforms more closely with a well-known southern European model.

As regards the position of local self-government in the public administration of the examined countries, it must be kept in mind that all these countries have adopted the European Charter of Local Self-government into their legal systems. Nevertheless, while Slovenia has expressed no reservations about the Charter's content and Slovakia has gradually implemented all its provisions, the Czech Republic has explicitly stated a number of reservations and implemented only limited provisions.

Turning again to Slovenia, the complexity of the country's local self-government system has clearly increased over time as a result of (over-)regulation. While the structure of government has been streamlined so that the municipal level is the only sub-national level, the total number of municipalities has increased dramatically since the beginning of the 1990s. At the same time, the central government has established its own system of local offices to handle state tasks at the sub-national level, thereby removing those tasks entirely from the list of municipalities' powers. In this sense, the role of Slovenian municipalities has been reduced, and their autonomy is now strictly limited to certain financial and management issues.

Concerning the Slovak local self-government system, the last 20 years have seen the development of a highly decentralised system known for its low level of efficiency. Local governments are quite powerful and their fiscal autonomy is also relatively high. Even so, if we compare these units to the strong local governments in places such as Scandinavia, the average Slovak municipality is very small (Buček 2005). This is despite the fact that the fragmentation wave that hit Slovakia after 1990 was much weaker than comparable waves in the Czech Republic and Slovenia.

Within the Czech Republic, the development of local (self-)government resembles the Slovak experience. Surprisingly, however, given the existence of a common state with Slovakia (Czechoslovakia) between 1918 and 1992, there are significant differences between the current local self-government systems in the two countries. Though some links can be drawn between the present and the inter-war period, these differences also recall the divergence between the Austrian and Hungarian parts of the Habsburg monarchy.

In sum, as the data in the comparative tables shows, the Slovenian local (self-) government system has not developed significantly since the end of the 19th century. This absence of substantial change should not be explained, however, as simply a failure to evolve. Rather, we may make sense of it using the concepts of early path dependence and initial outcome path dependence. Similarly, when we look to the current local self-government systems in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, we find that the systems in the two countries differ markedly from each other as well as from their Slovenian counterpart. The current state of all three local (self-)government systems is also different from their situation in the past. Still, there are clear links between their institutional set-up after 1990 and in eras before World War II, especially the inter-war years.

Concluding remarks

In spite of their international achievements, including integration into the European Union in 2004, and their relatively successful transition, each of the examined countries must deal with the legacies of communism. The latter include a lack of transparency, corruption, a low level of political accountability and inefficient public service delivery. Nevertheless, a comparison of institutions in the local (self-)government systems in these countries shows that they are generally more influenced by the outcomes of the inter-war period (and to a limited extent, the Habsburg period) than those of the socialist era (see also Bakoš et al. 2015). Revisiting our assumptions, we can make the following statements:

1) The development of local self-government systems in all these countries shows recognisable path dependence.
2) To some extent, the development of local self-government systems after 1990 was outcome-dependent while the process during the socialist period was quite state-dependent.
3) The post-1990 development of local self-government systems in these countries was both early path-dependent (in terms of the inter-war years) and initial outcome-dependent (in terms of the Habsburg monarchy era). Ultimately, however, the early path dependence prevailed.

At the same time, the limited consistency in the compared criteria across the selected countries may also suggest alternative trends. From this standpoint, a high level of centralisation was typical during the socialist period in the Czech Republic and Slovakia but not in Slovenian territory. Paradoxically, centralisation became a reality in Slovenia after 1990, a development that recalled the local (self-)government system used in the country before World War II.

In fact, while the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia are all labelled CEE countries, they differ significantly when it comes to their past and present local (self-)government systems. In this context, this study confirms the conclusions of Swianiewicz (2014). On the other hand, the existence of recognisable path dependence in all three cases reinforces the conclusions of Bakoš, Soukopová and Selešovský (2015).

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Endangered European Municipalities: A Systematic Outline of the Problem and Its Political Impact[1]

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Politics in Central Europe (ISSN: 1801-3422)
Vol. 15, No. 2
DOI: 10.2478/pce-2019-0016

Abstract: *Drawing on the experiences of Czech municipalities that cannot perform their local government role due to grave indebtedness, this article seeks to identify other European countries where municipalities may be facing existential problems. It can be assumed that grave indebtedness is not the only potential threat to communities in Europe. One aim of this study is, thus, to identify other possible threats to municipalities and provide specific examples. My goal, among other things, is to start a scholarly discussion about endangered municipalities and bring this phenomenon into the realm of political science. My methodology uses qualitative research and content analysis to identify potential threats that could in extreme cases wipe out European municipalities. To obtain data about specific endangered municipalities in Europe, I rely on snowball sampling, a method used by researchers to identify potential subjects who may be hard to locate. My findings identify five potential threats to European municipalities, which I divide into two groups: common and less common. I highlight the locations of endangered municipalities and those where problems are pending as well as the groups of municipalities in the greatest peril from individual threats. I also highlight potential political impacts. My approach uses empirical case studies to model possible scenarios. Based on this analysis and the experiences of specific endangered municipalities, I outline six general forms of endangerment and eight different courses of municipal endangerment.*

Keywords: ***endangered European municipalities; problems of municipalities; gravely indebted municipalities; very small municipalities; threatened by disasters***

1 This study has been undertaken as part of project no. 126915 „Failed Municipalities in the Czech Republic" based on the support of the grants department of Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic.

Introduction

I want to begin with the example of Prameny, a small municipality located not far from the geographical centre of Europe[2] and a place where local candidates waived their right to stand for office in each of the six elections held between 2009 and 2012. The reason for this was simple: the longstanding grave indebtedness of the municipality.[3] During this leadership vacuum, Prameny was run by a state-appointed official who had no power to manage municipal debts or make decisions on the municipality's behalf. At the time, the municipality faced foreclosure and the sale of its property, and by 2011, its debts had skyrocketed to EUR 3.4 million. As a result of this financial deterioration, it ceased to provide public services. By 2016, it had been forced to shut down its municipal lighting system and its sewerage infrastructure was in disrepair, causing problems for residents. At the time of writing, the municipality is still unable to respond to these issues and only the help of local volunteers is allowing it to maintain appearances. Its annual income is approximately EUR 63,000. In contrast, Prameny is charged annual interest of at least EUR 185,000 on a total debt of EUR 4.44 million (Spěváčková 2016; Dolanská 2016). The only change in recent years has been the willingness of some locals to stand in the five successive elections since 2012.[4] These representatives have not, however, been able to influence the outcome of the situation. A total solution remains far-off, with state involvement the most likely remedy. Prameny is a prime example of a Czech municipality whose very existence is in danger or, to put this differently, it is a place where local self-government may disappear because of longstanding grave indebtedness. Other Czech municipalities in this predicament include Turovice, Bublava and Měnany.

The problem of endangered municipalities in Europe has been neglected to date though there are some examples of research and expert discussions on closely related topics.[5] Starting a discussion on this topic is particularly important for Czech analysts as it may provide some critical European context for local developments. Gravely indebted small Czech municipalities now find

2 Located in the Karlovy Vary region of the Czech Republic, Prameny is only 20 kilometres from a historic Mittelpunkt Europa (geographic midpoint of Europe).

3 For the purpose of this article, a critically indebted municipality is one that is unable to repay very large debts over an extended period.

4 Extraordinary elections were held on 7 April 2012, 26 September 2015 and 6 January 2018 after the resignation of representatives who were unable to agree on a debt management process. The last such resignation took place in March 2018, that is, six months before the regular municipal elections. Since those elections, the number of elected councilor positions has been from five to nine in the 120-member Prameny council. This is in order to prevent the council's dissolution in the event that individual councillors resign over differences in opinion over how to run the municipality.

5 Examples of paralysed municipalities can also be found in Kenya, South Africa and India among other countries (Blore – Devas – Slater 2004; Marrian – Magubane 2014; Enca 2015). Due to the varying definitions of municipalities globally, however, examples from Europe provide a more suitable comparison.

themselves in a deadlock which is reinforced by a legislative vacuum since the governing legislation offers no effective solutions (Hornek 2016: 246; Hornek 2017: 116). Expansion of the scope of research beyond the Czech Republic is crucial if we are to understand the phenomenon of endangered municipalities. Aside from this expansion of geographic scope, more investigation is needed of circumstances that may imperil municipalities since grave indebtedness is presumably not the only threat to the existence of European municipalities.

Aims

To date, political science has not generally addressed the existential problems – and potential extinction – of European municipalities. This is probably because these issues implicate many scientific disciplines and their interdisciplinary nature has overshadowed the innate links with political science. Against this backdrop, the study aims to draw attention to key issues and provide a basic systematic outline of factors that may in extreme cases threaten the existence of European municipalities.[6] At the same time, I describe some of the potential political impacts of these threats. These goals are complicated by the relative poverty of available data on these issues.[7] One of this work's additional aims is, thus, to provide concrete examples of endangered European municipalities.

Scope, methods applied and data collection

As my title suggests, Europe provides the geographical boundary for this research. There are, however, more than 90,000 municipalities in Europe (Eurostat 2017). Moreover, across different countries, these municipalities have different functions, are funded differently and vary overall in terms of municipal structures, historical practices and local peculiarities. The aim of my research was therefore to address the greatest possible range of situations that endanger municipalities. As such, no fixed sample of countries was defined in advance and nor was any specific European region investigated. This goal was, however, impeded by the limited availability of source material (see my notes on the data collection process below). The lack of case studies about this phenomenon was similarly unhelpful.

6 The threats in question could significantly affect municipal operations. They may, for example, influence local politics and the provision of municipal services or, in extreme cases, lead to the dissolution of the municipality.

7 The difficulties in obtaining data can be linked to the fact that specific cases of endangered municipalities are often hidden in the international environment where the focus is on the national level. In other words, these cases do not appear in the international (English language) press, and they are not addressed in international analysis/research in political science.

The study draws on qualitative research methods and a content analysis of relevant sources to meet its objectives (see Yin 2015; Drulák et al. 2008). I have used snowball sampling to obtain data about specific endangered municipalities in Europe. This is a method employed by researchers to identify potential subjects in studies where subjects are hard to locate (Hartnoll 2003).[8] As a first step, a content analysis was carried out on texts from different scientific disciplines accessible through scientific databases.[9] I also searched for broadly related book-length works, especially in European libraries and their databases,[10] and then analysed the volumes found. Based on this literature review, it became clear that a) existing scientific works do not deal with the existential problems of European municipalities in a comprehensive way, b) coverage of the issues of endangered municipalities is fragmented across the scholarly disciplines and c) there are a small number of relevant case studies and more information is needed from these affected municipalities.[11]

Based on these findings, I surveyed a large number of authorities and institutions from a range of European countries. A questionnaire concerning the current issues of municipalities was prepared and sent out to the official e-mail addresses of these institutions. To this end, I contacted 48 unions and associations of municipalities and 95 interior ministries or authorities responsible for particular municipalities[12] as well as 29 embassies operating in the Czech Republic. The response rate from these institutions was very low at just 9.88 %.[13] The answers that I received confirmed the need to focus primarily on media reports since even at the level of individual states (regions), there was no clear database or record of problems affecting municipalities, let alone specific case

8 For this reason, the examples and cases presented in this study do not fully reflect the situation across the whole continent. Rather they simply provide a basic systematic analysis. The goal here is to initiate a multidisciplinary discussion, which should lead to broader reflections on these issues.

9 They included electronic sources placed, for instance, in the databases of the Web of Science, Taylor & Francis Online, Scopus, PoEBSCOhost, Central and East European Online Library or Google Scholar.

10 For this purpose, I made use of libraries at the following universities: Leiden University; University of Warsaw; University of Potsdam; Humboldt University; University of Basel; University of Zurich and Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

11 In addition, I had the opportunity to consult several foreign experts on municipal policy and municipalities. In this regard, I discussed potential threats to municipalities with Professor Jochen Franzke (University of Potsdam), Professor Pawel Swianiewicz (University of Warsaw), docent Daniel Klimovský (Comenius University in Bratislava) and the staff of Gemeindeamt of Canton of Zürich Dr. Alexander Gulde (Department of Municipal Finance) and Dr. Alexander Locher (Legal Secretary).

12 In the case of federal (regional) states, I approached all relevant ministries (authorities) in the state responsible for the municipality.

13 Most (10) of the completed answers came from the embassies. The authorities and relevant ministries that were contacted responded in five cases. And only two unions of municipalities – the Association of Estonian Cities and the Croatian Association of Municipalities, replied from the union of municipalities. All the answers received had the following two characteristics: (a) a recommendation that the author approach a specific institution (the institutions addressed did not respond); or (b) references were sent to possible information that could be used for research.

studies. I therefore conducted an online search of European media[14] with the goal of finding concrete examples of endangered communities.[15] From this monitoring, I was able to map out some examples of endangered European municipalities that had been covered in the media.[16] At the same time, the information about individual threats and their impacts remained fairly basic, and I therefore attempted to obtain more information directly from the representatives of the affected European municipalities. Unfortunately, this did not produce the desired results.[17]

Drawing on all of the data processed and examples collected, I proceeded to identify and categorise dangers. Based on their potential intensity, they were divided into two groups: threats more likely to occur in Europe and those that were less common and limited to specific circumstances or fortunately not encountered at all in Europe. Individual threats were linked to specific examples of municipalities and states where they might be happening or arise in the future. For each individual threat, I identified situations that might arise and pointed to examples of potentially affected municipalities. This study concludes by proposing some general concepts that could be used to characterise the situations endangered municipalities may face. Applying these terms, I outline eight possible variations on how municipalities could become endangered.

14 The following databases were consulted: Factiva, LexisNexis, PressReader and Newton Media Search. I used the Google search function to monitor the media. (list key words?)

15 Media monitoring has shown that if the media do cover problematic municipalities, then it is in texts that are not – with some exceptions – published in the English language. Because it is a local theme, it is not necessary to present it in English, but only in specific national languages. For this reason, it is a great advantage for the researcher to cover as many European languages as possible with his or her linguistic skills. For the sake of further research and inquiries, it is advisable to make even greater efforts to cooperate with local institutions and researchers who can better focus on possible cases from their countries. The author of the paper worked mainly with the texts written in Central European languages, i.e. Czech, German, Slovak, Polish and, of course, English. Nevertheless, some French, Spanish, Italian and Hungarian texts have been incorporated as well.

16 The used examples mainly cover the situation after 2001, but the paper also treats the examples of municipalities prior to this period, on the grounds that such threats may also occur in the future.

17 Representatives of 20 municipalities (from Slovakia, Germany, Austria, Switzerland) were addressed, mainly from small municipalities. The representatives were approached in their native languages and were asked to respond to eight questions related to local politics, citizens' participation in local politics, administrative capacity of the municipality or, for instance, services provided by municipalities. They were addressed first through official or personal emails. However, no answers came back, probably also for the following reasons: many of these municipalities do not have their own websites, the representatives of the addressed municipalities are not released from their jobs and hold their functions in their leisure time, and in some cases it is even impossible to find out via the Internet who the specific representatives are. That is why they were addressed for the second time, this time by letters sent by post (it was often difficult to obtain the official addresses of the municipal authorities and, therefore, higher administrative units were addressed). This effort, nevertheless resulted in one answer received from the Swiss municipality Meienried.

State of knowledge and terminology applied

Much has been written about the miscellaneous problems of municipalities and the challenges they have had to face.[18] Even so, the scholarship concerning the existential problems of European municipalities is not comprehensive. In particular, there is a need to define what constitutes a threat to municipalities and decide how to approach this issue. The issue of potential existential threats to municipalities has been addressed across a wide range of disciplines including economics, law, public administration, sociology, geography and urban studies. Individual disciplines perceive these potential threats differently according to their focus.

I want therefore to focus on the current state of knowledge about municipal endangerment. This includes the questions of whether and how the problem has been addressed by political scientists, how the research deals with natural and environmental threats and how demographics and economics factor into these risks. From an economic point of view, the most significant threat to municipalities is indebtedness. When municipal representatives fail to manage finances carefully, the community may be left with financial problems severe enough to threaten its existence. Generally speaking, the largest cities with the biggest budgets have the highest volumes of total debt. These cities can, however, afford to borrow large amounts and tend to be able to repay these sums as a result of having more diversified incomes. In contrast, though the debts of smaller municipalities may not to be as high as those of large cities, in cases where they are large, communities have a hard time repaying them.[19] Financial crises (CEMR 2009; UCLG 2009) also have an impact on municipalities[20] and can create or exacerbate debt repayment problems. This is what has happened, for example, in the cities and regions of southern Europe where the inability to repay debts deepened during the financial crisis and where development models proved unsuccessful (Knieling – Othengrafen 2016). The research also covers

18 Examples include: municipal reforms in a number of European countries that have merged many municipalities; the democratisation itself in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe; the effects of globalisation or regionalisation; broadening the direct election of mayors in many European countries; using new methods such as New Public Management or practicing the principles of Multi-Level Governance; the use of the concept of paradiplomacy by large municipalities in particular; or a relatively new concept of smart cities that is expected to introduce modern technology into city management so that municipalities, for example, make more efficient a provision of public services, the areas of energy, transport, waste management, water management and, as a whole, all of that should facilitate a better way to sustainable development.

19 When publishing the most indebted municipalities in a given country, the total debt is converted per capita, which makes it possible to compare the situation across various size categories. That is the reason this text also uses this conversion.

20 For example, in 2011, the Council of Europe released a publication dealing with local governments during the crisis. The texts arose from the 17th Session of the Council of Europe Conference of Ministers Responsible for Local and Regional Government, held in Kyiv, on 3–4 November 2011 (Davey 2012).

municipal finance reforms and case studies of cities with economic problems (Hansmann 2011). Other works deal, for example, with strategies to escape municipal debt taps (Junkernheinrich 2011) in the absence of municipal funds (Holtkamp 2011; Holtkamp 2010). The authors also address factors affecting local policies on the consolidation of the municipal budgets (Geißler 2011) and the options for declaring municipal bankruptcy (municipal insolvency), which might be one solution to grave municipal debts (Brand 2014).[21]

The second research perspective devoted a great deal of attention from the international community and can often be linked to indebtedness, too. It entails demographic problems of municipalities, which may be caused by a variety of influences, such as migration, urbanization, suburbanization, mobility, the aging of the population or indebtedness (ed. Oswald 2006). In this area, the international scientific community deals with the long-term or medium-term leaving of citizens from their residences. This phenomenon is referred to by the term 'shrinking cities'. Municipalities such as these can be found all over the world. It can be a global process, or a purely regional phenomenon (ed. Oswallt 2004; ed. Oswallt 2006; ed. Weaver – Bagchi-Sen – Knigh – Frazier 2017). In Europe, this municipal shrinking was and still is occurring, for example in connection with the new states of Germany (German Länder) and the cantons of Switzerland. The phenomenon of shrinking cities is not unusual or new and can be found in ancient times (Richter 2013: 21). For example, Bartl (2011) explains the shrinking of municipalities by the migration and aging of the population. The correlating decrease in population has an impact on municipal budgets. On that account, these municipalities can go into debt, their development might deteriorate, and the services could be restricted, including health care. In extreme cases, municipalities would have no human resources for management and no candidates for elections (Bartl 2011). In Europe, case studies have been developed on this issue, mainly concerning German municipalities. These studies also address the influence on local community policy but mainly focus on fields such as Urban Studies, Economy and Sociology. This paper is particularly concerned with urban regeneration and the potential of the shrinking municipalities (Kühn – Liebmann 2009; Richter 2013). It deals with the specific cases of German cities,[22] such as Duisburg, Zittau, Görlitz, Eisenhüttenstadt, Riesa, Stalsund, as well as with the theoretical approaches and concepts of how to aid municipalities in regeneration, for example, through strategic planning, multi-

21 The text deals with the situation in Germany. In the Czech Republic (given the cases of critically indebted municipalities), the situation was dealt with by the relevant ministries, but eventually this step never materialised. In Europe, bankruptcy of municipalities is possible, for example, in Switzerland or Hungary. (Hornek 2016)

22 The research does not only concern German cities but also shrinking municipalities all over the world, for example cities from deindustrialisation in Great Britain, suburbanisation in the USA or cities affected by the collapse of the Soviet Union. (ed. Oswald 2004; ed. Oswald 2006)

level governance or urban redevelopment (eds. Kühn – Liebmann 2009; Glock 2006). The researchers also address natural and environmental catastrophes and their impacts on municipalities. However, also in this case and more importantly, they address the impacts on human lives and property. Typically, current disasters cause more property damage and affect a larger area and thereby more population (Langhammer 2007: 13). Since the year 2000, about two billion people around the world have been directly affected by natural disasters (eds. Guha-Sapir – Santos 2013). Both natural and social sciences are exploring disasters and their impact on society. Geography has been addressing such areas as disaster risk, disaster vulnerability (Wisner – Luce 1993), disaster risk reduction and public management in critical situations (Schneider 2011) for a long time. The economic impacts of natural disasters are also explored (Guha-Sapir – Santos 2013). Case studies often target African cities (e.g. Pelling – Wisner 2014) and large natural disasters in the US and their impact (e.g. Schneider 2011).

In political science, the issue of threats to municipalities has not yet been given much regard. There are no case studies to identify the political impacts of various threats in specific municipalities.[23] Consequently, it is not yet possible to rely on typology or classification that would deal with the threats and their possible political impacts. Also, for example, no institution creates a possible index of the most endangered municipalities. The phenomenon of failed states has such an index, called the Fragile States Index (FFP 2016). The fact that political scientists have not yet sufficiently addressed the threats that may endanger the existence of local governments or their political impacts also means that there is no agreed-upon terminology that would be used or that would describe the above-mentioned phenomenon.[24]

The text proposes using the term '*endangered municipalities*' as an example of municipalities that may be afflicted by a particular threat that could eventually bring the municipality to extinction. Neither do we find a generally applied terminology in the case of such municipalities that do not fulfill their functions anymore, are paralyzed and lack an elected municipal leadership, as was the case with the Czech municipality of Prameny between the years 2009–2012. For such municipalities, the term '*failed municipalities*' is suggested, based on the example of states that do not fulfill their basic functions.[25] However, the term

23 For example, no papers have yet been published to explain how the local politics of a municipality (voter turnout, local election campaigns, etc.) is affected or not after the municipality has suffered a natural-environmental disaster. There is also a lack of more detailed research into the critical debt of municipalities and its influence on local politics (cf. Hornek 2016). Also, political analyses of local policies of the shrinking municipalities are inadequate.

24 However, even other fields which deal with the issues of municipalities do not have proper terminology, except for the aforementioned phenomenon of shrinking municipalities.

25 Theoretical approaches to the failed states can be found at three levels, namely economic, political and military-security (cf. Šmíd – Vaďura 2009). It is the economic and political decline that could possibly be applied to the municipalities.

failed municipalities is not yet used in political science.[26] It is only mentioned in one economic publication devoted to non-European municipalities from the authors Blore, Devas and Slater (2004). The authors divide the municipalities into four categories,[27] where the fourth type describes the municipalities that have failed. However, this is a typology of the third-world communities whose leadership is not elected but appointed. These municipalities have deficit budgets, which is a problem that is not being solved. Central governments can proceed in such cases by removing the remaining functions from the failed municipalities. This is an approach that has been applied, for example, in Kenya and some South Asian countries[28] (Blore – Devas – Slater 2004). In European literature, this terminology does not otherwise exist. The situation is different in the US literature, where essentially the same term of failure of municipalities is used. The term is mainly associated with American municipalities that have financial problems or have gone bankrupt[29] (Schragger 2016). However, even in the US, scientists are more concerned with the economic (Spiotto – Acker – Appleby 2012) rather than political science. They deal with the prevention of critical debt (Frankel 2014) and the possible reforms that would solve the problems of bankruptcy (Gillette – Skeel 2016).

The identified threats to European municipalities

Based on the above described procedure and data collection, 5 types of threats that can significantly jeopardise the European municipalities have been identified and differentiated. The paper first deals primarily with three threats, which it dedicates the main space to. These are the following threats 1) economic, 2) demographic and 3) natural-environmental.[30] They are labeled as rather com-

26 The terms 'endangered municipalities' and 'failed municipalities' should be logically complemented by a term that denotes such municipalities that have failed to deal with the impacts of endangerment and de iure (not only de facto as in the case of failed municipalities) they cease to function and exist. Such municipalities can be described as 'extinct municipalities'.

27 The remaining municipalities are categorised as dynamic, handicapped and frustrated (Blore – Devas – Slater 2004: 14–16).

28 A precondition for the solution to the described issues in municipalities is to secure new financial resources and to revive local democratic responsibilities. This, however, appears to be a long-term process.

29 This is the case of such municipalities as Detroit, Stockton, Vallejo San Bernardino or Bell. These are mainly post-industrial cities, which are a part of the non-prosperous regions. In the affected cities there is a large ethnic minority (Schragger 2016: 23). In the USA, they have had experience with the bankruptcy of municipalities since 1937. By January 2012, 633 bankruptcies of municipalities and small tax districts had been recorded in the US. The debt limit differs for each municipality according to the federal states (Spiotto – Acker – Appleby 2012: 47).

30 Many possible threats may fall under natural-environmental threats. The paper focuses on those that can be so severe that municipalities may become extinct due to them. They primarily include threats from volcanic activity, earthquake threats, or the possibility of a nuclear power plant accident. In addition, they also include, for example, threats such as floods, devastating fires, tsunamis, landslides and chemical industrial accidents.

mon threats because they can afflict potentially more European municipalities than the other two threats. Nevertheless, the other two types of threats, which are rather rare, namely include 4) a higher intent and 5) a war conflict, and are naturally represented in the paper as well. Such threats form the group of less common threats and the text attaches less attention to them, as these threats exhibit a very specific local character; in other words, fortunately, such threats do not exist in Europe.

Table 1 summarises the identified threats to European municipalities. In the table, examples of states and specific municipalities, where we may encounter endangered municipalities or where they might appear in the future, have been assigned to individual threats.

Table 1: Types of threats and examples of endangered or potentially endangered municipalities

1) Economic threats (grave indebtedness)	**2) Demographic threats**		**3) Natural and environmental threats**				**4) Threats from plans at a higher level**	**5) Threats from military conflict**
	a) very small population in the municipality	b) shrinking municipalities (more than 20% of the population)	a) threat of floods	b) threats from volcanic activity	c) threat of earthquakes	d) risk of a nuclear power plant accident	a) construction of strategic buildings in the area of the municipality or b) mining	
Examples of countries/ municipalities	Examples of countries/ municipalities	Examples of countries/ municipalities	Examples of countries	Examples of countries/ municipalities	Examples of countries	Examples of countries	Examples of countries	Examples of countries
Austria (Dünserberg, Warth, Schröcken, Damüls, St. Gerold, Klösterle); **Czech Republic** (Prameny, Turovice, Bublava, Dlažkovice) **France** (Levallois-Perre); **Germany** (Gröde, Putgarten, Damp, Langeness, Hagen Duisburg);	**Austria** (Gramais [45 inh.], Namlos 72 inh.], Kaisers 76 [inh.], Hinterhornbach [92 inh.], Großhofen [98 inh.]); **Czech Republic** (e.g. [Čilá 15 inh.], Vysoká Lhota [15 inh.], Kaničky and Hradiště [each 27 inh.], Kuřimany [28 inh] or Bludov [29 inh].); **France** (e.g Rochefourchat [1 inh.], Leménil-Mitry [3 inh.], Rouvroy-Ripont [7 inh.], Urtière [8 inh.],	**Austria** (Eisenerz); **Germany** (Düsseldorf, Bitterfeld-Wolfen, Gelsenkirchen, Görlitz, Halle); **Portugal** (Arraiolos, Lisbon); **Greece** (Athens, Piraeus), **Spain** (Baracaldo); **Great Britain** (Belfast, Birkenhead, Glasgow, Liverpool);	**across European countries**	**Greece**; (e.g. Agioi Theodoroi, Santorini, Nisyros, Milos, Troizinia-Methana); **Iceland** (e.g. Mýrdalshreppur or Bláskógabyggð) **Portugal** (municipalities Vila do Corvo, Vila Franca do Campo, Ponta Delgada, Ribeira Brava);	**Balkan countries; Bulgaria; Greece; Iceland; Italy; Romania; Turkey**	**Belarus; Belgium; Bulgaria; Czech Republic; Finland; France; Germany Hungary; Romania; Slovakia; Slovenia; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland; Netherlands; Ukraine; United Kingdom**	**across European countries**	in the past the collapse of **Yugoslavia**, the present conflict in **eastern Ukraine**

continue

1) Economic threats (grave indebtedness)	**2) Demographic threats**		**3) Natural and environmental threats**				**4) Threats from plans at a higher level**	**5) Threats from military conflict**
	a) very small population in the municipality	b) shrinking municipalities (more than 20% of the population)	a) threat of floods	b) threats from volcanic activity	c) threat of earthquakes	d) risk of a nuclear power plant accident	a) construction of strategic buildings in the area of the municipality or b) mining	
Examples of countries/ municipalities	Examples of countries/ municipalities	Examples of countries/ municipalities	Examples of countries	Examples of countries/ municipalities	Examples of countries	Examples of countries	Examples of countries	Examples of countries
Hungary (Harkans, Bükk szék, Balatonfűzfő); **Italy** (Torino, Milan, Siena, Genoa); **Poland** (Bydgoszcz, Płock, Łódź, Toruń); **Portugal** (Portimão); **Slovakia** (Devín, Ondavka, Púchov, Čadná,); **Slovenia** (Gornji Petrovci, Solčava); **Spain** (Pioz, Jerez de la Frontera); **Switzerland** (Leukerbad)	Casterets and Baren [each 13 inh.], Les Goulles and Pommerol [each 19 inh.]); **Germany** (e.g. Gröde [9 inh.], Dierfeld [10 inh.], Wiedenborstel [11 inh.], Keppeshausen [15 inh.], Herbstmühle and Sengericht [each 19 inh], Grothusenkoog [21 inh.], Hamm and Süderhöft [each 22inh.], Affler [27 inh.]); **Slovakia** (e.g. Príkra [7 inh.], Šarbov [10 inh.], Havranec [11 inh.], Ondavka [15 inh.], Belejovce [18 inh.], Poproč [23 inh.] Bystrá and Olšinkov [each 27 inh.], Parihuzovce [27 inh.], Regetovka [31 inh.]; **Spain** (Jaramillo Quemado [5 inh.], Castilnuevo [8 inh.], Fuembellida [13 inh.], Manciles [19 inh.]; **Switzerland** (e.g. Corippo [13 inh.], Bister [33 inh.], Kammersrohr [29 inh], Schelten [40 inh.] Lohn [41 inh.] Rebévelier [42 inh.], Berken [43 inh.], Clavaleyres [46 inh], Rongellen [53 inh.], Meinried [71 inh.]).	**Italy** (Cagliari, Forno di Zoldo, Genoa, La Spezia); **Latvia** (Liepaja); **Slovenia** (Maribor)		**Italy** Messina, Catania (Etna); **Spain** (municipalities Tuineje, Frontera, Gáldar, Artenara, Alajeró, Santa Cruz de la Palma, Tinajo, La Orotava)				

Rather common threats of municipalities

Endangerment by critical indebtedness

The indebtedness of the municipalities varies across individual European countries. In recent years, the local self-government debt in Central and Eastern Europe, such as in Romania and Poland, has rapidly grown. The total debt has also increased in France and in Italy. However, due to the experience with the last economic crisis, the municipalities are attempting to manage their budgets cautiously (Hava 2015; Périnel 2016). The local government also plays a role in municipal debt. It can regulate the possibilities of the indebtedness of the municipalities. Most countries have a certain system of debt regulation given by the legislation. This can partially prevent debts (see Hornek 2016: 115–116). In spite of a certain regulation of municipal indebtedness, there are municipalities in individual countries in Europe that are deeply in debt. Large municipalities with more than 100,000 inhabitants have the largest debts in Italy[31] and Poland.[32] By contrast, small municipalities with up to 5,000 inhabitants have the largest debts per capita in countries such as the Czech Republic, Austria,[33] Slovenia[34] or Hungary.[35] Slovakia is an example of a country where the most indebted cities have over 10,000 but fewer than 100,000 inhabitants.[36] Similarly, the most

31 In 2014, the most indebted municipalities were Torino (€ 3,519 per capita), Milan (€ 3,036 per capita), Siena (€ 2,457 per capita) and Genoa (€ 2,172 per capita). It has been attempted to deal with the indebtedness by requesting funding from the state, increasing the municipal tax and lowering the municipal waste and public transport rate, and by providing fewer public services (Secolo d' Italia 2014).

32 In 2015, Bydgoszcz, Płock, Łódź and Toruń had the highest ratio of debt to the total annual income of municipalities. The ratio reached 95.34 % of annual income (Fakt24.pl 2015; Sąsiada 2015; WP finance 2016).

33 Austrian municipalities that have been indebted for a long time have fewer than 1,000 inhabitants. Debt per capita exceeds 10,000 € per capita. This high debt is most common in Vorarlberg. Examples are Dünserberg (debt per capita € 13,084); Warth (€ 14,869), Schröcken (€ 24,696), Damüls (€ 10,472), St. Gerold (€ 13,992), Klösterle (€ 11,287) (Burth 2015; Meinbezir.at 2015; Statistik.at 2016).

34 The most indebted municipality of Slovenia, Gornji Petrovci (2,057 inhabitants), had a debt per capita of around € 1,740 in 2013. The second most indebted municipality was Solčava and its debt per capita was € 1,334. By contrast, Ljubljana had the highest total debt of EUR 171 million (624 per capita). Slovenian municipalities are generally under-financed; since 2011 they have received lower budget transfers than they are legally entitled to. Small municipalities have to provide the same services as the large ones, which poses a problem. For example, all 212 municipalities have to provide services such as day-care for pre-school children, primary school, primary healthcare or social services. In order to cut their costs, municipalities often form joint municipal administrations, which carry out certain tasks for multiple municipalities. (Slovenia News 2018; Sobotainfo.com 2013)

35 The situation in Hungary is similar to that in the Czech Republic since the most indebted municipalities are those that had a failed investment project.

36 The most indebted cities in Slovakia are municipalities with over 10,000 inhabitants. An example is Žilina. The municipality owed 59.7 % of its current revenue (debt of € 349 per capita) in 2015, which after many years fulfilled the statutory criteria. Other examples include the city Púchov (€ 307 per capita) and Čadná (€ 232 per capita). Žilina had the worst financial situation for years. The state had to help by waiving the debt in the amount of € 5,840,000 (Vláda SR 2014; Tunega 2015; Čas.sk 2015).

indebted cities in France have over 20,000 inhabitants and in Portugal over 55,000 inhabitants.[37] States like Germany[38] and Spain[39] have a very high debt in both large municipalities over 100,000 and in small municipalities under 5,000 inhabitants.

The critical debt of the municipality is becoming a major topic of local politics. It is the main problem that the representatives of the municipality must solve. The issue of dealing with the critical debt is a major topic of municipal elections and even of election campaigns. In extreme cases, local residents might not even want to run in the municipal elections and lead the community. It can be expected that the elected positions in indebted large municipalities are still appealing to the candidates despite their indebtedness. However, in the case of small municipalities, where the attractiveness of the elected positions is less even under regular conditions, the debt increases the potential lack of interest in leading such a municipality. In larger municipalities, the political parties can be expected to find different solutions to the problem with debt and the population would also have different opinions on what approach is the most reasonable. On the contrary, there may be a consensus in small municipalities, even though it is not a rule. The residents are aware of the debt due to the consequential reduction in services provided. In this case, the size of the municipality does not matter, since services are limited both by small and large municipalities. On the other hand, large municipalities cut down on above-the--standard services, while small municipalities have to reduce even the most basic ones. Large municipalities have more redundancies, the municipal property is sold, and fees for transportation and local taxes are increased. Critical debt can lead to people leaving their residence, which is a problem, especially for small municipalities. With long-term debt of large municipalities and the migration of a high proportion of the population, the number of elected representatives is decreasing, as in the case of the phenomenon of shrinking municipalities.

37 For example, Levallois-Perret (€ 9,129 debt per capita) has a total debt of € 595 million (Bourquard 2015). In recent years, the worst situation in Portugal has been experienced by the town of Portimão (55,614 inh.), which had its accounts frozen for three years. It could not invest and in general manage its municipality because its debt amounted to 162 million euros. The municipality began to drastically reduce and lay off its workers. In 2016, it received a loan worth € 142.5 million from the Portuguese Municipal Fund, to be repaid by the city within 27 years (Portugal News 2016).

38 The most indebted large cities are located in the Ruhr area. These are municipalities such as Oberhausen, Duisburg, Hagen, Herne and Mülheim an der Ruhr (Mittermeir 2015). The smallest municipality in Germany Gröde with nine inhabitants has the largest debt per capita of (€ 26,767 per capita). Other examples are a small municipality of Putgarten (€ 19,357 per capita), Langeness (€ 19,086 per capita) and Damp with fewer than 1,500 inhabitants (€ 21,633 per capita) (Wetter 2014).

39 A frequent cause of large debt in Spanish municipalities is the consequence of the 2008 economic crisis, which is also connected with the collapse of construction (Gonzáles 2013). The municipalities in trouble are located in Andalusia and Valencia (Fernández 2013). One of the most affected Spanish municipalities is, for example, Jerez de la Frontera, which has more than 200,000 inhabitants and is one of the most indebted municipalities. In 2013, each inhabitant owed € 4,600 (Al Jazeera 2013).

Based on empirical examples, five possible situations which can occur in a critically indebted municipality have been identified:

1. An unresolved situation;
2. A bankruptcy of the municipality;
3. A temporary assumption of management of the municipality;
4. Financial aid from the state;
5. Municipalities solve their debts themselves.

1. An unresolved situation. The first possible situation was described in the introduction and exemplified by the Czech municipality of Prameny. It represents one of the worst situations that can be encountered in Europe. The municipal debt is deepening and the situation has to be dealt with ad hoc by the state. The same situation is in the Czech municipality of Turovice (219 inh.); however, the total debt is lower (3,12 million euro in 2017). Spanish Pioz with 3,600 inhabitants is in a similar situation to Prameny. Pioz has been indebted because of developers' projects. At the current installments of € 2,000, the debt would be repaid over the next 7,000 years. The municipality is unable to pay for everyday activities, such as public lighting or garbage disposal, and road maintenance has been stopped. There is also a 25 % unemployment rate in the municipality due to the debt (Govan 2012). At present, the worst situation is apparently faced by the Slovak municipality of Ondavka, which is critically indebted despite the fact that the total debt exceeds 'only' more than 30,000 euros. The municipality has only 15 inhabitants. Ondavka was indebted under a former mayor who was found guilty of violating his obligation in the management of foreign property. Still, he won the election in 2006, and in 2012 he resigned. Ondavka, under the leadership of a former mayor, did not even initiate the recovery regime it had been ordered to undertake. The municipality faces ten executions, the public lighting is not lit, the garbage is not taken away, and the inhabitants have not paid local taxes and fees for years. Since January 2015, nobody has run the municipality. The last seven elections for the mayor and deputies have not been held. Nobody takes an interest in running for the elected positions. The situation can only be solved through the amalgamation with the surrounding municipality, which should receive state aid for the amalgamation. (Otriová 2017; Tvnoviny.sk 2018)

2. A bankruptcy of the municipality. The second possibility is the bankruptcy of the municipality. Unlike in the US, this is virtually absent in Europe. A unique example is the Swiss municipality of Leukerbad (1,600 inhabitants). Since the 1990s, the municipality has been massively investing in spas, services and local infrastructure, bringing its total debt up to 350 million CHF, approximately 219 thousand francs per capita. The village was unable to repay its liabilities. For more than 15 years, it had no money and was not repaying its debt. Canton Wallis was expected to help, but that did not happen. The municipality fell under forced administration. The representatives of the municipality had to sell all the property as well as the town hall. Even the other municipalities in the vicinity of Leukerbad had to sharply reduce their expenses. Therefore, the solution was the bankruptcy of the municipality. Leukerbad has been suffering the consequences to this day, constantly saving drastically. But it benefits from its location in the mountains and from the interest of tourists. The municipality is committed to repaying 1.3 million Swiss francs each year. The mayor admitted that it was surprising that the debt had not affected the main revenues of the municipality, which is also the reason it survived the bankruptcy. There is minimal unemployment in the municipality, its inhabitants have not left and population growth is stable. Leukerbad is even more attractive to new residents because it has a school and a pre-school in the area. On the other hand, local taxes are at the highest possible limit. (Teevs 2013) As can be seen from this example, the bankruptcy of a municipality does not have to lead to its failure. On the contrary, it is more about restarting and ending paralysis and thus slowly beginning with new development.

3. A temporary assumption of management of the municipality. Most European countries are not allowed to bankrupt their municipalities. However, municipalities may be placed under forced administration; an example of this would be Slovakia. In 2015, nine municipalities were under forced administration in Slovakia. In 2017, the number decreased to five municipalities: Devín (1,538 inh.), Luhyňa (304 inh.), Švedlár (2,145 inh.), Ladomirová (1,055 inh.) and the city of Martin (54,978 inh.). Municipalities under forced administration cannot invest in any way, develop or apply for subsidies. They can only lead the municipality in the most basic way, such as road maintenance or pay for municipality employees. Therefore, in the case of municipal development, local citizens set up civic associations to address municipal problems (Krčmárik 2015; Liptáková 2017). In Poland, the management is temporarily given to a commissioner. In these municipalities, all services are cut and all the money is used for debt repayment. The spiral of debt in Poland often consists of the government repeatedly imposing new obligations on municipalities without raising the money for this purpose. Therefore, municipalities have to borrow money to fulfill the requirements of the government. The banks lend the money even to the municipalities with large debts. It is certain that they will get their money back because it is a state debt. So far, there is no law prohibiting the banks in lending money to the municipalities in poor condition (Skrobisz 2015). For example, in Germany the position of a 'Sparkommissar' helps the municipalities in financial problems. One is either appointed by the supervising ministry of the interior or through an agreement between the ministry and the municipality. Municipalities such as Waltop (2005) and Nideggen (2014/2015) have had experience with this institute (Kimmel 2006; Welt.de 2013).

4. Financial aid from the state. In some countries, the municipal debt is taken over by the state and (partly) repaid. Such situations have appeared in Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. For example, in Hungary in 2013, the state paid 80 % of the total debt for 14 municipalities. These included the Harkans with a debt of € 14.9 million (3,889 per capita), of which the state has taken over € 10.32 million. Other examples are Bükkszék and Balatonfűzfő (each total debt is around € 3.2 million). The state helps because municipalities have to fulfill the basic functions, even if they do not have the finances to do so (Válasz.hu 2013). More than a decade ago in the Czech Republic, the state first bought back hundreds of millions of debts of the town Rokytnice nad Jizerou, and the city was gradually and quite substantially waived of its debts (Hornek 2016). An example in Slovakia is the city of Žilina, and a probable candidate is Devín, as it faces a very bad situation. In 1997, there was the intention to build a residential neighborhood, which failed thus resulting in its current indebtedness. The municipal debt is virtually unpayable since the interest alone represents essentially the annual income of the municipality, which has sold everything. Devín has been under forced administration since 2005. Devín's debts exceed 10 million euros and the municipality is unable to get out of this situation alone. The only options are a change in the legislation and the possibility of bankruptcy of municipalities or assistance from the state or from the Bratislava City Hall, as Devín is one of Bratislava's main districts (Krčmárik 2015; Ineko 2016; Liptáková 2017).

5. Municipalities solve their debts themselves. The municipalities in this category deal with debt on their own. The majority of European indebted municipalities fall into this category. Depending on the extent of the debt, there is a reduction in services; possibly, an increase in local fees (taxes) and financial problems are becoming the subject of local politics. In this category, there are all possible sizes of municipalities. One example may be the German city of Oberhausen, which is one of the most indebted municipalities. In 2013, it was the most indebted city and by 2015 each of more than 210,000 inhabitants owed 9,450 euros. In addition to the closure of the heavy industry and the associated consequences, the city also financially contributed to the solidarity tax when the West German municipalities financially supported the municipalities in the former East Germany. Several austerity measures were in place in the city. For example, the swimming pool, several schools and libraries were closed down and local parks were not maintained. On the contrary, the city is trying to financially support cultural events and has not closed down local theatre, which costs up to € 8 million a year, because cultural events attract young people who should be the future for the city (Eddy 2013; Mittermeir 2015). The possible situations are not mutually exclusive. A municipality may go over several phases at one time, depending on the local legislation and the possible means that can be used for debt relief.

Demographic threats to municipalities

Demographic threats to municipalities include, in particular, the phenomenon of shrinking municipalities (e.g. Bart 2011), when municipalities lose their inhabitants for a variety of reasons. The phenomenon affects municipalities across size groups (ed. Oswald 2006). The scientific community addresses the issue to a great extent. These are municipalities[40] that lose up to tens of percent of their inhabitants, which poses significant problems for them. Efforts to remedy and stop inhabitants from leaving are one of the main goals of the municipality. On the other hand, such threats in larger municipalities do not pose a direct endangerment to the extinction of the municipality. The direct threats connected to demographic problems of municipalities are mainly perceived in the smallest municipalities that are most at risk. For this reason, we primarily focus on the smallest municipalities with fewer than 50 inhabitants.[41] These municipalities do not represent the phenomenon of shrinking municipalities, but rather the very fact of a low number of population, augmented by the high average age of the local population, low birth rates, higher mortality and unattractiveness of living in the municipality.

Very small municipalities can be found mainly in the countries with a higher number of municipalities. What is quite typical of such states is in general a high percentage of municipalities with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants. More than 85 % of municipalities with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants can be found in the Czech Republic (96 %), France, Slovakia (95 %), Hungary (91 %), Austria (91 %), Switzerland (89 %) and Spain (85 %). On the contrary, Poland has 25 % of such municipalities and Romania 35 % (Baldersheim – Rose 2010: 3; Eurostat 2017). Municipalities with up to 50 inhabitants can be found particularly in France, Spain, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Switzerland or in Germany.[42]

The smallest municipalities have, in the vast majority of cases, low budgets and do not provide too many services to citizens. There are not enough job of-

40 For example, let us mention Marseille (it lost 116 thousand inhabitants in the years 1975–1999), Genoa (it lost 226 thousand inhabitants in 1970–2000), Düsseldorf (it lost 116 thousand inhabitants in 1960–2000) or Chemnitz (it lost 55 thousand inhabitants in 1980–2000) (ed. Oswald 2006).

41 The stated number of population cannot be taken strictly because similar problems are often found in municipalities with several hundred inhabitants.

42 It is necessary to add: In Spain, 1,238 municipalities have fewer than 101 inhabitants (INE 2016; Gosálvez). In the Czech Republic in 2017 there were 453 municipalities with 100 or fewer inhabitants. Sixty-six municipalities even have 50 or fewer inhabitants and 55 % of all municipalities have fewer than 500 inhabitants (ČSÚ 2017). In Slovakia in 2017 there were 137 municipalities with fewer than 100 inhabitants and 991 municipalities with 100 to 499 inhabitants (Statistical Office 2017). In Switzerland there are 33 municipalities with fewer than 100 inhabitants and a total of 401 municipalities with fewer than 500 inhabitants (Statistik Schweiz 2018). In France in 2015, there were 3,541 municipalities with 100 or fewer inhabitants and a range of 101–500 inhabitants could be found in France in 16,223 municipalities (INSEE 2016). One hundred of the smallest German municipalities with fewer than 70 inhabitants can be found mainly in three Länder – Rheinland-Pfalz (72 municipalities), Schleswig-Holstein (23 municipalities) and Thüringen (5 municipalities) (Destatis 2016).

fers in the municipalities, so the residents have to commute to work or school. Another typical feature is worse traffic servicing. In the smallest municipalities, there is also a minimal variability in the candidacy to municipal councils. Often, the same candidates stand in the elections and the leadership of the municipality does not have to change throughout many election periods. The smallest municipalities often lack any classic political competition, as the inhabitants know each other very well and can even have close to 'family' relationships. Possible situations in the smallest municipalities have been divided into the following four possible scenarios that we will outline:

1. The municipality is about to cease;
2. Preserved situation;
3. Municipalities decide to merge;
4. Development of the municipality.

1. The municipality is about to cease. This is a situation where municipalities are heading towards their extinction or merging with neighboring municipalities. This includes the smallest municipalities with only a few inhabitants and with no means of gaining new inhabitants. In such municipalities, there is a high average age and the same long-term leadership of the municipality. The municipality gets into this situation on the basis of an active cause. Examples may be as follows:

a) the lack of interest of the local population to stand in the elections (the inhabitants are often persuaded to run but do not do so even though they wish to preserve the independence of their municipality);
b) rapid population decline;
c) critical indebtedness; or
d) legislative changes leading to the extinction of municipalities.

The general problems of the smallest municipalities are further exacerbated by these causes. If the situation is not solved, the municipality finds itself in agony.

An example is the Slovak municipality of Jurkova Voľa with 79 inhabitants. The leadership of the municipality decided not to stand in the elections and the other inhabitants were not interested in standing as candidates. Since April 2018 there has been a possible solution to such situations in Slovakia. The municipality where municipal elections have failed two times in a row may integrate with a neighboring municipality in the same district (TVnoviny.sk 2018). This is probably the way similar problems will be treated in Slovakia. This is how the above-mentioned situation regarding indebted municipality of Ondavka will probably be solved. Another example is the smallest Swiss municipality of Corippo with 13 inhabitants, which has been run by the municipality administrator since this year, as the mayor resigned after more than 20 years and no candidate is interested in running for the office. There have already been two quests for amalgamation, though they were not favoured by most of the neighboring municipalities. A third attempt to gain support for Corippo amalgamation is being planned (Schweizer Bauer 2018). Other examples of the decline in the population can include the Czech municipalities of Čilá and Vysoká Lhota, where it has been possible to draw up a candidate list so far (there has always been the same number of candidates as elected councilors) and the elections do take place, but gradually the two smallest municipalities in the Czech Republic regularly experience a declining number of inhabitants. In 2018, both municipalities had 15 inhabitants, but in 2015 they both had 17 inhabitants, and 22 inhabitants in 2010.

2. Preserved situation. The second situation does not substantially differ from the first, except that the current state is so-called 'preserved' and can last many decades. In other words, the preserved situation does not currently lead to the downfall of the municipality, but in the case of not increasing the number of inhabitants or occurrence of one of the causes of the previous situation, the municipality gets into the first most critical situation.

The inhabitants are reconciled with the functions of their municipality, they do not need to increase or develop their municipality. These are mainly indigenes who have bonded with the municipality and have lived there most of their lives. In the case of leadership and candidacy for these municipalities, the same characteristics apply as in the first case, above all the same long-term leadership and a small plurality of candidates. Examples of these municipalities may include the smallest French municipalities, where it is not possible to expect any amalgamation any time soon. In France, it is possible that within inhabitants there are secondary residents who pay local taxes and are registered in the electoral rolls (Mongaillard 2013). This is why we can come across municipalities that are independent and have fewer than ten inhabitants. We can use as examples the smallest French municipalities, such as Rochefourchat, which has a single permanent resident but its own mayor and a nine-member municipal council, and a municipality of Leménil-Mitry with three inhabitants and Rouvroy-Ripont with seven inhabitants. (INSEE 2016) A large number of the smallest European municipalities find themselves in such a preserved situation.

3. Municipalities decide to merge. A situation where municipalities decide to merge to prevent their actual extinction or to have the opportunity to better develop their part of the municipality. It can happen either under pressure or under motivation of the state or by individual decisions of municipalities. As an example of motivation, Spain offers financial incentives for merging of municipalities; yet, since 1981 only two mergers have taken place. Both mergers took place only because the municipalities had an absolute majority of the same party in their leadership – Partido Popular (Hermida 2013; Reinero 2016). The last amalgamation took place between 2013–2015, and on the contrary six new municipalities emerged. In 2014, Spain had 6,813 municipalities with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants (i.e. 83.9 % out of 8,117 of all the municipalities) that qualified for amalgamations of municipalities (Gomez 2015; Gosálvez 2015). A real amalgamation in practice can be found, for example, in Switzerland where it is constantly being carried out. In 2000, Switzerland had 2,899 municipalities, in 2017 only 2,255 and in 2018 the number of municipalities even decreased by 33 municipalities (Statistik Schweiz 2018). Individual cases of merging municipalities are a long-term process, which takes several years to complete. The merging process is supervised and performed by the Gemeindeamt of the canton concerned. For example, most amalgamations took place in the cantons of Ticino, Graubünden, Luzern or Bern. Amalgamation of municipalities is voluntary in Switzerland with some exceptions,[43] and thus all actors involved must approve of it (Berner Zeitung 2014 Gulde, Locher 2015).

4. Development of the municipality. Rather a theoretical situation is the possible development of the municipality, which will lead to the arrival of new inhabitants or to a higher birth rate, which would revert the local situation. Such a situation rarely occurs in the smallest municipalities because those communities can hardly afford their development. They would first have to secure finances and make a successful investment project that would make the municipality more attractive. In case of failure, there is a risk of critical indebtedness and the cases we know, for example, from the Czech Republic or Spain.

The above-mentioned four possible situations can in principle also be applied to the municipalities with several hundred inhabitants. They do not have to face imminent endangerment, yet all of the characteristics described can concern them, possibly with one exception that they may not be so fatal for these municipalities.

Endangered by natural and environmental disasters

Natural disasters and environmental disaster can inherently pose a danger to any municipality. In this case, it is important in what area the municipality is located[44] rather than the size of the municipality. The size of the municipality itself can, however, play a role in dealing with a disaster. By nature, small municipalities can be more vulnerable in prevention and handling of the disaster

43 An example of a voluntary amalgamation could be the municipality of Bettmeralp (439 inhabitants), which was formed (2014) from the merger between Martisberg and Betten (canton of Valais) (Berner Zeitung 2014). An example of the extraordinary forced merger is the former municipality of Ausserbinn (41 inh.), which had to integrate with the municipality of Ernen in 2004, following the decision of the parliament of the canton of Valais. The municipality even addressed the courts, but unsuccessfully (Gulde, Locher 2015).

44 Whether extreme forms of natural processes or the potential threat of environmental disaster can be expected in their vicinity.

than large cities, for example, because they do not have such large budgets or usually lack the organs of a rescue system or other services.[45]

It is often complicated to determine in a variety of disasters when and where they will break out. Their impacts on the municipalities vary. Many natural disasters may be impending in many places, such as floods, which may strike in the watershed of various European rivers and streams. It is the floods that we meet in Europe at certain intensities every year. Let us be more specific in localizing threats in the case of earthquakes. On the basis of the research from the SHARE project, such areas/countries were defined where hazard runs high, i.e. 10 % probability and higher that within fifty years an earthquake will hit. These are Italy, Greece, the Balkan countries, Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Iceland. (Du Brulle 2014) As regards the threat of volcanic activity, it is possible to speak of specific places, with the three most dangerous volcanoes in Europe being Etna, and Vesuvius in Italy and Mount Teide on the island of Tenerife.[46] There are also active volcanoes in the Portuguese Azores and Madeira, and there are six active volcanoes in Greece. Volcanic activity also threatens Iceland, where four volcanoes have been active in the recent past.[47] (Smithsonian Institution 2016, Volcano Discovery 2016). In the case of threats from environmental disasters, European municipalities that have strategic industries, nuclear power plants and similar objects located in their cadastral area or vicinity are potentially at risk.

If the municipality has been affected by some of the above-mentioned disasters, the rescue of life and property are the first to be addressed. At the time of the disaster, the municipality is run by the current leadership and it is up to it to decide how to cope with the situation and how to cooperate with the higher territorial units and components of the state. According to Kingdon (1984), a natural disaster provides an opportunity for political action. Public

45 This may not always be the case, especially in the locations where natural or environmental disasters can be expected or already affected the municipality in the past. The similar applies even if municipalities have, for example, chemical plants, nuclear power plants and the like in their area or in their vicinity. The fact that the small municipality is 'sufficiently' safeguarded for a possible disaster is often given by the financial help from a higher territorial unit or state, since smaller municipalities can hardly afford such securitisation, or possibly at the cost of a loan or subsidy.

46 Etna is the highest and most active volcano in Europe, which was last active in 2011. The most endangered cities are primarily nearby Messina and Catania. Vesuvius is very dangerous, not only because nearly three million people live near it, but also because it was last active in 1944. In the Canary Islands in Spain, there are eight active volcanoes. For example, the following municipalities are near these volcanoes: Tuineje, Frontera, Gáldar, Artenara, Alajeró, Santa Cruz de la Palma, Tinajo and La Orotava.

47 The following municipalities are potentially most at risk in the Azores: Vila do Corvo, Vila Franca do Campo, Ponta Delgada, Povoação, Santa Cruz da Graciosa, São Roque do Pico, Velas, Angra do Heroísmo and on the island of Madeira the municipality of Ribeira Brava. In the vicinity of the Greek volcanoes there are, for example, the municipalities of Agioi Theodoroi, Santorini, Nisyros, Milos and Troizinia-Methana. In Iceland the following volcanoes were active in the past – Hekla, Bárðarbunga, Eyjafjallajökull and Grímsvötn, with the following municipalities in close vicinity – Mýrdalshreppur and Bláskógabyggð. In Iceland, we should rather speak of threats to individual settlements (e.g. Hella, Stóri Núpur, Ásolfsskálli etc.) than entire municipalities, as the municipalities of Iceland have a cadastral area of up to several thousand square kilometers.

officials can use a natural disaster to demonstrate their leadership abilities and willingness to solve difficult problems. The role of the political leadership of responsible representatives of the municipality plays an important role. Studies show that if voters perceive that politicians are responding badly to disasters, they lose considerable votes in the elections (Brancati 2007). If the political impacts on local politics are reflected, then it is only after some time, depending on the damage incurred to the municipality and whether the existing leadership handled the situation well. For example, people in affected municipalities may be expected to prepare preventions against a repeated threat (for example in case of floods) in the future. For this reason, the theme of the disaster (whether a past one or a future one) will considerably resonate in local politics. The experience with a disaster is likely to affect the decision-making of the councilors, the direction of the municipal finances and the development of the municipality. The political impacts will also be linked to the subsequent reactions in the socio-economic spheres when unemployment is rising, the psyche of the population is deteriorating and entrepreneurs are going bankrupt. As a consequence of disasters, there are expenditures from the state treasury in the vast majority of cases; it has to finance and pay the consequences, which burdens the budget of the whole state (Hladný 2007: 41). In response to these impacts, residents can also decide that they no longer want to live in such a municipality and leave it.

Natural and environmental disasters can have a wide variety of impacts on the municipality, ranging from the absence of any (political) intervention in the municipality to its possible extinction. The situation is always specific and the impacts are individual. Still, four model situations have been created of what impacts can occur in municipalities:

1. Extinction of the municipality;
2. Long-term restoration of the municipality;
3. Partial influence on the running of the municipality;
4. Not affecting the municipality.

1. Extinction of the municipality. The impact of the disaster is so pronounced that the municipality's extinction is decided for over its renewal. A decision may involve establishing a new municipality or relocating residents to other municipalities.

For example, let us mention the town of Prypjat, evacuated after explosion in the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, which is still a forbidden uninhabited zone. After the disaster, a new city of Slavutych[48] was built for the inhabitants of Prypjat, where around 25,000 inhabitants lived in 2014, (i.e. since 1989, the population increased by 14,000 inhabitants) (ed. Oswallt 2006). This category

48 In 2011, the average salary in the city was almost double that of the state average and the average age was only 32 years. (ed. Oswallt 2006)

also includes an example of the United Kingdom's overseas territory, Montserrat Island. The capital city of Montserrat, Plymouth with four thousand inhabitants, had to be abandoned in 1997 after volcanic activity. Two thirds of the island were evacuated, most of the evacuated population did not return to the island. The destruction of the city meant serious economic problems for the whole island. On the island, among other things, it was necessary to rebuild all the institutions that were based in the capital city (BBC news 2005).

2. Long-term restoration of the municipality. In this scenario, the municipalities are heavily damaged by a natural or environmental disaster; therefore, reconstruction is long-term and lasts many years. In this scenario, municipalities are heavily affected by natural or environmental disasters, and therefore reconstruction is long-term and lasts many years. Gradually, as is possible, residents return to the municipality.[49] There can hardly be any talk about the classic local politics and the everyday functioning of the municipality, the elections are not held at all or are not held in due time. As a result of differences in practice in individual states, the state may be expected to assume the role of coordinator, the representatives of the affected municipality act and cooperate with state authorities, without whom it would be difficult for the municipality to recover.

Italian municipalities that have been hit hard by earthquakes include L,Aquila (2009) and Amatrice (2016). The state spent more than nine billion euros on the reconstruction of the city, and yet L,Aquila is not entirely restored. The inhabitants still do not want to return from the suburbs and the surrounding new small villages back to the centre of L,Aquila, where everything is still being reconstructed. It is expected that no earlier than 2019 will the city centre be restored (Du Brulle 2014; Radačičová 2016). On the other hand, big damage to municipalities does not necessarily have to lead to their extinction, but on the contrary to new construction and hence the impetus of new development.[50]

3. Partial influence on the running of the municipality. In these cases, this is not a many-year-long reconstruction as in the previous model as only part of the municipality may be affected. For some time, running of the municipality and the services provided are provisory, but the organs still carry on their work in a certain way.

As examples, let us mention the Czech municipalities of Lukavec (380 inhabitants), Keblice (365 inhabitants) and Račice (314 inhabitants) affected

49 For example, when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, the town lost 72 % of its inhabitants between August of 2005 and April of 2006 (ed. Oswald 2006: 62).

50 An example is Japanese Kobe, which, after a severe earthquake of 6.9 on the Richter scale in 1995, had more than 180,000 buildings damaged or destroyed and vastly destroyed infrastructure. Kobe, however, was quickly restored beyond expectations and became the inspiration for more resilient buildings and other cities (Alexander 2012; Radačičová 2016).

by the floods in the summer of 2002. The inhabitants of these municipalities failed to submit candidate lists to municipal elections within a set deadline because they were primarily preoccupied with the consequences of the floods. Therefore, the elections were not held in the municipalities in November 2002 in due time. The municipalities thus had to be run by the administrators of the municipalities until the end of March 2003, when the new elections took place[51] (Milerová 2016).

4. Not affecting the municipality. The disaster did not seriously endanger the running of the municipality in any aspects. Thus, municipalities can provide their citizens with the same amount of services and at the same quality. Municipalities are able to cope with small consequences of the disaster themselves. Even in the political life of the municipality, the disaster does not affect the political competition or the participation. Local elections take place in due time. Municipal protection and preparation for future disasters can become a pre-election issue.

Examples are the Czech municipalities of Nový Oldřichov, Volfartice and Horní Libchava (the Liberec region), hit by the floods in July 2009. However, the municipalities handled the situation themselves and the impact of the floods was not significant (Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic 2009: 17).

Less common threats to municipalities

Threats by higher intent

The term 'threat by higher intent' refers to a decision by the state or the region that the municipality will surrender its needs to the greater social needs. This is often contradictory to the opinion of the local population that has to submit to the decision. They are relocated and the municipality ceases to exist. The pursuit of reversing the higher intent tends to be a major political issue. In these cases, the local situation is subject to the local nationwide media interest and the views on the possible extinction of the municipality are also expressed by the highest political representatives. Residents of the affected municipality may also be motivated by the state (through financial or other compensation) to consent to the extinction of the municipality. The term a higher intent may refer to the construction of strategic buildings[52] in the area where the municipality is,

51 The impacts of the floods in the additional municipal elections in these small municipalities did not lead to a consensus across the municipality and one joint candidate list. On the contrary, there were more candidate lists in all the municipalities and a higher plurality of candidates.

52 These can be, for example, dam constructions, nuclear power plants, or airports. A specific example is the attempt to build a third start-up runway at the Munich Airport, which should be located in Attaching, which has been part of the Freising municipality since 1978. Local residents are against its construction.

or the mining.[53] There are basically only three alternatives: a) the proponents of the municipality persuade the neighborhood/state that it should continue to exist and the intent is not realised; b) the realisation will occur and the municipality will yield to a higher intent and will cease to exist, the inhabitants will be relocated; and c) a compromise alternative occurs, when only part of the municipality becomes extinct and the rest of the municipality remains and continues to function.

Threats from military conflict

Fortunately, there is currently no threat of warfare in the studied European countries. However, it was possible to observe this in Europe in the recent wars in former Yugoslavia[54] or in the current conflict in Eastern Ukraine. In case of threat by warfare, as well as by environmental disasters, the main concern lies with the lives of the population; however, a military conflict affects all public affairs. This means that it also affects the functioning of municipal self-government. It is then marginalised and the municipalities stop functioning in the affected areas as a result of the intensity of the conflict. Such situations may occur when municipalities are destroyed completely due to the war conflicts.[55]

The main political activity in Attaching concerns this construction (Attaching 2017). Another example is the fate of a part of the municipality of Kursdorf (part of the city of Schkeuditz), which formally exists but nobody lives there any more due to the immediate proximity to the airport in Leipzig/Halle (Kursdorf 2009). For example, due to a higher intent, a number of municipalities disappeared in the past in the Czech and Slovak territory. Examples include the municipality of Chudobín (destroyed in 1950–1960 due to the construction of the Vír water reservoir), the municipality of Mochovce (the Slovak municipality was destroyed in the 1980s and the inhabitants were relocated due to the construction of the Mochovce nuclear power plant; formally the municipality was amalgamated with the neighboring municipality of Kalná nad Hronom) or the municipality of Kundratice (the municipality was completely destroyed due to brown coal mining in 1974) (Extinct Municipalities 2018).

53 So far, the last municipality in the Czech Republic destroyed due to coal mining was the municipality of Libkovice in 1993, despite the persistent resistance of the inhabitants of the municipality and their blockade with their own bodies. However, there has long been a discussion about the possible dissolution of the town of Horní Jiřetín (2,237 inh.), endorsed, for example, by President M. Zeman. The neighboring municipality of Dolní Jiřetín was swallowed by coal mining in 1983 (Baroch 2013).

54 An example may be the town of Mostar (Bosnia-Herzegovina). About 40,000 inhabitants left before 1995 and 70 % of the houses were destroyed or damaged. After the war, the city was divided into two nationally separate groups. A consequence of the war was the destruction of the traditional industry, the rise in unemployment and the departure of young and educated people, which made it difficult to develop the city (ed. Oswallt 2006).

55 Six French municipalities could serve as an example (Beaumont-en-Verdunois, Bezonvaux, Cumières-le-Mort-Homme, Fleury-devant-Douaumont, Haumont-près-Samogneux, Louvemont-Côte-du-Poivre) that were destroyed during the Battle of Verdun in 1916. It was decided that they would neither be restored nor integrated with other municipalities. The stated ghost communes legally do exist, but are not populated at all and are managed by a council of three members, appointed by the prefect of the Meuse département. The reason is to maintain the testimony of the municipalities that had died for France (Roads 2015). An example from the Second World War can be the exterminated Czech village of Ležáky, which was burned down and its inhabitants murdered in June 1942 as a result of the Heydrichiad; it was not subsequently restored. The same fate awaited the municipality of Lidice only 14

Once the conflicts are over, the affected municipalities are primarily concerned with the attempt to gradually restore the functionality of the municipality and its actual restoration. As a result of war conflicts, the phenomenon of shrinking municipalities is very often manifested in municipalities (eds. Oswallt 2006). The same model situation applied to a threat by natural or environmental disasters can basically be used for the threat by a war conflict. An important difference in this threat is that overall state aid for the regeneration of municipalities will depend on the overall intensity and length of affliction in the whole country. There is also the possibility of international assistance in the rebuilding of the country/municipality.

Conclusion

Do the examined threats in fact lead to the extinction of European municipalities? Not really, there are not many municipalities nowadays that would become extinct because of endangerment by one of the identified threats. If municipalities do become extinct, it is mainly because of the decision of small European municipalities to merge with each other and create one common municipality. These processes are currently observed in Switzerland, for example. Generally speaking, in the issue of endangerments by a very small number of inhabitants in the municipality, the situation across Europe (especially, for instance, in France, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Spain) is often conserved; in other words, municipalities seek to preserve their independence and are not interested in amalgamation. They find it sufficient for their municipalities to provide limited services only and they also accept the fact that their municipalities are not able to develop. Assuming that these (smallest) European municipalities do not get new inhabitants in the future, then with the aging of the existing population and the migration of the population to urban areas (in 2018, 74 % of the population of Europe lived in urban areas (UN 2018)), the municipal problems will escalate. In the future, it can be assumed that these problems will have to be addressed, most probably systemically (for example, by consolidation reforms), as they may concern hundreds to thousands of small European municipalities. Another real threat of municipal extinction may be the extinction due to a higher intent or, possibly, upon the effects of a natural-environmental disaster. When threatened by a higher intent, this always involves a specific national situation that leads to the extinction of the municipality in the event of a really higher need for state interest. Natural and environmental disasters can inherently pose a threat to any municipality, regardless of its size. What is significant is

days earlier, but it was restored after the war. A similar fate, for example, affected the French village of Oradour-sur-Glane, which was wiped out and destroyed by German soldiers in 1944. After the war, the ruins of the village were preserved as a reminder of the horrific act and the municipality was restored in the immediate neighborhood.

the area in which the municipalities are located and whether extreme natural processes or the potential threat of the environmental disaster can be expected in their surrounding areas. Nevertheless, the very affected municipalities are not dissolved and are being restored. In the event of endangerment stemming from critical indebtedness, no municipality has actually become extinct or been merged, also because the new merged municipality would have to assume the debt of a critically indebted municipality. Such a step would require a debt relief or a gain of financial support for the newly emerging municipality, most likely from the state. The Slovak municipality of Ondavka is the closest to experience such a situation and extinction. The last identified threat is only theoretical in today's (western) Europe and, fortunately, not current. Yet, it is a threat that led to the disappearance of a large number of European municipalities in the past.

All of the aforementioned five identified types of endangerment of municipalities were viewed separately. Yet, as can be seen from concrete examples, the causes of endangerment can be interconnected, or they can follow one another and intensify the critical situation in the municipality. Such examples may be, for example, as follows:

a) municipalities with a very small number of inhabitants that are critically indebted due to their attempts to make their municipality more attractive;
b) a heavy debt of large cities can lead to the shrinking of the population, in connection with the possible rising unemployment of the city/region, the limitation of services provided or increasing local taxes;
c) municipalities that have been afflicted by a natural-environmental disaster may, due to the effects of the disaster, become a shrinking municipality because the inhabitants may not want to return after the disaster; or
d) municipalities can become critically indebted in order to settle and recover after a natural-environmental disaster.

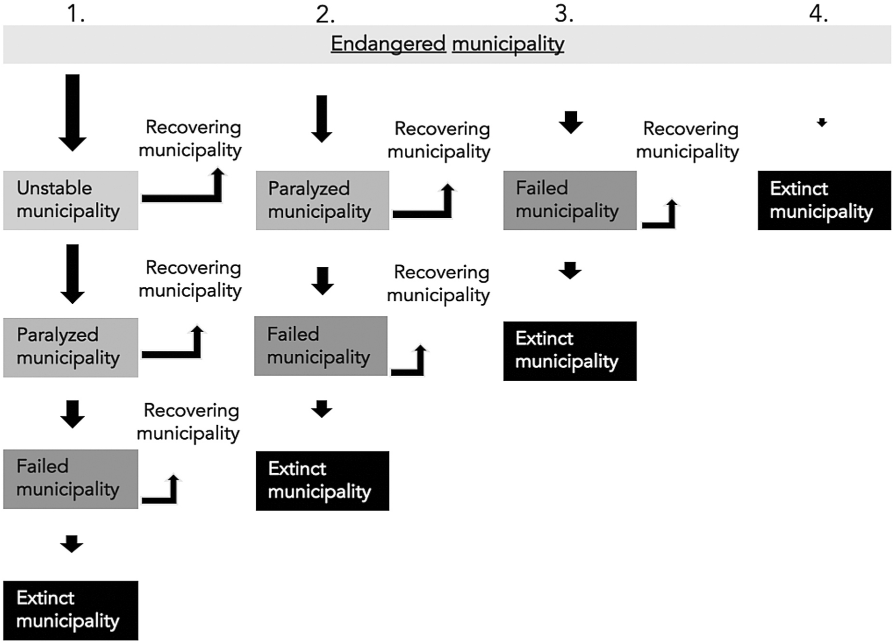
Despite the fact that the municipalities do not actually experience extinction, the outlined threats to municipalities can and, in principle, always have some political impact on the afflicted municipality. Political impacts can affect the very form of local democracy. All of the identified threats can bring the municipal politics into a crisis. However, individual impacts always depend on the situation in a particular municipality and the intensity of the threat. It is precisely the diversity of the impacts of individual threats that has shown that the proposed terms of *endangered municipality* and *failed municipality* are not alone capable of describing the overall reality of individual municipal situations. For this reason, Table 2 introduces the extension of the terms related to the endangerment of municipalities, which more reflect individual municipal situations.

Table 2: Terms linked to endangered municipalities

	Term	Characterisation
1.	**Endangered municipality**	A general term that denotes a municipality that may be affected by a particular threat, which may, in the extreme case, lead to its extinction.
2.	**Unstable municipality**	The municipality, which is already troubled by a specific endangerment affecting the running of the municipality. Elected representatives are aware of the municipal problem/problems. Because of a serious problem, the municipality is becoming unstable. As a result of the problem, it can restrict municipal services and stop municipal development. At this stage, it is still quite likely that the municipality will be able to deal with/resolve its endangerment. When solving it, the municipality can try to help itself on its own, but it is also possible to engage a higher territorial administrative unit or the state.
3.	**Paralyzed municipality**	The municipality, which is plagued by significant problems that affect all the courses of events in the municipality. The municipality has elected leadership and municipal elections in the municipality do take place. Nevertheless, the municipal administration faces very limited possibilities how to solve the municipal situation. There may be no consensus in the leadership of the municipality about how to cope with the crisis situation in the municipality. The municipality ceases to provide municipal services and its mission, arising from the law. In the case of municipal consensus and existing legislation, the municipality can solve its situation by itself. However, it can be expected that another entity will be involved in dealing with a crisis situation.
4.	**Failed municipality**	It is a municipality that is plagued by very significant problems, which are even higher than in the case of the paralyzed municipality, as problems are not solved. In essence, this is the worst possible situation, as the municipality has set off on the path to extinction. The municipality still exists formally, the inhabitants do live on its territory, but the municipality does not even fulfill the most basic functions that arise from the national legislation. In such a municipality, none of the inhabitants are interested in running for municipal elections, and therefore the municipality has no elected representatives who could try to solve the municipal situation. The municipality de facto does not exist, which results in the fact that it is unable to help itself; consequently, another entity has to be involved in the solutions.
5.	**Extinct municipality**	A no longer existing municipality that has failed to deal with endangerment and its impacts. The municipality ceases to function and exist, already also de iure. In connection with the specific situation and the local legislation, the territory of the extinct municipality is usually integrated/merged with the neighboring municipality.
6.	**Recovering municipality**	The municipality, which has managed to start solving its problems stemming from the impact of a specific threat. The period of municipal renewal will vary considerably depending on how deep the crisis occurred in the municipality, i.e. at what stage the recovery process was launched and whether the municipality solves the situation alone or is assisted by another entity (e.g. a higher self-governing unit, state or union of municipalities). It can be expected that the longest recovery will be in the case of *failed municipalities* and, on the contrary, the shortest in *unstable municipalities*.

Based on the differentiation among these six terms, it was possible to create schemes that reflect possible types of developmental situations of endangerment in European municipalities. The first scheme presents the basic four variants from which four other possible fates of endangered municipalities are derived in Scheme 2.[56]

Scheme 1: Scheme of possible variants of endangerment

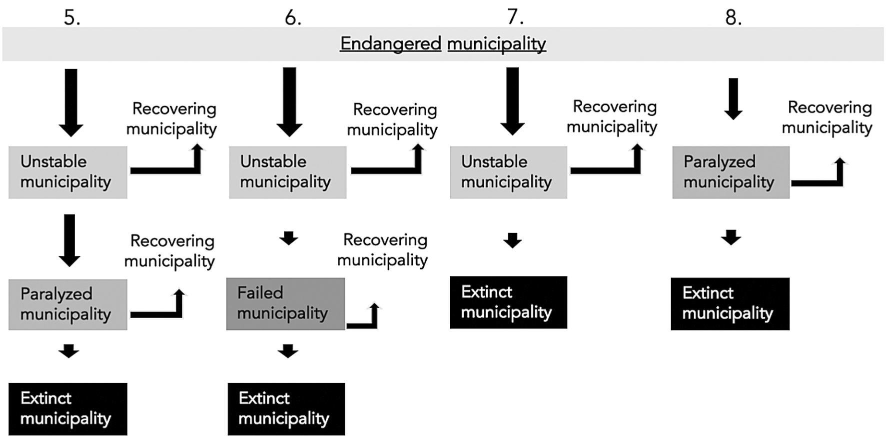


The first variant represents a progressing and deepening path that can lead to the very extinction of the municipality. It can occur in any type of endangerment, yet it is to be expected that the extinction will most likely not occur because in most cases the problem is being solved before the extinction materializes, which launches (mostly) the long-term regeneration of the municipality. If we were to assign some endangerments to the first variant, they would include the critical indebtedness of (small) municipalities or the deepening of the unresolved situation in the municipalities with the smallest number of inhabitants. The second and third variants represent a more rapid momentum of endangerment, when the threat hits the municipality more unexpectedly. For this reason, these

56 The size/length of the arrows in the presented schemes attempts to outline the author's view of the possible deepening of endangerment. The smaller/shorter the arrow, the less likely it is to move to the stage which the arrow is pointing to.

two variants can be associated primarily with endangerments stemming from natural-environmental threats or war conflicts. The same is true for the fourth variant, except that the extinction of the municipality is not preceded by any other situation in the municipality. The municipality has been so deeply affected that it has been decided not to renew the municipality and thus to cease its existence.

Scheme 2: Scheme of possible variants of endangerment



Variants five and six are very similar in their essence to variant one. The main difference in variant number five is that there is no situation where the municipality does not have political leadership, but still the affected municipality may become extinct. Variant number six, on the contrary, represents a more pronounced and faster deepening of the situation. An unstable municipality moves directly to the state where the municipalities are not administered any longer and are directly facing extinction. Under variant number seven, the endangerment posed by a higher intent can best be imagined; a case when a municipality is in a precarious situation and tries to prevent its extinction, yet it has been decided from the higher places about the extinction of the municipality. The eighth variant extends variants two and three where, especially in the case of natural-environmental disasters, paralysis can occur and it has been decided after a subsequent assessment of the situation that the affected municipality will not recover and will cease to exist.On the basis of the presented paper, it can be concluded that small European municipalities are the most vulnerable. In addition to their demographic problems, they mostly operate with small budgets, so they can only provide their citizens with a limited set of municipal services. In the situations where small municipalities are not gaining any new inhabitants, they may over time end up being extinct due to a lack of population. If they are more deeply indebted, the smallest municipalities find it hard to repay their debts and often have to restrict or relinquish their services completely. (Not only) This can cause people to leave and to take no interest in communal politics. Even in the case of endangerments by a higher intent, it is to be expected that the municipality's extinction will rather be thought about in the intentions of a smaller municipality than larger agglomerations. A municipality with fewer inhabitants will be less likely able to protect itself from such an intent than a larger one. In a situation where a small municipality is hit by natural and environmental disasters, it can also be expected that it will be less able to cope with the consequences and will rather need help of its surrounding. In the case of potential war conflicts, the smaller municipalities may not be restored after the conflict. This list may also be one of the reasons why consolidation reforms have been implemented in a number of European countries and we cannot find small municipalities in them with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants.The study has aimed to launch a scholarly discussion about the phenomenon of endangered municipalities that are located in functional, legal and democratic states. At the same time I have sought to bring this issue into the realm of political science. It is advisable to expand the number of case studies that would focus on the political impacts in endangered municipalities, both at the horizontal and vertical levels. They could build on examples from the Czech Republic that have so far only been partially mapped.

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Participatory Budgeting in the Major Cities in Poland – Case Study of 2018 Editions

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Politics in Central Europe (ISSN: 1801-3422)
Vol. 15, No. 2
DOI: 10.2478/pce-2019-0017

Abstract: *The paper refers to the social innovation of participatory budgeting which has become a very popular tool for stimulating citizen participation at the local level in Poland. It focuses on the major cities, defined as capitals of the voivodeships or regions. Based on the data concerning 2018 participatory budgeting editions in the eighteen cities, it describes the funding, organisation of the process, forms of voting and voter participation as well as the nature of projects selected and implemented. According to the amended Act on the Local Self-Government, organisation of participatory budgeting will only be obligatory for Polish cities from 2019. Despite that fact, it has already become quite popular and broadly applied in local communities. However, citizens' participation and involvement in the process seems quite low, suggesting a need for experience sharing and improvement of the initiative. Also, project selection reflects the influence of various social groups within urban communities, rather than assisting groups which are at risk of marginalisation.*

Keywords: ***participatory budgeting, urban governance, local self-government, Poland***

Local government is treated as an important value, a major instrument of decentralisation in modern Europe and a tool of improvement in the quality and efficiency of governance. However, it is also defined to serve citizens' participation. For example, the European Charter of Local Self-Government highlights that the principle of freely elected local authorities 'shall in no way affect recourse to assemblies of citizens, referendums or any other form of direct citizen participation where it is permitted by statute' (European Charter 1985). This puts local government in the context of stimulating residents to take responsibility for their neighbourhoods. As Tsobanoglou and Harms argue, participation is necessary to address the modern crisis of distrust in politics, quoting various mechanisms applied within the local democracy (Tsobanoglou – Harms 2018). Participatory budgeting is one of the tools which may achieve the objective of citizen mobilisation, although it cannot be considered separate from other means of stimulating citizen activity.

In the last decade, participatory budgeting has become highly popular in Poland, even without legal provisions binding local authorities to implement such measures in their governance processes (Rytel-Warzocha 2018: 392). It's been applied in a growing number of local government units, mainly the communes, but also in six voivodeships, on the regional level.

Participatory budgeting – concept and its developments

Participatory budgeting (PB) is a very broadly studied concept of involving citizens in local or sublocal governance through their inclusion in financial decision-making processes. In its original shape, established in Porto Alegre, Brazil in the 1980s, it was a response to inequality in access to power in the city (de Olivero Dutra 2014: 11). It was perceived as an important social innovation and a chance to improve quality of governance due to better and better informed decisions (Brun-Martos – Lapsley 2017: 1008), to encourage local communities to express their needs, as well as to take responsibility for their environment, and as a tool of increasing transparency and civil control in governing (Hartog – Bakker 2018). With these benefits in view, self-governments all over the world strived to implement this solution, but it should be stressed that PB is always a component of a broader system of participative governance (Avritzer 2017: 47), and only thus it may serve to improve the level of trust and legitimacy on the local level (Swaner 2017). Thus, it becomes incorporated in a set of traditions, principles and arrangements in place developed by the local community and defined by its authorities, this is why the general name of 'participatory budgeting' encompasses a great variety of solutions in different parts of the world. Undoubtedly, 'while the diffusion of PB is impressive, there are complications: PB is being implemented in very different ways, largely as a result of legal, social, political and historical traditions that exist in different countries' (Brun-Martos – Lapsley 2017: 1007). Thence, the importance of analysing participatory budgeting in various geographical, legal and historical contexts to verify how the basic concept of delegating the power to decide on a part of local authorities' expanses to the entire community is applied in different circumstances and what goals it can achieve.

Participatory budgeting is frequently associated with such concepts as decentralisation, governance and participation and it needs to be highlighted that these are frequently perceived and defined as values involved in the human right to good administration (Charter 2000: 41). Decentralisation, which has been a subject of very broad research, can be defined as 'a distribution of competencies which allows their significant part to be transferred from the central government to lower echelons of power' (Chrzanowski – Sobczak 2017: 14). A well-designed decentralisation is considered to bring benefits to the communities, as it is 'widely advocated as a means to foster legitimacy, stimulate more equitable growth, enhance policy efficiency and increase democratic accountability; it is even made a key element of „good governance; in general'" (Mueller 2015: xxii). Its advantages include better accommodation of social diversity and discrepancies of interests, more efficient management of public affairs, as well as greater stimulation of local activists, whose voice is better heard on the lower level of governance. Even though local and specialist self-government is the fundamental channel of decentralisation (Kmieciak 2016), currently more stress is put on the potential to decentralise competencies even further, to include smaller, even sub-local communities 'for the sake of efficiency or to promote civic participation' (Liebmann 2000: 169). In these terms participatory budgeting may serve as a way to stimulate the citizens' involvement and encourage them not only to participate in the processes provided by the authorities, but also to self-organise and to build small communities around specific problems affecting the particular neighbourhood.

In this way, participatory budgeting may also contribute to implementation of good governance principles on the sub-local, local and even regional levels. According to the classical definition by the World Bank, 'the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development' (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 1999). It includes a range of elements: participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, orientation on consensus, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency and accountability. Other sources may offer slightly different listings, e.g. openness, partnership, effectiveness, efficiency, accountability or cohesion (Kobielska – Lisowska 2014). A well-designed participatory budgeting initiative may well affect all of them by introducing the local residents into the decision-making processes affecting their closest neighbourhoods. With the fundamental idea of encouraging direct participation of all citizens, participatory budgeting corresponds to the principles of participation, equity and inclusiveness, but it may also enhance accountability through greater transparency of the process, and above all, by increasing the residents' involvement and interest in the sublocal and local issues. Additional channels of communicating interests and preferences may also affect more efficient management of the local community's resources and the local space, thus making the local or sublocal communities more responsive to the changing opinions and expectations of the inhabitants. Importantly, such solutions may also benefit minority groups;

firstly, by providing them with a possibility to participate in the political system in a less formalised way, and secondly, by making it easier to promote and implement their initiatives.

All of these objectives are directly associated with the level of social participation. On one hand, the efficiency of any participatory scheme is determined by the citizens or inhabitants' trust in it and their will to take in the process. On the other hand, a successful scheme may entice more activity within the community. In political science, this term is defined as 'a tool to engage citizens in the public life and a way to redistribute power to particular echelons' (Wójcicki 2013). Also perceived as a crucial element of civil society, it is frequently encouraged in democratic countries and to ensure inclusiveness with respect to interest of all citizens. Importantly, in the context of the classification referred to as the ladder of participation, participatory budgeting can be perceived as the highest level of co-deciding, more advanced than the other two – informing and consulting (Waligóra 2014).

Political and social participation in Poland

Political participation in Poland remains quite low, although, as shown in Table 1., in the 2018 local elections, voters in the largest cities and capitals were more committed to voting than in other types of municipalities. In most cities (16 out of 18) the voter turnout was higher than regionwide in the voivodeship the city is the capital of, however in 14 of them it ranged between 45 and 55 %, which is quite a high result in the Polish elections, but still only close to half of the residents. Also, on the lower level of local governance, the participation of citizens remains insufficient in terms of establishing efficient communication and involving communities in governance of their neighbourhoods. Especially in urban communes, popularity of sublocal self-government (osiedla, dzielnice) is very low, as measured by voter turnout at elections, as well as by the numbers of candidates for sublocal councils or number of initiatives brought by citizens themselves. This shows the unused potential of participation in the cities and the citizens' concern about their local communities. The cities strive to mobilise this potential by participatory budgeting, too.

The social and volunteer participation is stable, as an extensive study in 2013 showed that 18 % of Poles were involved in formal groups or organisations, 27 % worked for their closest community or neighbourhood and 9 % participated in actions taken by churches or religious groups. The total number of persons getting involved in social action was 34 %, similar to values observed in earlier years (Zaangażowanie społeczne Polek i Polaków 2014). However, an increasing number of Polish citizens contribute financially to non-governmental organisations and charities, especially through the mechanism which allows them to assign 1 % of their due yearly income tax to a selected organisation. Therefore, it should be assumed that the current evolution of Polish society may serve to enhance the level of social activism and participation, if relevant, creative and stimulating tools are provided.

The local authorities attempt to enhance citizens' participation by introducing various forms of participation, for instance civic panels in Gdansk (Official Portal of the Municipality of Gdansk, accessed 24-1-2019), local microgrants in Wrocław (Mikrogranty, accessed 11-3-2019), referenda to consult particular decisions (National Electoral Commission, accessed 11-3-2019) or other forms of public consultations (Waligóra 2014). Participatory budgeting, first introduced in Poland in 2011 in Sopot (Olejniczak – Bednarska-Olejniczak 2008), has grown more and more popular and by amendment of the Act on Local Government introduced in 2017, organisation of participatory budgeting is obligatory for all urban counties starting in 2019 (Act 1990).

Local government in Poland

Poland has a three-tier territorial self-government with 16 regions (województwo) on the regional level, counties (powiat) on the subregional level and communities (gmina) as the basic unit of local organisation and authorities. Each unit of self-government is defined as a community of citizens, thus indicating the local authorities' obligations concerning community building and stimulation of local activity and participation.

As a general rule, each county comprises several communities (Sześciło – Kulesza 2012); however, with the average population per county of about 101 thousand, it would be impracticable to treat the largest metropolises like other municipalities. Thence, the specific status of 'urban counties' (powiat grodzki) (Act, 1998), which are communities with competencies and responsibilities of counties. In 2018, there were 66 communities of this status in Poland, including all 18 capital cities of voivodeships[1] (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, accessed 11-3-2019). After initial inconsistencies in interpretation, the 2001 amendment to the local government acts clarified that such cities are classified as communities, obliged to perform responsibilities assigned to poviats (Act 2001). According to the Polish Constitution, the local and regional administration (both self-government and deconcentrated administration) is organised by the principles of decentralisation and subsidiarity. The residual competencies in all local issues are assigned to the communal self-government, while the act on poviat government provides an exclusive list of responsibilities of this sub-regional echelon of administration (Act, 1990). Thus, municipalities acting as poviats are responsible for such areas as management of municipal roads, streets, bridges and squares; provision of water and sewage services; provision

1 In two voivodeships – Kujawsko-Pomorskie and Lubusz – two cities share the capital status.

of waste disposal; provision of electricity and gas; public transportation; health care; public education; organisation of cultural activities as communities, but also for issues related to disaster management, public security and other areas assigned to poviats (Act 1998). In the case of urban poviats these responsibilities are combined.

As mentioned above, there are 18 regional 'capital cities' of voivodeships in Poland. They differ in size, level of economic development and wealth (Table 2), as well as in social and political traditions. Like the regions themselves (Skrzypiński 2017), the capital cities have their specific features and problems, depending on their history, traditions, location, level and character of their economic development, as well as the local community, its education, diversity, attitudes and involvement. The discrepancies and different challenges they face require individual policies and selection of tools. However, encouraging participation is perceived everywhere as a value and an opportunity, thence the popularity of participation-promoting methods applied in Polish metropolises.

Comparison of participatory budgeting in voivodeship capitals

Material and methods

The following section analyses the participatory budgeting in 18 voivodeship capitals in Poland. The objective of the study was to verify the cities' actual commitment to implementation of participatory budgeting, evidenced by the funding assigned for participatory budgeting; to assess the social outcome in terms of the participation in the broadest (and easiest) stage of the process, i.e. the consultation vote; and to check the final impact of the initiative on the cities by way of a short overview of the projects selected and implemented. To gain a deeper understanding of the process, its organisation was described, too, considering the classification of submissions applied by the cities' authorities in the vote.

All of the analysed cities had implemented this initiative, so for comparative purposes a single edition was selected: the 2018 edition. All of the data were acquired from dedicated websites of participatory budgeting at the respective Municipal Offices or else by direct enquiries to municipal officials responsible for participatory budgeting.

Funds assigned to participatory budgets

The amounts assigned to participatory budgeting processes in the analysed cities varied strongly, depending on the size and economic status of the city. They ranged from 2,500,000 PLN to 64,000,000 PLN (Table 3), which means that the largest participatory budget (in the capital and the wealthiest city in Poland –

Warsaw) was over 25 times higher than the lowest one in Opole. However, if the numbers are analysed as a percentage of the municipal budget instead as absolute values, the sequence is different. The highest percentage (almost 1% of total municipal expenses) is noted in two cases (Łódź and Katowice), and the lowest one is 0, 22% (again in Opole).; however, the difference is much less than in the case of absolute numbers (in this case it is only fivefold), because quite naturally larger cities with higher budgets are able to allocate higher amounts to participatory projects. However, the percentages are more suggestive of a rule: none of the analysed 18 cities assigned more than 1% of their overall budgetary expenses to the citizens' participatory process. Even though the sheer concept of participatory budgeting and the process is attractive and stimulating for citizens, the low level of funding may discourage participation in the longer term.

The municipal participatory budgets vary significantly in the number of projects selected for implementation (Table 4). Although it seems logical that the largest city with the largest participatory budget should fund the largest number of projects (especially if it is considered a combination of 18 separate participatory budgets in quarters of the city), but still the number results in the lowest average value per project. Only in two cities (Poznań and Szczecin) did the average value exceed 600,000 PLN, and in a further two (Wrocław and Kielce) was it above 400,000 PLN. The higher amounts may allow for funding of more difficult, larger-scale projects; however, the participatory budgeting process is addressed to lowest-level sublocal activists, so lower amounts may actually be useful in the case of smaller projects, especially soft projects, while even hard investment projects included in participatory budgeting are usually on a much lesser scale.

In analysing the average value of a project, it should also be considered that, as suggested by ngos specialising in urban participation (Kębłowski 2014: 23), all cities provided for different categories of projects to be funded (Table 5). Fifteen out of the 18 analysed cities applied a geographic division, with a certain amount assigned to projects concerning the entire city and a certain amount for projects on a sub-local level: quarters or neighbourhoods, depending on the organisation of sublocal units, or else special districts developed for the purpose of participatory budgeting. In such cases on the municipal level fewer projects were funded and their average value was higher, thus allowing for bigger-scale initiatives, provided that they benefited larger groups of inhabitants. In the sublocal category, it was possible to submit – and gain funding for – projects worth several thousand PLN (1,500–2,000 €). Some cities also added value-related categories (e.g. allocation of set amounts for big and small projects, in one case also microprojects) or else categories based on the character of the projects (soft vs. investment projects). In two cases, there were also 'specialist', participatory 'sub-budgets', assigned for specific types of projects:

educational ones in Gorzów Wielkopolski and the renovation of historic buildings in Wrocław. Such diversification may be helpful for all parties involved: projects are easier to classify and supervise for the municipal administration, the vote is more clear for inhabitants, but this solution also facilitates development of applications by providing more clear frameworks for initiators of such submissions. Finally, it increases a sense of fairness among all parties, as any competition between large, municipal-scale projects and sublocal initiatives capable of drawing much smaller attention and addressed to smaller groups of beneficiaries could be impossible. Thus, municipal authorities attempt to encourage more diverse initiatives.

Importantly, division of the budget between various districts or quarters also serves to ensure that funding goes to different parts of the city and not only to the city-centre or most gentrified areas. Activation of local inhabitants is especially important in peripheral or sub-urban areas for several reasons. Firstly, frequent investment in those parts is more needed to keep inhabitants from commuting to the city centre for their daily errands and, secondly, social activity is usually focused in several areas and encouragement of even more citizen initiative in various parts of the city may contribute to more sustainable and equitable urban development.

Citizens' participation in participatory budgeting votes

Participatory budgeting is a long-term process with annual cycles with consultations, submission of projects, their formal verification and sometimes amendments, citizens' vote to select projects and, finally, the implementation of the selected ones (Demediuk – Solli – Adolfsson 2012). However, even the final stage of actually engaging public funding citizen-initiated and citizen-picked projects is not so spectacular and popular as the citizens' vote (Table 6). Since the participatory budgeting is designed to encourage citizen activity, the local authorities attempt to organise the vote in the most citizen-friendly form. All eighteen analysed cities provided for the possibility to vote online, and fourteen also distributed printed ballots to ensure that inhabitants who can't or don't want to participate in an internet vote are also invited to take part in the project selection. Out of the four cities which didn't, one organised additional counselling or assistance from municipal clerks for citizens for whom the virtual form could be too difficult, in two cases citizens were also allowed to vote in person at special meetings in Gorzów Wielkopolski or by coming to the Municipal Office (Katowice).

The analysis of voter turnout in the vote does not show any significant trend considering either the forms of vote or population of the city. Even though in bigger cities participatory budgeting could mobilise more voters, it still remained quite a low percentage of the formal population of registered inhabitants of the cities (since there are no uniform statistics concerning this group for various cities, the unregistered inhabitants are not considered, even though some cities allow all residents to vote in the participatory budgeting, regardless of their formal status). The range – both in the absolute numbers and percentage – is very broad, too: from fewer than 10,000 voters to almost 100,000 and from less than 5 % of the population to almost one in four inhabitants, significantly lower than in the national elections. Still, the numbers are quite low, considering the potential of direct democracy and participation involved in participatory budgeting. It seems that the promotion of this is not yet sufficient or that the course and effects of the process are disappointing for the citizens. However, it should be highlighted that the promotion should rely primarily on bottom-up processes, inviting sublocal activists to face problems on the lowest level of the municipal administration, while activities by the local authorities, as well as the municipal offices should rather provide a framework and support the action addressed directly to inhabitants concerned with particular projects and initiatives.

Projects implemented through the mechanism of participatory budgeting

Considering the diversity of the cities on various levels – differences between the cities and communities inhabiting them, the territorial structure and balance between the centre and outskirts, economic development and need for investments, and finally traditions and advancement of urban activism and participation, as well as the varying design of the participatory budgeting itself, especially concerning classification of projects and their encouraged objectives – it would be very difficult to provide an overall classification, especially within the scope of a paper. However, it is possible to attempt consideration of some types of projects which are actually implemented and their potential impact (reserving that this is not an attempt to build an exclusive classification).

– **soft projects vs. investment projects**

In general, a trend is visible to balance investments in sub-local infrastructure and community-centred projects with respect to the number of projects. For instance, in the case of Białystok in municipal-level projects, the number of soft and investment projects is equal, while in Katowice 75 % city-level projects were hard ones. On the district level soft projects also made a slight minority (36 % in Białystok and 40 % in Katowice). It should be stressed that especially on the district level these were frequently quite simple initiatives, actually falling into the regular scope of municipal responsibilities, e.g. a road joining ‘Słoneczny Stok’ neighbourhood with Mruczkowska Street (Białystok, 249,000 PLN), parking spots at ‘Wysoki Stoczek’ neighbourhood (Białystok, 202,500 PLN), the repair of street and pavement surfaces at Wilimowskiego Street (Katowice, 397,500 PLN) or a 'safe and colourful' playground at Zawodzie (Katowice, 300,000 PLN); more innovative initiatives are not so frequent. Soft projects are quite naturally much less expensive, with two outstanding types: support for libraries, especially in Katowice (20 projects concerning purchase of new books, audiobooks and other items for libraries throughout the city and six other projects implemented at and by libraries, funding ranging from 2,500 to 40,000 PLN) and sublocal feasts, e.g. Silesian Feast at Murcki (Katowice, 30,000 PLN) or Family Feast at Piaski (Białystok, 13,900 PLN). Some of the feasts to be funded were organised or co-organised by Roman Catholic parishes (e.g. St. Father Pio Parish Sports and Family Feast, Białystok, 24,900 PLN).

– **projects for children/young families**

A large group of projects involve initiatives related to specific needs of young families or families with children, some of which were developed and/or co-organised by schools or kindergartens. This probably results from significant participation from exactly this group of inhabitants: middle class, aged 30 through 45, who either have kids or plan to have them within a few years. Many of those projects involve publicly accessible playgrounds: the playground at Kopiec Piłsudskiego (Kraków, 130,000 PLN), the repair of playground equipment near ul. Krośnieńska and ul. Nowosądecka (Rzeszów, 180,000 PLN). These projects may also involve school/kindergarten play or sports facilities: expansion of a playground built in the gardens of Primary School no. 39 for children aged up to 10 – pupils of the school and kindergarten and other inhabitants of the Dąbie neighbourhood (Kraków, 20,000 PLN) or improving the infrastructure of the kindergarten building and its surroundings (Rzeszów, 180,000 PLN). Some of the projects were also more innovative and original: fourteen district projects focused on first aid training for children (Kraków, 2,600–4,500 PLN). Importantly, there are a few projects concerning activisation of the youngest generation, e.g. football as an alternative to a computer – a series of organised sports training for children and youth (Rzeszów, 49,520 PLN).

In all of the analysed cities there was also funding for social activisation of elderly inhabitants, such as 'The centre for active seniors' (Olsztyn, 300,000 PLN) or 'Nordic walking with babies and seniors' (Gdańsk, 4,875 PLN). Participatory budgeting also provided for funding initiatives for people with disabilities. It can be highlighted that these projects did not directly address the problems of marginalisation.

– **sports-related projects and healthy lifestyle projects**

Another important and frequent group of projects involved initiatives related to healthy lifestyle, especially sports. Once again, this is a reflection of the attitudes and expectations of the groups who participate in the processes of applications development and in the voting itself. This category frequently includes increasingly popular outdoor fitness equipment, e.g. construction of eight outdoor fitness outlets with light architecture, e.g. benches etc. (Gorzów Wielkopolski, 500,000 PLN). A very popular area of projects submitted and selected concerns cycling. For example, in 2018 two out of four big projects in Opole were related to bicycling (development of bicycling infrastructure in Opole for 499,000 PLN and safe cycling routes in the city centre for 500,000 PLN) and another one oversaw construction of changing rooms at the football pitch of a club (500,000 PLN).

There are also quite a few sport-related soft projects, e.g. district project of a cycle of medium-level sports activities for various age groups (Gorzów Wielkopolski, 5,500 PLN) or football tournaments for children and adults (Opole, 100,000 PLN).

– **revitalisation projects**

The final category to be analysed concerns revitalisation projects. From its beginnings, participatory budgeting was designed to boost social inclusion and support the groups which are marginalised or at risk of marginalisation (Shybalkina – Bifulco, 2018), although the impact of such initiatives on redistributive effect has not been clearly evidenced and requires further analysis (Hong – Shine, 2018). Still, among its other objectives, participatory budgeting is supposed to serve to eliminate inequalities inside the city and tensions between the city-centre and outskirts in order to stimulate more sustainable development, so revitalisation initiatives to support marginalised neighbourhoods and communities affected by underinvestment should play an important role. This could be a chance to change the developmental dynamics of those parts of the city. However, none of the analysed major cities in Poland provided for any sort of special attention to such projects within the participatory budgeting processes. In no city was there a separate category for revitalisation projects or extra assistance for initiators of such applications. It does not mean that the city authorities are not concerned about revitalisation. They do not, however, use participatory budgeting as a measure to stimulate it. Initiatives falling in this category can be found among selected projects in Katowice (Revitalisation of the ks. Franciszek Macherski square and maintenance of the Silesian Uprising Fighters statue, 37,000 PLN), in Kraków (Teodor Axentowicz square revitalisation, 72,000 PLN; revitalisation of Słowacki Avenue, 40,000 PLN; revitalisation of historic stadium, 180,000 PLN); in Toruń (revitalisation of a square on St. Joseph Street, 120,000 PLN) or in Zielona Góra (historic surrounding of an old overpass), but this is not a major group of projects. This may be due to the fact that inhabitants of districts and neighbourhoods that require revitalisation are not prone to participate and their needs and expectations are not well audible within the participatory budgeting process. This is a well-known problem of participatory budgeting in the 21st century, as shown by Celina Su's study of New York participatory budgeting initiative: 'A particular puzzle lies in how and why inclusion does not necessarily lead to redistribution' (Su, 2017, p. 74).

Conclusions

The analysis of just a single year of participatory budgeting in the eighteen cities which are voivedeship capitals shows the popularity of the process. It is broadly applied, and in some cases quite large amounts are assigned to the process, even though they still account for a small percentage of municipal budgets. This may be a reason why the current participation of the citizens in the project selection state is not always satisfactory, even though local authorities take efforts to make it as available as they can.

It is evident that this tool of encouraging citizen participation is broadly known in Polish local governments, and that practices (concerning the level of funding, forms of counselling, as well as of projects selected) are easily dispersed. This suggests that the legal provisions making introduction of this solution obligatory for some types of local governments are not necessary, since effectiveness of this tool may be enough to promote it and the increasingly influential local movements may press local authorities to apply it.

On the other hand, Polish metropolitan participatory budgeting serves only some objectives typical for this process. It does empower citizens, thus stimulating their participation in city governance, although the turnout at the final votes to select projects for implementation suggests that the initiative still reaches too few citizens to actually change the local and sub-local communities' attitude to the right to and responsibility for their surroundings. This conclusion corresponds also to the findings concerning types of projects selected and implemented, as they involve lifestyle rather than quality of life. Certainly, participatory budgeting in the analysed cities could be applied more effectively in terms of encouraging more equitable and sustainable development. The findings about participatory budgeting in Poland thus also match issues and problems identified by studies in other parts of the world, like Lerner's study on New York participatory budgeting (Lerner 2017).

It seems that introduction of a legal obligation to apply participatory budgeting is not so important in the current Polish situation as establishment of experience sharing and good practice exchange fora to develop and expand participatory budgeting so as to make it a part of broader governance scheme. It is a very popular tool in modern Poland, so it doesn't need promotion, but it needs to be incorporated in a more advanced and complex system of methods to transform modern local communities.

Table 1: Selected characteristics of Polish voivodeship capitals

voivodeship	city	registered population	population change 2015-2017	unemploy-ment rate	municipal budget expenses in 2018 [PLN]
Dolny Śląsk	Wrocław	638,586	+ 0.44%	2.1%	4,482,000,000.00
Kujawsko-Pomorskie	Bydgoszcz	352,313	- 0.94%	3.9%	2,338,640,916.00
Kujawsko-Pomorskie	Toruń	202,562	- 0.06%	5.2%	1,253,400,000.00
Lubelskie	Lublin	339,85	-0.26%	6.2%	2,280,735,363.32
Lubuskie	Gorzów Wielkopolski	124,295	+0.43%	2.7%	860,295,543.00
Lubuskie	Zielona Góra	139,819	+0.80%	3.4%	1,098,429,533.00
Łódzkie	Łódź	690,422	-1.51%	6.3%	4,071,559,916.00
Małopolska	Kraków	767,348	+0.83%	2.7%	5,581,357,284.00
Mazowsze	Warszawa	1,764,615	+ 1.2%	2.0%	17,671,266,007.00
Opolskie	Opole	128,14	+7.74%*	3.9%	1,124,494,608.00
Podkarpacie	Rzeszów	189,662	+2.03%	5.4%	1,471,906,955.00
Podlasie	Białystok	297,288	+0.44%	7.0%	2,354,943,160.00
Pomorskie	Gdańsk	582,205	+2.69%	2.7%	3,354,000,000.00
Śląsk	Katowice	296,292	-1.21%	2.2%	2,345,802,549.00
Świętokrzyskie	Kielce	196,804	-0.63%	5.8%	1,407,675,939.00
Warmińsko-Mazurskie	Olsztyn	173,07	-0.22%	4.5%	1,253,400,000.00
Wielkopolska	Poznań	538,633	-0.68%	1.4%	3,982,779,681.00
Zachodniopomorskie	Szczecin	405,657	-0.44%	3.1%	2,854,000,000.00

Source: Statistics Poland data for 2017, municipal budgets for 2018 published at the municipalities' websites (the large increase of the population in Opole resulted from the change of the city borders by inclusion some villages formerly belonging to neighbouring communities)

Table 2: Voter turnout in local elections in 2018

voivodeship		city	
Dolny Śląsk	46.50%	Wrocław	52.04%
Kujawsko-Pomorskie	46.25%	Bydgoszcz	52.56%
Kujawsko-Pomorskie		Toruń	52.61%
Lubelskie	51.62%	Lublin	50.96%
Lubuskie	45.54%	Gorzów Wielkopolski	53.49%
Lubuskie		Zielona Góra	46.35%
Łódzkie	49.31%	Łódź	57.29%
Małopolska	52.20%	Kraków	55.26%
Mazowsze	61.52%	Warszawa	66.9%
Opolskie	45.36%	Opole	54.85%
Podkarpacie	49.56%	Rzeszów	54.06%
Podlasie	47.23%	Białystok	51.97%
Pomorskie	52.75%	Gdańsk	57.70%
Śląsk	44.47%	Katowice	51.55%
Świętokrzyskie	51.57%	Kielce	52.33%
Warmińsko-Mazurskie	46.40%	Olsztyn	49.23%
Wielkopolska	47.67%	Poznań	54.43%
Zachodniopomorskie	45.14%	Szczecin	43.15%

Table 3: Amounts assigned to participatory budgeting (absolute numbers and percentage of the city's budget)

voivodeship	city	[PLN]	percentage of the municipal budget
Dolny Śląsk	Wrocław	25,250,000	0.56%
Kujawsko-Pomorskie	Bydgoszcz	13,300,000	0.57%
Kujawsko-Pomorskie	Toruń	7,070,000	0.56%
Lubelskie	Lublin	15,000,000	0.66%
Lubuskie	Gorzów Wielkopolski	6,180,000	0.72%
Lubuskie	Zielona Góra	6,000,000	0.55%
Łódzkie	Łódź	40,000,000	0.98%
Małopolska	Kraków	14,450,000	0.26%
Mazowsze	Warszawa	64,000,000	0.36%
Opolskie	Opole	2,500,000	0.22%
Podkarpacie	Rzeszów	5,500,000	0.37%
Podlasie	Białystok	10,000,000	0.42%
Pomorskie	Gdańsk	14,000,000	0.42%
Śląsk	Katowice	22,800,000	0.97%
Świętokrzyskie	Kielce	5,000,000	0,36%
Warmińsko-Mazurskie	Olsztyn	3,730,000	0,30%
Wielkopolska	Poznań	20,000,000	0,50%
Zachodniopomorskie	Szczecin	8,000,000	0.28%

Table 4: Number of projects chosen for implementation and average value.

voivodeship	city	number	value
Dolny Śląsk	Wrocław	63	400,793.65
Kujawsko-Pomorskie	Bydgoszcz	49	271,428.57
Kujawsko-Pomorskie	Toruń	67	105,522.39
Lubelskie	Lublin	44	340,909.09
Lubuskie	Gorzów Wielkopolski	36	171,666.67
Lubuskie	Zielona Góra	24	250,000.00
Łódzkie	Łódź	228	175,438.60
Małopolska	Kraków	120	120,458.33
Mazowsze	Warszawa	850	75,294.12
Opolskie	Opole	18	138,888.89
Podkarpacie	Rzeszów	36	152,777.78
Podlasie	Białystok	36	277,777.78
Pomorskie	Gdańsk	106	132,075.47
Śląsk	Katowice	126	180,952.38
Świętokrzyskie	Kielce	12	416,666,67
Warmińsko-Mazurskie	Olsztyn	28	155,416.67
Wielkopolska	Poznań	30	666,666.67
Zachodniopomorskie	Szczecin	13	615,384.62

Table 5: Division of participatory budgeting into different categories.

voivodeship	city	
Dolny Śląsk	Wrocław	4 municipal-level projects, 57 district projects, 2 projects related to historic monuments
Kujawsko-Pomorskie	Bydgoszcz	municipal-level projects for the first time and 10 million PLN for each neighbourhood
Kujawsko-Pomorskie	Toruń	30% for municipal-level projects and 70% for sublocal-level projects
Lubelskie	Lublin	5 big projects and 39 small projects (15 projects within amounts guaranteed for quarters of the city)
Lubuskie	Gorzów Wielkopolski	2 municipal-level projects (one soft and one investment), 29 district projects and 5 educational projects
Lubuskie	Zielona Góra	municipal projects (2 of them) and projects submitted for 5 districts within the city (4 per district)
Łódzkie	Łódź	204 district-level projects (mean value 147,107.84 PLN) and 24 municipal-level projects (mean value 460,250 PLN)
Małopolska	Kraków	8,000,100 for municipal-level projects and 4,454,900 PLN for quarter-level projects
Mazowsze	Warszawa	participatory budgeting organised on the level of quarters (eighteen of them), subdivided into districts
Opolskie	Opole	4 big projects, 4 small projects and 10 micro-projects
Podkarpacie	Rzeszów	1st category for municipal-level investments (4,000,000 PLN); 2nd category for neighbourhood-level investments (2,900,000 PLN) and 3rd category for soft projects (600,000 PLN)
Podlasie	Białystok	11 municipal-level projects and 25 projects in districts
Pomorskie	Gdańsk	5 municipal-level projects (mean value of 609,228.40 PLN) and projects for 24 neighbourhood projects
Śląsk	Katowice	municipal level (12 – mean value of 250,066.67 PLN) and quarters (114) projects
Świętokrzyskie	Kielce	2 big projects (1,800,000 ad 2,500,000 PLN), 10 small projects (150,000 PLN each)
Warmińsko-Mazurskie	Olsztyn	24 neighbourhood level projects (mean value 105,416.67) and 4 municipal level (integrated) projects (mean value 300,000)
Wielkopolska	Poznań	municipal level (6,000,000 PLN and 3 projects), district level (14,000,000 PLN for 13 districts and 27 projects)
Zachodniopomorskie	Szczecin	municipal projects (1), 4 districts divided into small and big projects (1 or 2 projects in each of the 8 categories)

Table 6. Participation in the consultation voting stage of participatory budgeting.

voivodeship	city	voting methods	number of voters	percentage of city inhabitants
Dolny Śląsk	Wrocław	online or paper vote	68,67	10.77%
Kujawsko-Pomorskie	Bydgoszcz	online or paper vote	55,218	15,44%
Kujawsko-Pomorskie	Toruń	online or paper vote	12,72	6.28%
Lubelskie	Lublin	online or paper vote	25,318	7.44%
Lubuskie	Gorzów Wielkopolski	meetings, online or paper vote	10,437	8.42%
Lubuskie	Zielona Góra	online or paper vote	36,593	26.17%
Łódzkie	Łódź	online or paper vote	97,974	14.07%
Małopolska	Kraków	online vote	32,958	4.30%
Mazowsze	Warszawa	online or paper vote	89,807	5,12%
Opolskie	Opole	online or paper vote	8,948	7.54%
Podkarpacie	Rzeszów	online or paper vote	19,712	10.39%
Podlasie	Białystok	online or paper vote	23,134	7.78%
Pomorskie	Gdańsk	exclusively online vote	44,655	9.68%
Śląsk	Katowice	exclusively online vote (stationary outlets for people who find online vote too difficult)	46,889	15.73%
Świętokrzyskie	Kielce	online, paper vote or in person	44,114	22.42%
Warmińsko-Mazurskie	Olsztyn	online or paper vote	41,246	23.84%
Wielkopolska	Poznań	online vote	55,631	10.29%
Zachodniopomorskie	Szczecin	online or paper vote	26,378	6.50%

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It's Getting Personal: Personalisation of political campaigns in four Prague districts during the 2018 Czech Senate elections[1]

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Politics in Central Europe (ISSN: 1801-3422)
Vol. 15, No. 2
DOI: 10.2478/pce-2019-0018

Abstract: *In October 2018 Senate elections were held in the Czech Republic. In the capital city of Prague, 41 candidates – both party members and independents – contested for the votes of the electorate of four districts. The goal of this article is to analyse the electoral campaigns which were conducted within these four districts in the online sphere of the social media site Facebook. Through complementary quantitative and qualitative methods, this text focuses its attention on the communication of the candidates themselves, but also on the reactions of the electorate in the environment of social media. Employing qualitative content analysis of the topics addressed by the candidates, sentiment analysis of user commentaries and quantitative analysis of posting frequency and followership, this article examines whether the candidates who led an active personalised campaign were more successful than the candidates who communicated with the public only sporadically and with less personalisation. The aim is to explore how the campaigns of successful candidates were conducted and to accentuate that social media is becoming more important in the campaigns of individual candidates, but that they are not a panacea for non-partisan candidates without an established supporter base and financial resources.*

Keywords: ***Political communication, Senate elections, social media, Facebook, the Czech Republic***

1 This paper was written as a part of a research project „Politická komunikace na sociálních sítích: analýza politické komunikace na případu voleb do Senátu 2018 v pražských volebních obvodech (č. E22–66)" financed from the Internal Grant System of the Metropolitan University Prague.

With the growth of social networks, political communication has undergone a significant change. The expansion of new media has created a new infrastructure for permanent political campaigning, and it allows political actors to create and share content directly with the electorate. Using the internet for political campaign purposes has become a key strategy of many political parties and individual candidates (see, e.g., Metz et al. 2019; Larsson 2015). It has always been crucial for political subjects to adopt new technologies to increase their chances of electoral success in the everchanging media environment. Incorporating the internet, and especially Web 2.0, allows candidates to reach an even larger number of voters faster and more effectively than previously possible with radio and television broadcasts (Towner – Duolio 2012). Especially in the past decade we can observe the incorporation of new media into the communication strategies in Western and Central Europe, as social media networks occupy an increasingly important role in the lives of the citizens and thus allow for more direct and interactive communication between citizens and politicians (Rainie a Smith 2012, Sweetser – Lariscy 2008, Quinlan et al. 2017: 1).

As the use of internet and especially Web 2.0 is seeping through from the established democracies of western Europe and the US, and the social networks are becoming a more prominent feature in everyday political communication in the countries of Central Europe as well as in the Czech Republic itself, political actors are even more encouraged to regularly address the electorate directly via the internet. By sharing their posts, updating information on Facebook or Twitter, publishing videos on YouTube or pictures on Instagram, political candidates can continuously speak to the public without the filters and editorialising influence of the mainstream media. Especially in second-order elections – and particularly in the elections to a body that is often considered by the public as inefficient or even redundant, such as the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic (see, e.g. ČT24 2018) – reaching out to the electorate and keeping it engaged may prove to be crucial. Employing the internet in political communication makes it possible to surpass the need to organise frequent press releases and conferences and communicate the political program of the candidate to – often politically disengaged – voters from the comfort of their homes, or to be precise, their computer or phone screens. All that the 41 candidates in Prague's four districts electing a senator needed to do was refresh their status on social media or post a short video to get their message out to the voters. Although campaign communication is not usually this simple, communicating directly through social media gave candidates the tools to coordinate volunteer activities, raise funds, increase the interactivity of the campaign and quickly disseminate information, opinions and PR materials beyond the scope of traditional media (see e.g. Ceccobelli 2018: 1, Aldrich et al. 2016, Chadwick – Stromer-Galley 2016, Grusell – Nord 2016, Blumler – Kavanagh 1999).

However, the question remains to which degree these tools are used by local politicians and candidates, as well as political parties in the Czech Republic and the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Communicating with the electorate via the internet, implementing social media and using interactive webpages has become the *de facto* norm in the western world, where launching a site and establishing a social network presence is often one of the first steps after announcing or launching a new political subject (Vergeer – Franses 2015: 1, Dang-Xuan et al. 2013). However, political actors are still getting used to the idea of reaching out to citizens in the everchanging and informal environment of Web 2. 0. Especially in the time before the elections, but also in the in-between periods due to the permanent electoral campaign-style many parties choose nowadays, communicating in real-time on social media, sharing a wide range of media content, including pictures and videos, or even launching surveys and fundraisers, can give candidates a crucial advantage in the electoral race. It is important to explore how these tools are employed primarily by individual candidates who do not possess a more extensive bureaucratic apparatus, a stable voter base of political parties or significant party funds, as they present a unique opportunity to surpass the obstacles of mass media communication and personalize the communication with voters in real-time. Although we encounter extensive research into political communication taking place online in political science research, the focus on the Czech Republic and especially on campaigns run by individual politicians is not as prominent and focuses rather on the aspects of participation or representation rather than on the what the candidates are sharing with the users and their reaction (see Hrdina 2013, Vochocová – Švelch 2015 or Vochocová – Štětka – Mazák 2015). Thus, the presented analysis provides a look into this form of self-presentation on social media, as well the feedback provided by the recipients of such communication, as it can be assumed that employing Web 2.0 in one form or another will only become more important for candidates, as well as for political parties in the future. Yet, as the following text shows, establishing quality and interactive political communication with the electorate is still not commonplace and natural for many candidates, even in elections, where individual candidates are in the centre of attention.

Electoral campaigns on social media

For scholars researching medial communication, electoral campaigns are among the most important sources (Ceccobelli 2018:30). The process of the personalisation of politics, as well as electoral campaigns, draws the attention of the scholarly public especially in the context of the voting and decision-making the process of the electorate (Cabada – Tomšič 2016: 1). There is no consensus on the importance of personalisation in elections where the voters are choosing parties with the leaders they prefer, or if they choose to sympathise with the leaders of the parties they already prefer (Belluci – Garzia – Lewis-Beck 2015). An increasing number of academic studies focuses on the topic of electoral campaigns that are conducted in the online environment and the unique characteristics of the way these are organised. As the internet is now used by more than 4 billion users across the world, and more than half of all adults use social media, this hardly comes as a surprise (Poushter 2016). The most widely used social media platform is Facebook, which currently has more than 2,3 billion users (Statista 2019). In the Czech Republic alone, which is the point of focus of this article, the internet is used by over 7,8 million of real users older than 10 years of age, representing 76,5 % of the population (NetMonitor 2018, Kucera 2017). More than 5,3 million people have an account on Facebook – far more than any other social network site – and over 77 % of these users use Facebook daily (Huskova 2018; Focus 2017; Vaculík 2019).

The gradual increase in the professionalisation of political communication, which is apparent in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, foreshadowed the quick and dramatic changes noticeable in the past decade towards more intensive, more strategic and more personalised conduct of political campaigns organised across new media platforms (see Cabada – Tomšič 2016, Negrine – Lilleker 2002, Gerodimos – Justinussen 2015: 114). Digitalisation of a 'permanent campaign' allowed political parties, as well as individual partisan and independent candidates, to reach out to loyal and volatile voters during the electoral cycle and restored the initial hopes that the Web would mediate dialogue – and therefore a more robust relationship – between citizens and their elected representatives (Kent – Taylor 1998). Whereas the sites of political parties were for a long time primarily used to provide basic information to visitors and to mobilise supporters of the party, with the emergence of social networks political communication lost the character of 'static campaign posters' (Enders – Warnick 2008: 323). It can be called into question though to what degree online political communication is meaningful and constructive, and if it allows for the mobilisation of the wider electoral base (Gerodimos – Justinussen 2015: 115).

As Quinlan et al. (2017) state, political candidates are rational actors, whose goal is to maximise the amount of received votes in the elections (see, e.g. Aldrich 1995, Downs 1957). In the past years communicating online through new media platforms was integrated into the political campaigns of many political actors, as it allowed them to promote and publicise the campaign freely, as well as to interact with the broad public (Bronstein 2013). Although the dynamics of hybrid media systems influence political communication significantly (Chadwick 2013), political actors control the amount and quality of information, which they can produce daily without the need for negotiating and compromising with other actors, especially journalists and media networks. New media thus introduce one crucial advantage: they make it possible to communicate freely without any interventions from the traditional media. In this half-public and half-private environment, political actors can meet their voters personally in the online sphere (Gunn – Skogerbo 2013, Quinlan et al. 2018, Russmann – Swensson 2017).

Although online communication with the electorate is an essential method for political subjects to promote their campaign and achieve an electoral victory, the degree to which candidates employ new media in their communication strategies depends to no small degree on the financial resources, personality and level of comfort with using social media. For partisan candidates, the party directive regarding communication strategy matters as well (Quinlan et al. 2017). During the electoral campaign, we observe that the main political leaders in developed democracies increase their number of daily posts. There is an increase in the personalisation of political communication while the number of posts addressing specific program priorities is decreased, and there is an apparent inclination towards the negative campaign. Across the board, the candidates then strive to present their communication as a personal and private dialogue with the social media users (Ceccobelli 2018: 14).

Personalisation of electoral campaigns and the point of focus

The main aim of this article is to continue the research focused on the topic of self-personalisation in the online environment and the impact of the self-personalisation style as a political tactic (see, e.g. Metz et al. 2019, McGregor et al. 2017, Gerodimos – Justinussen 2015, Small 2010). The theoretical concept of political personalisation focuses on the campaigns of individual politicians at the expense of political parties and institutions (Rahat – Schaefer 2007). From this perspective, personalisation is the process of the increased concentration of the publicised message of individual political candidates to raise the interestingness and media relevance of the message (Stromback 2008).

Individual actors as central figures of campaign communication share more personal and private posts, which are not always centred on their political program or party agenda (Vergeer et al. 2013: 4–6). The candidates often present themselves as regular people. They are citizens living among their electorate, and strive to make themselves relatable beyond the scope of their formal office (see e.g. Bene 2017, Gerodimos – Justinussen 2015, Manning et al. 2017, Ross – Burger 2014), or as professionals who possess individual qualities and can bear professional responsibility for political activities and tasks (Hermans – Vergeer 2013, Kruikemeier 2014).

Van Aelst et al. (2012), in their article, define personalisation as a concept on two levels: individualisation and privatisation. If we adhere strictly to their definition, the communication of individual politicians in the online environment is always considered personalised communication, and thus the possibility of a closer examination of its nuances would be eliminated. On the other hand, Metz et al. (2013) build on the assumption that voters are strongly influenced by the personal style of political communication. The electorate increasingly bases their assessment of individual candidates on the information regarding specific candidates originating from their self-presentation on social media sites. As this view allows us to look closely into the way the individual politicians present themselves on the internet, this study follows this line of logic and further employs the definition of Van Santen and Van Zoonen (2010) who distinguish three separate dimensions of personalisation. In the *professional dimension* politicians communicate activities and qualities that are linked to their office; in the *emotional dimension* the actors put their personal feelings into the forefront of the message; and in the *private dimension* of personalisation they convey personal information about their private lives, not related to the political office they are running for (see Van Santen – Van Zoonen 2010 for details).

Although the definitions of personalisation in the scholarly research can differ, the academic public often points out the fact that social media stimulate and encourage the use of the personalised communication style in the campaign (Metz et al. 2019: 4). Social networks are oriented primarily on individual actors. They allow individual actors to bypass the mass media and traditional journalism and to quickly create their content to publish and share without the need for extensive technical, IT and PR investment. There is a strong foundation for the 'equalisation thesis' in the political communication research (see Ward et al., 2003, Gibson and McAllister 2014),[2] suggesting that individuals – and especially independent candidates without a strong backer – can profit from employing new media strategies in their campaign. As the individualised messages, separated from political parties or movements, have more significant potential to be communicated on social media, the personalisation of the environment increases, as the candidates are in charge of their self-presentation and profiling on their social media accounts (Hermans – Vergeer 2013, Enli – Skogerbo 2013, McGregor et al. 2017). Based on these assumptions, the following text aims to explore the aspects of personalisation and communication strategy towards the electorate during the campaign conducted through Facebook in the elections for the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic in October 2018. The candidates that ran for office in four electoral districts in which senators were chosen in the capital city of Prague are analysed.

2 On the other hand, it has been pointed out by many researchers, that indeed large political parties and subjects with enough financial founds and professional PR in place benefit from the internet communication, as their professional and technologically sophisticated communication come across as more compelling and interactive to the public, delivering better campaign results (Margolis – Resnick 2000, Hermans – Vergeer 2012).

H1: Candidates who conducted an actively personalised campaign on Facebook were more successful in the elections than candidates who used the social media network in a sporadic and less personalised way.

Research sample and method

As mentioned above, Facebook is currently the most popular social media website, with more than 2,3 billion users worldwide and over 5,3 million users in the Czech Republic. In the last decade, Facebook had become a 'critical player' for sharing news, primarily due to the simplicity with which users can share, recommend and link important messages (Olmstead – Mitchell – Rosentiel 2011). Facebook gained a dominant role in the sphere of political communication among Czech media, as it connects political actors and candidates with the most significant number of users, as well as with journalists, essential people from the public domain, experts and opinion leaders. Whereas Facebook is used by about half of the total Czech population, Instagram has only 2,3 million users, and Twitter has 389 thousand users (Vaculík 2019).

The analysis presented in this article focuses on the campaign that took place before the Senate elections held in October 2018. This campaign then represents an important case of self-representation and personalisation on the most widely used social media site in the Czech Republic. This is because not only partisan candidates, but also individual candidates ran for office and thus employed different styles of communication, approaches to personalisation and involvement on the internet in their campaign communication strategies. Specifically, for a comprehensive analysis, the attention is aimed at the way Facebook was used by the candidates running for office in four districts in the capital city of Prague.[3] The 2018 elections were held in Prague voting districts 17, 20, 23 and 28, which correspond roughly with the areas of Prague 12, Prague 4, Prague 2 and Prague 8 respectively. The period covered by this analysis focuses on the end of the campaign, between 1 September, 2018 and 11 October, 2018. Thus, it covers both the start of the most active campaign efforts in September and the end of the campaign until the day before the first day of the second round of the two-round runoff elections. It is vital to mention that from 41 candidates that ran for the senator's office, only 27 candidates had an active Facebook account during this period. The accounts studied were the official accounts linked to the candidate's website. No supporter or group profiles, nor the profiles of the political parties represented by the candidates, were taken into consideration. In order to respect the inter- and intra-platform dissimilarities (see Mascheroni – Mattoni 2013; Brunnerová – Charvát 2017 for details), only one social media

3 Every two years, a third of the Czech Senate is elected. The Czech Republic is divided into 81 single-member districts, which have no larger than 15 % difference in number of citizens.

platform (Facebook) was observed. Moreover, the attention was focused on the profiles of the candidates themselves and not on the different groups or individual profiles supporting them.

Freelon and Karpf (2015: 391) stated that research of hybrid media, such as social networks, calls for the employment of hybrid methods. With this in mind, the following analysis employs a broader spectrum of methods, which allows us to not only explore how the social media platform was utilized by the candidates in generic terms, but also to bring a more complex picture regarding how Facebook users reacted to the content of posts shared by the political actors. In order to achieve the abovementioned aims, the method of qualitative--oriented sentiment analysis of user messages is used (see Brunnerová 2018: 139–146 for details), which is then complemented by quantitative observation of the shared posts and reactions, as well as a content analysis focused on the candidates' posts themselves.

In the sentiment analysis, over 14 thousand user comments and reactions posted on the candidates' profiles were manually coded and analysed with the *Zoomsphere* platform. All reactions in which a positive, negative, neutral or ambivalent sentiment was present were included in the sample. Posts which did not include any sentiment (i.e. posts that did not have any original content of the person who posted the reaction or comment) were disregarded. These include, for example, URL links without commentary or posts solely tagging another user. During the analysis, the correctness, accuracy or factual content of the comments was also disregarded. For the content analysis of 1.071 posts that were shared by the 27 candidates who possessed an active Facebook account, 35 main topics and 31 subtopics were identified based on a preliminary review across the posts; for every post, all included topics were identified and coded. Subsequently, it was identified whether the topics included professional, emotional or personal characteristics of personalised communication. In the sample, visual posts (pictures as well as emoticons) were also considered if they represented the identifiable sentiment of the user.

Quantitative aspects of user favour

It needs to be pointed out right from the beginning that the number of fans or followers on Facebook does not present a figure that would give evidence of how much the users of Facebook *like* the individual candidates.[4] From the logic of social media, it is reasonable to assume that many users will follow a wider

4 Although we also need to take into consideration that on Facebook both targeted advertising and the althorithm-effected reach of the post impacts how many users see the specific post or the candidate's profile, it can also be assumed that if the candidate has an interest in reaching out to Facebook users and establishing an active communication with voters in a selected district, they will also consider these effects and will take the necessary course of action to promote their profiles.

number of candidates, both the ones they like, but also candidates they have a critical attitude towards. In particular, political professionals, scholars and journalists often follow a spectrum of candidates disregarding their personal preference. Nevertheless, the number of followers still provides valuable insight into the number of users the candidates can reach out to with their posts and campaign. It allows us to depict trends of development and provide a contextual framework for the following analysis. Especially in the time right before the elections, a rapid growth or decline in the number of followers can suggest the importance the broad public assigns to various candidates and gives evidence to what the 'starting line' for candidates was.

Table 1: Number of Followers

	1 September, 2018	11 October, 2018
Jiří Drahoš	155869	155200
Marek Hilšer	43059	43843
Pavel Fischer	42671	42906
Hayato Okamura	6801	7150
Vladimír Kratina	5118	6412
Lubor Michálek	4637	4798
Aleš Gerloch	2713	2798
Ladislav Jakl	1838	2134
Petr Hannig	1494	1483
Benjamin Kuras	1087	1482
Lukáš Wagenknecht	748	1214
Miroslava Skovajsová	774	1161
Martin Dvořák	1180	1067
Eva Syková	848	924

	1 September, 2018	11 October, 2018
Ivan Gabal	891	912
Eva Tylová	647	692
Milan Golas	597	675
Jiří Nouza	608	651
Marta Semelová	637	640
Pavel Dungl	6	335
Roman Petrus	285	289
Ivan Pilný	248	281
František Dobšík	144	238
Jiří Haramul	6	90
Ivan David	68	72
Roman Kerekeš	14	49
Jiří Witzany	3	7

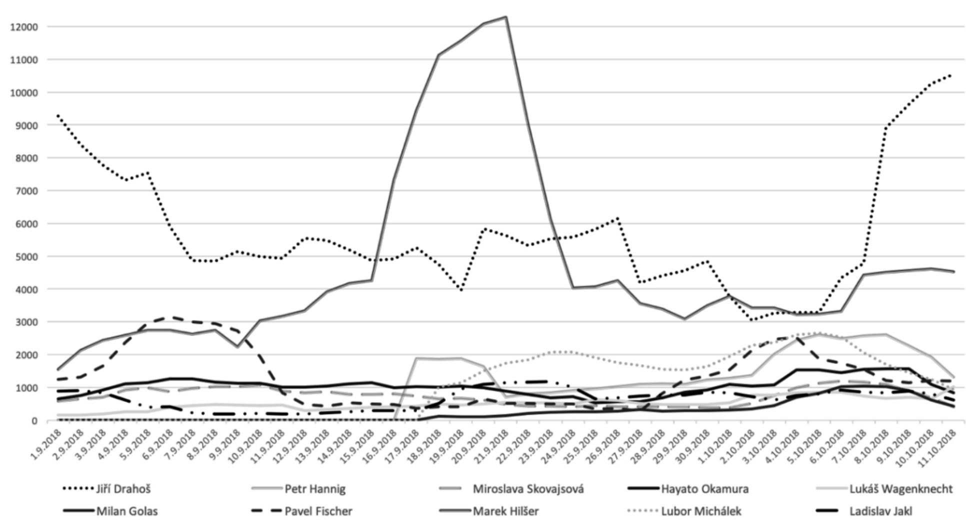
An important observation regarding the number of followers on Facebook is that the three candidates who contested in the preceding presidential elections entered the hot phase of the campaign with a significantly larger follower base and thus were from the beginning in a very uneven position compared to other contestants, not only in the scope of the social media presentation, but also in the overall visibility of their campaign due to a thought-through PR offensive. The followership of Jiří Drahoš was dramatically higher, but even Petr Hannig, who ended in the penultimate spot in the first round of the presidential race had more followers than most of the other Senate candidates in Prague. On the other hand, partisan candidates entered the Senate campaign without an established broad base of followers, signifying that developing a social media presence in a permanent way between elections is not a priority for many political parties. The only partisan candidate with a broader base of followers was Hayato Okamura.[5] The difference between the followership of candidates was quite significant.

5 It needs to be acknowledged though, that partisan candidates could have used the social media profiles of their parties to communicate with their electorate.

During the campaign Drahoš had more than 150 thousand followers and could address not only a large number of supporters, but also his critics.

Similarly, Marek Hilšer and Pavel Fischer entered the campaign with a previously established followership of around 40 thousand followers. On the other hand, the remaining candidates did not have over hundreds or a couple thousand followers. The fact that most of the candidates were not followed by a wide base of Facebook users though suggests that the candidates did not utilize the social media site in its full capacity and did not prioritize establishing themselves on it before and during the campaign. They did not capture the attention of users to the degree where they would start to follow the individual candidate in order to be able to read their posts regularly. Especially independent candidates, who before the elections stood aside from the main political scene, remained rather unknown figures for the voters in their electoral districts, also due to their low visibility online.

Figure 1: PTAT Metric in the Observed Period



The PTAT indicator shows the level of engagement on the profiles of the candidates and points out how users reacted to the profile of an individual candidate, how many users shared the page, commented on it, gave it a 'like', became followers, tagged the page in their status etc. Although this metric does not show if the followers were positive or critical towards the candidate, it allows us to depict how the profile of the candidate stimulated and provoked a reaction or activity from Facebook users. As Drahoš, Hilšer and Fischer had a dramatically larger number of followers, it is not surprising that the PTAT indicator was also higher for them compared to other candidates in their respective districts. Not only were their profiles followed, but they encouraged and stimulated the users to actively participate in the discussion, to post their comments or share the profile and to draw even more attention to their campaign. The profile of Hilšer registered increased activity in connection to the discussion addressing the topic of immigration and refugees in the middle of September 2018. Contrarily, the profile of Drahoš became increasingly active during the first round of the elections and after they ended. It is not without interest that Lukáš Wagenknecht, although possessing a lower number of followers than other successful candidates, used both his profile and the official profile of his party to present himself to the electorate, and managed to positively accumulate user interest and increase the number of followers, as well as interactions on his profile.

On the other hand, the profiles of other candidates who entered the second round of the elections showed a very low degree of users' interest. Although the number of reactions on the profile of Eva Tylová increased during the last days of her campaign, compared to Fischer, who was her rival in the second round, the mobilisation of interest could not compete. Similarly, the other unsuccessful candidates from the second round were not able to mobilise their online supporters sufficiently on Facebook and spread the general knowledge of their candidacy, opinions or campaign activities to their potential voters.

Table 2: Number of Shared Posts in the Observed Period

Hayato Okamura	92
Benjamin Kuras	86
Miroslava Skovajsová	66
Ladislav Jakl	60
Jiří Drahoš	57
Lukáš Wagenknecht	57
Aleš Gerloch	54
Ivan Pilný	53
Marek Hilšer	51
Pavel Dungl	43
Roman Kerekeš	42
Roman Petrus	41
František Dobšík	39

Jiří Haramul	38
Martin Dvořák	36
Eva Tylová	35
Libor Michálek senátor	35
Jiří Nouza	34
Vladimír Kratina	31
Milan Golas	28
Jiří Witzany do senátu	24
MUDr. Ivan David	24
Prof. Eva Syková	19
Pavel Fischer	18
Ivan Gabal	10
Petr Hannig	7

A striking difference can be observed when it comes to the number of posts the candidates shared on Facebook. Whereas Okamura, Benjamin Kuras, Miroslava Skovajsová, Ladislav Jakl, Wagenknecht and Drahoš shared messages several times per day, especially as the first round of elections was getting closer, Hanning and Ivan Gabal only shared a handful of posts during the last month before the elections. Fischer, the winner in the electoral district of Prague 12, did not share a large number of messages either, especially compared to other successful candidates. Similar to Wagenknecht though, his posts gained the most ‘likes’ and positive reactions from users in his district, and due to the solid follower base, the posts were actively shared among the users. Contrary to for example the campaign taking place before the presidential elections in early 2018, where it did not go unnoticed that some of the candidates did not manage their Facebook communication on their own but instead used a team of PR specialists as well as volunteers to manage their social media accounts, it was a clear aim of the candidates in the Senate elections to evoke the feeling of authenticity and immediate communication with the public. Most of the candidates though did not involve themselves significantly in the discussion on their profiles, although, for example, Hilšer and Wagenknecht did react to the comments and replied to the messages on their profiles regularly.

Topics of candidates’ posts

Interestingly, the most prominent topic of the candidates’ posts on Facebook was the progress of the campaign itself. The candidates used their profile to relay the moments of the contact campaign to the users online. All candidates utilized Facebook to share moments from campaign events, inform their followers of planned meetings and upcoming events and share photos and videos from meetings with the voters. There was an apparent and noticeable emotional charge in these messages, which showed the most positive moments of the campaign and the encounters with Prague’s inhabitants. The accentuation of the contact campaign was also noticeable in the personal contact with voters and the engagement of candidates in local events happening in the neighbourhoods of the electoral district they ran for. Communication on Facebook thus constituted an opportunity to relay the campaign on the ground to the wider public of voters present online, and it allowed the candidates to engage users who did not have the opportunity to meet them in the streets of Prague.

A very important topic of the campaign across the board was the personal lives of the candidates. Posts often addressed the life stories of the candidate, their family lives, but also their hobbies and pastime activities. Posts explaining – through text or video – why the candidate decided to run for the particular district were also prominent, as some of the candidates did not have their permanent address in that part of Prague and thus deemed it necessary to explain why they wanted to represent the inhabitants of that neighbourhood. Posts focusing on personal characteristics were crucial for less-known candidates, who utilised Facebook to present themselves to the public, acquaint the users with their previous professional career and accomplishments, but also to share their priorities and personal interests. For example, Skovajsová and Roman Kerekeš took the users of Facebook on a tour through their medical practices and their experiences as practising doctors. Ivan Pilný remarked on his success as a manager, but also as a minister of finance in the coalition government in

2017. Aleš Gerloch presented his career as a lawyer and university faculty head, and Roman Petrus pointed out his work as mayor for the Social Democratic Party. Especially candidates who were not previously part of the political scene or were less well known from public life could thus strive to establish a personal relationship with Facebook users, as well as gain recurrent and plentiful comments, stating that a user will not vote for a particular candidate as they do not know (of) them.

In the area of political agendas, policies and program priorities, no single topic dominated the campaigns on the district level or in the overall Prague campaign. In the Senate campaign on Facebook topics were prevalent the voters could easily identify with. The candidates focused on the issues of environment and city greenery, the problematic housing market and traffic situation in the capital, improving the quality of education, as well as health and social care. This is well-illustrated in Drahoš's post from October 2nd in which he stated, accompanied by a photo from the contact campaign among voters in a Prague subway station, that 'in the city, we most importantly have to feel good. Nothing epitomizes this better than the well-known „safety of the home". Quality schools, maintained streets, well-functioning transportation, playground [*sic*] for children. Even the most vulnerable of us will know that we will take care of them' (Drahoš 2018b). Accentuation of topics important for the voters in the electoral district was vital also in the posts of Wagenknecht, who stated in a post that a 'Senator should be in my opinion an advocate of the citizens of his electoral district. If elected, I will be the advocate and defender of local topics of citizens' (Wagenknecht 2018b).

On the other hand, among the peripheral topics, only sporadically were the issues of European integrations, migration or taxation discussed. Although these topics elicit an active response from many Facebook users, these reactions were often quite critical towards the candidate, no matter what the specific stance was they took towards the issue (see below). The topic of the European Union (EU) was very important in the campaign of Okamura, who declared that his program is 'democratic, pro-west and pro-European – with the emphasis on the freedom of the individual, but simultaneously on social cohesion and consideration among the people in our society' (Okamura 2018). Migration was thematised by Kuras, who said in a post 'Please become aware [...], a civilization catastrophe is rushing towards us. In a couple of months, illegal immigration will end because it will turn into „legal" migration. The „Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration" will establish migration as a fundamental human right and the acceptance of migrants and taking care of them as an obligation of all European countries'. (Kuras 2018). Less frequently discussed topics were the issues of 'marriage for all' and adoption for same sex parents, addressed supportively by Skovajsová. Another less frequent topic was the protection of the Czech language, history and identity, which was thematised repeatedly by Gerloch, who aimed to protect the idea of the Czech nation and Czech language by amending the constitution to explicitly state that Czech is the official language, and to call the Czech Republic homeland of the Czech nation, making these features state-forming.

Most of the candidates focused their attention on the representation of two to three major topics, occasionally including complementary policies into their priorities. Most often the selection of represented topics was directly linked to the previous profession of the individual candidate, or their previous political engagement. In the posts linking their professional experience and the topics they wanted to represent, candidates running for the office of Senator pointed out their competence and expertise in the given field. Drahoš focused primarily on the issues of education and schooling, Tylová addressed the situation regarding housing in Prague and the environment, Dobšík and Petrus concentrated on traffic and transportation, whereas Pavel Dungl talked primarily about healthcare, similar to Kerekeš or Hilšer, who linked public health with social-security policies. Many candidates in the electorate districts thematised the issues of bureaucratic apparatus and digitalisation of administration and public service. These topics were prominent in the campaigns of Wagenknecht and Drahoš.

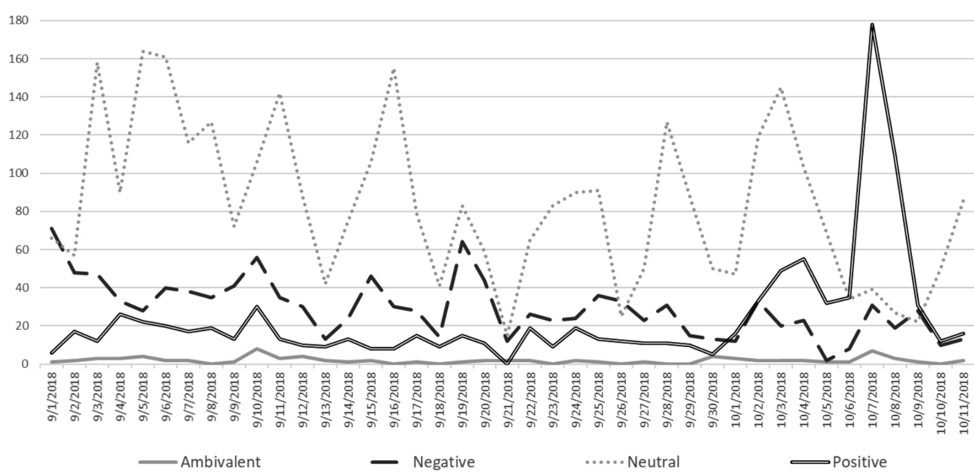
Besides sharing posts, candidates communicated their opinions and priorities on Facebook by sharing interviews with journalists, articles written about them and TV and radio appearances. Quite often, the candidates used a historical anniversary to present their own opinions and programmatic priorities. Videos of the candidates with supporters were very popular, and famous figures, celebrities, politicians and personal friends spoke on their behalf and about their qualities and expertise. It is not without interest that candidates very often encouraged the electorate to participate in the election and vote. Candidates even openly addressed the fact that 'likes are not votes' (Skovajsová 2018) and that 'showing fondness and support is nice, but if they do not transform into ballot paper in the ballot box, it means a single thing: your vote was forfeited, and you will not be heard' (Drahoš 2018c). The candidates across the districts thematised the issue of low election turnout in the Czech Republic, the role and importance of the Senate as well as the civic engagement in politics.

The presentation of individual candidates put a strong emphasis on the absence of political scandals, extensive professional expertise and experience, strong work ethic, as well as an understanding of the citizens in Prague's districts and a continuous effort to improve the lives of the electorate. Particularly for candidates who lacked extensive political experience, as in the case of Gabal or Skovajsová, pointing out that they are not linked to any political affairs or scandals was a handy benefit and spun their lack of political experience. It was evident that it was crucial for the candidates to present themselves in person and to convince voters with their personality, rather than their political program and specific policies they wanted to implement in the Senate. Drahoš and

Hilšer often accentuated emotional and individualized personalisation in their messages. Drahoš often addressed his hobbies, as well as his student days, and Hilšer shared his activities with his family. Both candidates put a strong emotional charge on the messages addressing current events. On the other hand, Fischer often shared posts that related to the duties carried out by a senator, but he also communicated personal and emotionally charged messages. Wagenknecht and Dung, who competed against each other in the second round and whose duel for the mandate was the closest, both focused on professionally aimed posts, similarly to Tylová and Lubor Michálek, who did not succeed in the second round of the elections.

Sentiment towards the successful candidates on Facebook

Figure 2: Sentiment towards Jiří Drahoš

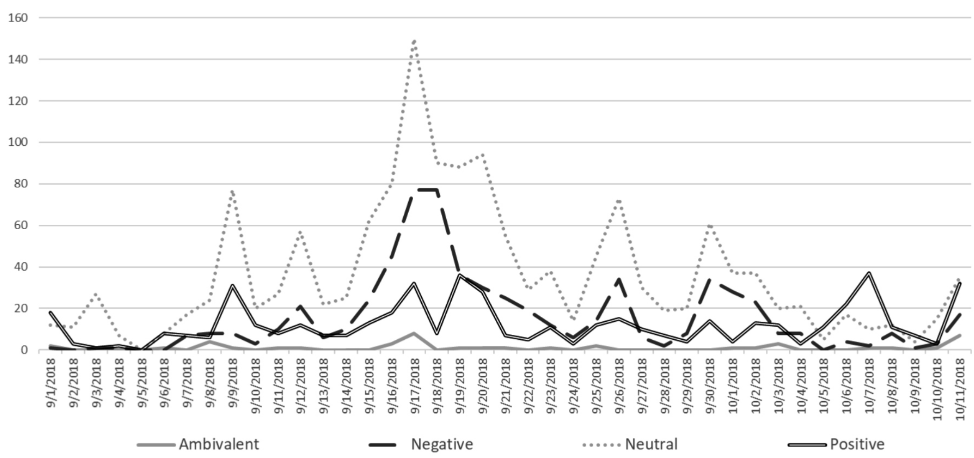


Drahoš was the only candidate in Prague (and one of the only two candidates republic-wise) who won in the first round of the elections by obtaining an absolute majority of votes – he attracted the vote of 52,65 % of the electorate. His campaign was the most expensive out of all the non-partisan candidates. He spent over 1 million CZK on the campaign, with a significant portion of that amount being dedicated to PR and marketing (UDHPSH 2018). The campaign on Facebook reflected this, as it has been conducted *de facto* permanently since the presidential elections held at the beginning of 2018. The campaign was conducted through a combination of posts commemorating important historical events and anniversaries, addressing the essential programmatic topics and priorities, presenting official campaign visuals and, especially as the campaign culminated, focused on photos of the candidate with the public during informal meetings and campaign events. Recurrent emphasis on emotional and private aspects of the personalised campaign received mainly positive reactions on Facebook. In particular, posts in which Drahoš shared memories from meetings held in Prague 4 and from the contact campaign were often commented on by his supporters. Others that drew positive reactions were from the beer festival Pivofest and the beers that the candidate tasted and preferred. From the contact campaign in the subway stations, during which Drahoš discussed with voters what they would like to improve about politics in their district, or posts about Drahoš' time at the Technical University. These raised positive reactions from potential voters, as well as users who could not vote in Prague 4, but who were exposed to Drahoš' profile as he became increasingly visible in the internet environment. Similarly, the discussion regarding the topics that Drahoš thematised helped to increase the reach of the campaign. During the observed period, an active neutral discussion commenting on current political affairs was present in the comment section.

Negative sentiments towards Drahoš on Facebook were observed mainly during the elections. The levels of positive sentiment were constant and spiked dramatically before the first round of the election. Interest, which raised Drahoš' profile, as well as the levels of positive sentiment, was several times greater than that of Eva Syková, who came second in the elections in Prague 4 with 13,06 % of the vote. It needs to be pointed out that negative sentiment was also predominant on Syková's profile, and there was only a minimal positive reaction towards the candidate of the government party ANO.

Distinctively negative sentiment was present on Drahoš's profile under posts that communicated concrete program priorities and showed the candidate's opinion regarding current political topics. Whereas in the campaign before the presidential election Drahoš often pointed out his previous professional successes and his expertise, in September and October 2018 he thematised more historical anniversaries and topical events. These posts then attracted positive as well as adverse reactions from users. Where the support for the candidate was mostly generic, stating fondness and positive preferences, negative comments were mostly specific and concrete, evaluating opinions of Drahoš. However, as with the negative sentiment, the reactions often commented on the character or physical features of the candidate. Users mockingly noted the false glasses Drahoš wore, which was raised during the presidential elections, or the campaign event during which Drahoš skinned a rabbit. A significant wave of negative sentiment was brought by posts in which Drahoš commented on the current issue of migration, political development regarding immigration and the European Union. Similar to Hilšer, the most negative reaction was towards a post that combined the topic of Syrian orphan refugees with criticism of the prime minister Andrej Babiš, in which Drahoš stated 'That is enough! The discussion regarding children who experienced the loss of their parents, is completely distasteful […] Mister Babiš, it is undignified when the prime minister of this country gathers political points on the trading with fear!' (Jiří Drahoš 2018a). Very often not only was the content of the post viewed negatively, but also the resolute form in which Drahoš communicated in these elections. Similar to the presidential campaign six months prior, critical users again stated that Drahoš lacked his own opinions. Drahoš's criticism of president Miloš Zeman was also met with negativity. Facebook users repeatedly noted that they felt like Drahoš was embittered and lacked sufficient political experience, or that he sought the political office for personal and financial gain, and that he was not connected to the district of Prague 4 as he does not have a permanent address there. Similar to Hilšer, Drahoš invested his time in pointing out that he was linked to the district and explained his motivation to represent voters of this neighbourhood. In the last days before the first round of the elections, positive sentiment started to rise dramatically, as more and more supporters came to the candidate's Facebook profile to show their support and write supportive messages. Especially positive reactions were then linked to the claim of competitor candidate Martin Dvořák, who said that Drahoš was behind a critical article, according to which Dvořák was supposed to keep money from the Club of Water Sports for himself (Blažek 2018).

Figure 3: Sentiment towards Marek Hilšer



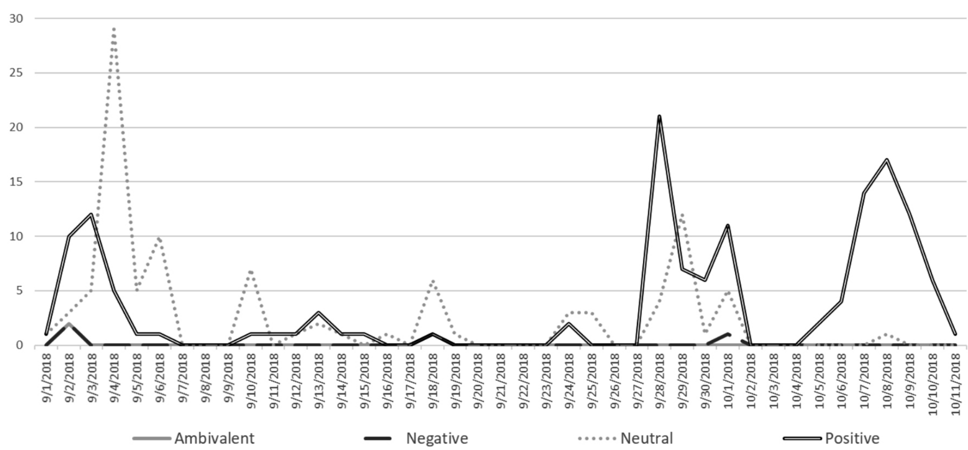
The campaign of Hilšer, who received 44,45 % in the first round and won in the second round beating Michálek with 79,75 % of the votes, was one of the cheapest campaigns among Prague's candidates, costing only a little over half a million CZK (UDHPSH 2018). Most of the funds – over 300 thousand CZK – were raised through a crowdfunding campaign on the HitHit platform. For financial contributions, Hilšer offered rewards in the form of button pins, shirts, homemade honey from his beehive and tickets for evening events, during which Hilšer spoke about his experience as a doctor in Kenya, or danced the tango. Both the campaign in the streets of Prague and the Facebook presentation were conducted in a light-hearted and relaxed style with a personalised campaign. For example, family photos with his wife and new-born baby doing everyday activities were included in posts, as well as pictures of Hilšer riding around his district of Prague 2 on a red moped and acting as a 'living billboard' (Hilšer 2018b).

Hilšer, who built his social media presence and his campaign in general on strong personal contact with voters, enjoyed positive sentiment from users throughout the entire period we studied. Nevertheless, especially during the second half of September and the beginning of October, negative sentiment towards the candidate prevailed, as Hilšer shared a series of posts that negatively commented on the current political situation and criticised Prime Minister Babiš. Active and often negative and even exasperated discussion, which sparked off of Hilšer's profile though raised the number of day-to-day interactions and significantly increased the reach of the campaign. Negative sentiment was often triggered by posts that had what the users perceived as an activistic campaign tone – the users pointed out to Hilšer that he was running for the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, not a local government. They further pointed out the powers and authorities of the senator, with the objection that as a Senator Hilšer would not be able to realise some of his priorities and they questioned how Hilšer wanted to fulfil his promises. The users also noted that for Hilšer, the presidential campaign was only a springboard to the Senate race. As in the case of Drahoš, it was criticised that Hilšer runs for office in Prague since his original place of residence was the city of Chomutov.

As mentioned above, reactions towards posts that addressed specific policy agendas and priorities of the candidate were both distinctively negative, and also highly positive. The largest increase of negative, and ambivalent, sentiment was raised by a post that was published by Hilšer in the middle of September, in which the candidate stated in connection with the acceptance of Syrian orphan refugees that the prime minister of the country is a 'heartless psychopath, who spreads his poisonous egoisms' (Hilšer 2018a). His criticism of the prime minister at the end of September and a post published in October, in which he spoke about the activities of the Czech Republic in NATO or the EU, were also perceived negatively. The fact that Hilšer remained in communication with his critics on his profile and actively participated in the discussion was regarded positively, as was his friendly conduct.

Positive comments, especially in the beginning of the observed period and in comparison with negatively oriented replies, were short and comprised of brief statements of support or agreement of a particular message of the candidate. The users were appreciative of Hilšer's congenial conduct, his pleasant appearance and especially the posts of him with his family and meetings with the citizens. Users who had the opportunity to ‘catch’ the candidate on his rides through Prague 2 often posted their pictures directly on Hilšer’s Facebook profile and shared the positive impressions of the meeting with him. At the end of the campaign, a wave of positive feedback was brought by the Hilšer’s criticism of his rival in the second round, Michálek, who right before the deciding round asked Hilšer to step down from the race. Michálek could benefit during his campaign from the fact that he occupied the post of Senator for this Prague district in the previous term and also from the support of the Czech Pirate Party for which he ran. During the whole campaign, his profile was less popular than Hilšer’s, and his appeal to Hilšer, asking him not to continue with the campaign right before the second round dramatically increased the negative sentiment on his profile.

Figure 4: Sentiment towards Pavel Fischer



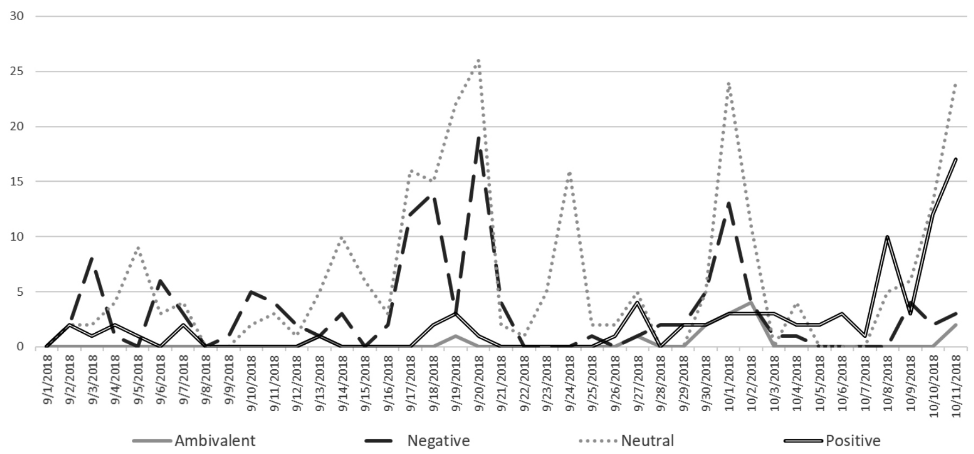
In Prague’s 17th electoral district Fischer ran for office and gained 49,98 % of the vote in the first round and won the election in the second round with 78,07 % of the vote. Unlike Drahoš and Hilšer, Fischer focused his Facebook campaign mostly on sharing interviews, articles and TV appearances, as well as presenting his professional qualities and experience. As Fischer was competing for office in his place of residence, he did not have to justify his decision to run for his particular voting district. Although compared to the other winning candidates his communication was rather sparse, Fischer and his team were very active on his personal website, where the candidate regularly shared articles, invitations for campaign events, photos from meetings as well as personal stories about his past time activities and hobbies. While the profile on Facebook was less active, it still attracted significant attention of users, especially compared to Fischer’s rival in the second round. On Tylová's profile, just a handful of users' reactions appeared during the observed period, and the only increase in interaction happened during the second round. These comments were mostly negative.

Fischer, similar to other winning candidates, shared his experiences from meetings that were conducted during the campaign or the events he attended. Feedback on his photos from a concert on Slovanský Island was very positive, as were photos from the Milada Horáková memorial reveal and the Moravian Saint Wenceslas Feast, which Fischer attended with his wife. Although Fisher was among the candidates with a lower amount of shared posts, due to the high number of followers and regular communication with users, his posts had a great outreach to the users of Facebook. Even though the activity on his profile was not as high compared to other successful candidates, when compared to other candidates in the 17th electoral district in Prague Fischer's profile was among the most visited, most commented on and most shared ones.

Fischer's most positively received post was a short video in which the candidate sympathized with independent journalism and rejected attacking journalists (Fischer 2018a). Also proving popular was a video commemorating the holiday of Saint Wenceslas, in which Fischer stated that one of his priorities is the support of solidarity and justice in society (Fischer 2018b). Facebook users appreciated in Fischer's typically short commentaries, his pleasant demeanour and polite presence but they also commented on his experience in diplomatic service and that his opinions 'were reasonable'. The support and positive sentiment towards the candidate started to increase substantially in the period before the first and second rounds of the Senate elections, during which his profile was visited by any users who came to show their appreciation and wished the candidate a successful election result. Many users who showed their support were not citizens of Prague, but a wide public from the entire Czech Republic, who repeatedly said that they wished that Fischer would run in the next presidential elections. Negative sentiment towards Fischer was minimal. The post that attracted the most positive reactions also gathered the most negative reactions. It involved the defence of independent journalism and journalists in the beginning of September. Some users also negatively perceived Fischer's long engagement abroad.

Wagenknecht was the one candidate from the winners of Prague's Senate elections who was a member of a political party, the Czech Pirate Party. Wagenknecht proceeded to the second round with the lowest supremacy over his rival. In the first round, he received only 18,5 % of the vote, whereas the second candidate, Dungl, got 15,29 %. The competition in the second round was the tightest from the four Prague districts. Wagenknecht won with 54,45 % of the vote. Although the popularity of his profile was not as strong when compared to other successful candidates, Wagenknecht benefited from the attention of more than 100 thousand users who followed the Facebook profile of the Pirate

Figure 5: Sentiment towards Lukáš Wagenknecht



party, which throughout the campaign delivered information on the campaign and Wagenknecht's candidacy. The presentation of the candidate, who focused his campaign on the issue of corruption, consisted of sharing photos from meetings with the electorate and videos on Facebook that communicated his programmatic priorities. Wagenknecht also used comedy sketches, which outlined the priorities he wanted to address in the Senate. In comparison to Dungl's campaign, who competed against Wagenknecht in the second round, it was noticeable that during the whole observed period Wagenknecht attracted a larger number of positive comments, but also a lively discussion about current political issues and problems not directly related to the candidate's campaign. Not only the followership but also the activity on Dungl's profile was noticeably lower, and especially in the days before the first and the second round the number of negative reactions increased.

Wagenknecht approached his campaign in a light manner, employing humour and focused, similarly to Fischer, more on the professional topics rather than on emotional and private messages like Drahoš and Hilšer. His connection to a political party brought Wagenknecht more space in the context of the social site and raised the visibility of the campaign. However, his connection to the Czech Pirate Party was also a cause of many negative comments, in which users stated their negative feelings towards both the candidate and the party, as well as ambivalent comments, which supported Wagenknecht but were critical of his relationship with the Pirates. The perception of the candidate's employment with the Ministry of Finance during the period in which Andrej Babiš was the prime minister was also negative. Users noted that Wagenknecht did not become the deputy in the area of financial management and audit with the intention of ‘fighting against injustice’, that he lacks expertise or that he ‘collaborates with a state-security member and a liar’ (Lukáš Wagenknecht 2018a). One of the most negative reactions was towards Wagenknecht’s policy priorities and the criticism of Andrej Babiš in the middle of September 2018. It is not without interest that the candidate’s position against corruption was usually perceived positively by users, but some users in the 17th district of Prague pointed out that there are more pressing issues in the district, like issues with parking, traffic or housing. A post in which Wagenknecht stated that the state service should be apolitical was received positively. Throughout the campaign on Facebook, users appreciated that the candidate ‘says things how he sees them as correct’ and is ‘not afraid to express his opinions’. Especially positive was the sentiment towards the fact that the candidate regularly answered the comments and questions of the users and participated in the discussion on Facebook. Particularly at the end of the campaign, the positive sentiment prevailed over adverse reactions on the candidate’s profile.

Conclusion

In the past decade, candidates for office in the Czech Republic have started to significantly increase their use of social media in political campaigns. Communication with the electorate through Web 2.0, the use of interactive websites, blogs and social media platforms in campaign strategies, have made it possible for political parties as well as individual politicians to share a wide range of content, from regularly posted messages, photos and videos, to surveys and requests for financial donations. Due to the communication in real-time, the easy access for the viewers as well as the possibility of immediate feedback and reactions from the electorate, and the possibilities for personalization, social networks allowed the candidates to take the campaign closer to the voters not only in personal contact but also through the permanent campaign conducted online.

Nevertheless, the use of new media for self-presentation and direct communication is only gradually becoming a more permanent feature of political campaigning in Central and Eastern Europe. Although many Czech politicians and political parties have become active on social media, a broad group of political actors employs online communication only sporadically in their campaign strategies, without using the full potential of the internet. This is also evident in the case of the Senate elections, which are the focus of this text. Out of the 41 candidates that ran for office in four districts in Prague, only 27 candidates had an active profile on Facebook a month before the elections, the most widely used social media platform in the Czech Republic.

This article aimed to thematise the self-personalisation in the online environment and the consequences of a self-personalised style as a campaign tactic. The goal was to examine the aspects of a personalisation and communication strategy towards the voters in the case of Facebook communication that took place directly before the elections to the Senate in the autumn of 2018, as these elections demonstrate how individual candidates running for office approach their presence on social media. The observed period covered the 'hot phase' of the campaign as well as its culmination; through both qualitative and quantitative methods, it was analysed, whether the candidates who lead an active and personalised campaign were more successful.

Jiří Drahoš, Marek Hilšer and Pavel Fischer started their campaigns more than a half year before the Senate elections when they ran for President of the Czech Republic, and at the beginning of the observed period had a significantly higher number of followers and interactions than other candidates. Not only Drahoš, who was followed by several times more users than any other candidate, but also Hilšer and Fischer, had the opportunity to address a broader spectrum of citizens through social media. Especially for non-partisan candidates, the reach of their profile played a key role. Politicians who could have become better known to the users from profiles of their political parties (as in the case of Lukáš Wagenknecht or Pavel Dungl), whose followers often reach in the hundreds of thousands, did not have to dedicate as much attention to their profiles. A low number of followers, as well as a low number of interactions and engagement, often not surpassing a handful or couple of tens of users, implies that active employment of social media platforms and the opportunities for personalisation and direct communication with the users that new media allows for is not a prominent and standard feature of campaign strategies in the Czech Republic, even in the elections to the second chamber of Parliament. It is not without interest that from the 14 candidates who did not have an active profile on Facebook during the observed period, only one candidate (Josef Nosek who in the electoral district of Prague 8 ran for the political movement For Prague) gained more than 5 % of the votes. Altogether, six out of eight candidates whose number of interactions on Facebook did not surpass 1,000, gained less than 10 % votes. Although we cannot gauge from interactions, activity or number of followers *how* the users spoke about candidates, nor what their preferences towards candidates were, if they commented on the candidates' profiles positively or negatively, for which reason they followed the profile or if they were entitled to vote in the district of the candidate, it is apparent that being able to reach a wide group of user public can greatly increase visibility of the campaign and disseminate awareness of the candidate's campaign. Active social media users are further able to communicate their perceptions of the candidates as opinion leaders to other, less active users or people who are not active on social media and thus enlarge the campaign's scope.

The candidates used Facebook to inform users and voters about upcoming events and opportunities to meet the candidate. The communication about the contact campaign itself presented the topic most often communicated by the candidates. The candidates regularly used Facebook to share their interviews, articles about their campaign or radio and TV appearances. From the content of the posts that the candidates shared, it was evident that most actors based their candidacy on two to three topics which they wanted to represent in the Senate. Most often, issues such as healthcare, education, housing or transportation were addressed, as well as the environment and limitation of bureaucracy. Candidates primarily communicated the intention of improving the lives of the citizens of the given Prague district in particular ways, rather than thematising topics connected to global politics or raising more controversial issues, such as the relationship with the EU, migration or taxation. These topics were only communicated on Facebook sporadically. Candidates focused instead on getting the users acquainted with the campaign activities, meetings with voters in the streets of Prague, as well as the presentation of their professional expertise and character qualities, or to familiarise the users with their family and personal lives, hobbies and pastime activities. The proportion of posts addressing personal topics and emotional responses of the candidates on the one hand, and messages addressing activities and qualities linked to the duties of the Senator's office on the other hand, differed greatly. In the campaigns of Drahoš, Hilšer and to a lesser degree Fischer, posts that thematised personal lives, opinions and impressions of the candidates were prominent. However, Wagenknecht and Dungl, whose competition in the second round was the closest, as well as the candidates who were not successful, Tylová, Michálek and other candidates, focused primarily on communicating the professional aspects and topics related to representing and holding the office of Senator.

Facebook users reacted very positively to posts that were personalised, in which candidates presented themselves as ordinary citizens, as well as towards messages relaying interesting moments from the contact campaign, especially in photographs. The comments of users suggested that positive reactions came primarily from users who were already decided on supporting that particular candidate. On the other hand, negative reactions were most often directed towards posts with a professional orientation, thematising current political affairs, and controversial political topics. In particular, posts expressing criticism of the prime minister Andrej Babiš or the president Miloš Zeman raised recurrent negative (but on the other hand, often simultaneously positive) sentiment from Facebook users. Active discussions on the profiles of candidates and a high number of users who participated in the debate in the comments, however, could contribute to improving the reach of the profile on the internet and disseminate the campaign to other users. Even if the reactions were adverse, the critical group usually did not represent the primary electorate that the candidate targeted. Facebook played an essential role in the effort of the candidates to introduce themselves to the voters and to familiarise them with their personality. It also allowed candidates to explain why they chose to run in a particular district, what connects them to that neighbourhood and to establish a closer, more personal relationship with users, whom the candidates were supposed to represent in the Senate. The willingness of candidates to participate in the discussion and to reply to users' questions was appreciated.

Overall, it can be observed that conducting an active, personalised and reactive campaign on Facebook, mainly if it was led by candidates who were previously known to the public (from previous elections or a different political function) and led the campaign in a more permanent manner, had its unquestionable importance in the elections to the Senate that were conducted in the Autumn of 2018 in Prague. Nevertheless, it is also apparent in correspondence to previous scholarly research, that in the context of the Czech Republic new media do not present a panacea that would change the course of the elections for candidates who lack funds and who don't have sufficient support. For candidates who had more financial resources, a higher number of followers, or who raised positive sentiment, the victory in the election was far from guaranteed. Leading a continuous campaign that allowed for establishing a personal connection between the candidate and the user was highly beneficial for successful candidates. It provided feedback for continuous adjustment of the electoral strategy and made it possible for the candidates to spread the word about their candidacy beyond their supporter's bubble towards more passive users of the internet and to the citizens who did not pay attention to new media. Thus it can be concluded that online personalised campaigns are an important tool in the campaign strategy for Czech political candidates and should therefore attract continuous attention of the scholarly public, who should address the use of Web 2.0 not only from the stance of political parties and major players, but also in regard to local elections and elections accentuating individual candidates, as the personalisation of politics taking place online is a predominant trend that in past decades reached the countries of Central and Eastern Europe as well.

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The fight against terrorism is not optional: cases of V4 states and their participation in the fight against IS[1]

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Politics in Central Europe (ISSN: 1801-3422)
Vol. 15, No. 2
DOI: 10.2478/pce-2019-0019

Abstract: *This article describes attitudes of V4 states (Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland) and their activity in the fight against terrorism, and specifically in the fight against the so-called Islamic State that has appeared in 2014. In addition to applying role theory, the main aim of article is to define the roles that V4 states perform. The second aim is to give an explanation of their (non-)participation of active involvement in general in the fight against terrorism within the EU. The results showed that roles differ and only Poland is active in the fight against IS, however rest of V4 took part in passive support that relies on their size, budget and also political will. These results were observed in main statements made by policymakers of each particular state that have been done through content analysis.*

Keywords: ***EU, Islamic State, NATO, role theory, terrorism, V4.***

Introduction

States fight against terrorism to protect their basic features such as internal and external security. It includes also security of people, territory, boundaries and institutions. New trends of terrorism show, that it is necessary to fight against

1 This publication is the result of Metropolitan University Prague research project no. 68–02 'Territorial studies, Economy and International relations', which was conducted in 2019 under a grant from the Institutional Fund for the Long-term Strategic Development of Research Organisations.

terrorism due to its international (global) character. It should be states first choice to participate in the fight against terrorism.

In 2014 US president Barack Obama established an international coalition to fight terrorism as an answer to the rise of the so-called Islamic State (later only IS). IS was not only threatening states such as Syria and Iraq, but was also bringing foreign fighters together through its media influence. This has now become a threat to all who have engaged in the war on terror since 2001.[2] After destabilization in the Arab world after the so-called Arab spring, states in the region of North Africa failed and collapsed. This situation created new conditions for the spread of terrorism, especially concerning groups with a connection to Al-Qaida. However, terrorist organizations have mutated and split from Al-Qaida, especially the so-called Islamic State (or Daesh in the US).[3] The USA in 2014 called upon a Coalition to fight IS and all V4 states were included (together with other EU states, but the EU itself did not take any action).[4] In this article, I would like to point out the particular roles of these countries in terms of the fight against IS since 2014 and explain their different attitudes and behavior in the fight against terrorism. V4 is a specific group and it worth observing how they behave to protect EU security when it comes to the question of terrorism.

Islamic fundamentalism has changed the strategies of attacks and its goals. it creates a stabilized regional cooperative structure (Cabada – Waisová 2018). The activity is sometimes common, however concerning terrorism; V4 does not play as a united actor. We could agree that V4 is at the crossroad between EU and NATO when we speak about fight against terrorism (Ušiak 2018). One of the reasons why the starts behave like that is different position in the debate about migration flows and how it it connected to fight against terrorism (more detailed in Bauerová 2018).

Why the V4 states concern about terrorism? The terrorist goal is no more the autonomy of a region as it was in Spain; the main aim of IS is to fight against each religion and to restore a new caliphate in current states that are not even Islamic by majority. The main idea of IS[5] was to create a new community from

2 The challenge has changed, from the fight against Al-Qaida to fight against any terrorists, even home-grown terrorist that has become a phenomenon, especially in EU.

3 Destabilization of states influenced unsatisfied people with Arab revolutions and they have become radicalized and have joined IS. Even Al-Qaida has ended binding to IS due to its unacceptable behavior towards Muslims and Muslim holy places. IS is a specific terrorist organization with new ways of behavior, they use media to spread radical ideology, recruit new fighters, spread fear and last but not least IS is tight to a territory, that was a new feature.

4 Terrorism is a new threat that the EU started to solve in a joint way after 9/11 2001 terrorist attack. Since that year radical Islamic terrorism became a new threat that is not possible to defeat it alone. It is hard to say whether terrorism is an external threat or internal threat to European security.

5 Islamic state is a specific terrorist organization based on new aim conquering the territory. It also differs from Al-Qaida because of that. Terrorists of IS seek for save-havens. The Islamic state has two faces: To conquer the territory and set up a caliphate outside EU; to conquer territory, spread fear and harm EU. EU has to face such challenge since 2014 when IS set a war against (not only) European states.

those that were vulnerable and to fight for a certain cause. For Europe Islamic terrorism was an external threat coming inside; however, with the so-called Islamic state, the situation is different.[6] The European Union (EU) is an international organization consisting of 28 states that all prefer to fight against terrorism outside the EU. This was declared in European security strategies in 2003, 2005, 2010 or 2016. This means that all member states on the ground of the European Council have declared that they will fulfill the ideas of the fight against terrorism. Their interpretation of certain participation in this fight differs from state from state. According to their behavior, it would seem that the fight against terrorism is optional, because not all states participate in the same way. In some respects, small states in the EU are not very different from medium-sized and major European powers. The difference from France, Great Britain or Germany is obvious – small states have not yet become a terrorist target. However, this does not mean that the threat of terrorism is not their problem. Even small EU states exist in an interdependent world, and therefore politicians should respond to this threat.

The successful fight against terrorism must be waged in two front lines. The first is inside Europe. V4 activity in the internal line is not questioned here. Cooperation is carried out between information services, police, customs officers (in tracking suspicious persons), protection of important buildings etc. Important action has to be taken also outside EU. Within EU we can observe two types of activity, passive and active form. The passive form of cooperation is also highly important in the fight against IS; passivity, however, could mean a lack of awareness.

Terrorism is a topic that the European Union fails to solve. In the history of integration, we can observe the development of European securities – internal and external. In addition to this division, the EU still does not know whether security questions should be solved together or separately (i.e. on a supranational or intergovernmental level – more on this in Bauerová, Hlaváčková, Vošta 2018).[7]

In this article, I have put three questions: (1) What roles do V4 states play in the fight against terrorism? (2) What are the limitations in their participation in the fight against terrorism in the EU framework? (3) What are the reasons for (non-)participation in EU external security actions to fight terrorism? Main

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6 It has the power to fight from outside. That is the reason, why the response also must be taken externally, not only internally, as was more usual for other forms of terrorism in a historical perspective for some EU states.

7 Terrorism was classified as a threat to internal security, however, during a long period was observed that defeating terrorism is not possible only inside EU or member states. One of the new solutions since 2003 are EU missions inside unstable countries which should help stabilize the environment in the country. However, those missions are not the main action to fight IS. We can ask why? The reason is simple; there was no common action to send troops to Iraq or Syria. States did not find a common attitude so everyone solves it on his own.

purpose is to show differences in the attitudes towards ways of fight against terrorism and limitations that has occurred during years.

To follow the questions I have used as a theoretical framework role theory that is not a mainstream in foreign policy analysis, but is becoming more popular due to its effectiveness to help detect role(s) that particular state plays towards someone (or something). This role is consisting of expectations – internal and external, that are observable in speeches or interviews of policy makers. To explain the role of each state of V4, I do critical content analysis of main politicians of V4 states who deal with foreign policy and usually decides about way of fight against terrorism (in the meaning of external action) – president, prime ministers and ministers of foreign policy, defense or interior. Within this framework my theoretical basis is constructivism. The main reason is that it allows studying language and speeches that can uncover the meaning behind the scene.

Briefly to the structure of this article, firstly I will explain theoretical framework (role theory and different concepts of role with its typology according to Kalevi Holsti (1973) and Lisbeth Aggestam (1999, 2006). Secondly I will explain EU background of fight against terrorism and limitations inside EU that influence V4 participation. In the third part will be explained background of V4 states participation and in the last part I will explain the role typology that each V4 state plays in the context of fight against terrorism with focus on fight against so-called Islamic state.

Theoretical framework

There are several options concerning ways to study state behavior. In the context of theories of international relations, I interpret state behavior with constructivism, which is capable of uncovering state interests and, on the basis of main concepts – identity, norms of behavior, notions of power – show what is important for particular politicians.

Role theory is rarely used theory as an analytical framework; however it has few advantages, for example pretty exact definition of role creation and role performance. In constructivism, role theory has been used (more detailed in Harnisch 2014). Usually authors who use role theory are influenced by the concepts of language and identity. This brings us to problems of constructivism definition. The point is that, with constructivism, you do not have to use it as one theory – there is more than one version of constructivism and we can combine them as is done for example by L. Aggestam (1999), who combines rational positions of realism where foreign policy is based on the maximization of gains; however, a role itself is socially constructed. In role theory, such a combination can be useful. When we speak about states and especially about state security, rationality is an expected characteristic. Power is also an important concept in constructivism. In my research, roles are socially constructed and states learn roles according to rules inside institutions (NATO and EU), but they are rational.

For the foreign policy of states, material sources are just as important as non--material, for example, normative and ideational structures (Reus-Smit 2009: 221–223) or power which does not come only from material sources.[8] I have chosen the work of Lisbeth Aggestam to show how roles are created. A role consists of internal expectations, external expectations, and identity. In this combination of states, policymakers create roles. Role theory is a reflection of the international context. Role conception and its role performance has to be seen in a broader context of how foreign policy is created (Holsti 1970: 246). According to Elgström and Smith (2006), roles are constructed by power in the international system or by the status of the actor. Small states are predetermined to play different roles, without high goals or leadership. The roles of small states are determined by their relationship to the external environment.

We can name roles according to these specific relations and performance of actors. There is a connection between the process of role conception and external expectations. The role is then influenced by norms and values which the state accepts. According to Lisbeth Aggestam (1999, 2006), roles are constructed and accompanied by these characteristics: (1) Role expectations – can be external and internal. Internal expectations are formed by political culture, society, and politicians themselves. External expectations are formed by an institutional structure where the actor belongs. (2) National role conception – this is a normative interpretation of the actor. Conception is long-term and shows what possibilities and strategies an actor can play. It is formed by history, culture and societal characteristics. Role conception is linked to the concept of identity. Identity is a part of role conception and has influence on its form. Creation of role is part of social reality and is formed by external and internal actors. These actors create some expectations, which can form the role itself. In some cases, the role can be changed in time. This is connected with norm and ideational changes. This is called the process of socialization, which is very important for constructivists. (3) Role performance – is the actual behavior of the actor. It can be influenced by specific situations. The actor plays its role. (4) Role change – the role is a stable figure; it has to be consistent so politicians can fulfill it. The role can be changed in the context. The situation must be severe – political instability, change of norms, and speculation about the role.

K. Holsti showed 17 roles of states that can be played. In these 17 types, there are some types which are not suitable for this time period (he created it during the Cold War) and some of the types are not suitable for small states. The table

8 In this context we can speak about discursive power. We cannot touch it, but it can change rules and decisions. Discursive power is a power of knowledge, ideas, culture, and language (Hopf 1998: 177). This kind of power can reproduce intersubjective meanings which constitute social structure and actor.

below lists all of them. Here I will work only with the ones that seem useful in current times and topic. The table includes types of roles according to responsibility, i.e. whether such a state prefers to be responsible or not. Perception and performance of responsibility is a key feature for actors who are or are not reliable and credential. Other specificities of roles are the types of action that states preform connected to other actors who are in symmetric or asymmetric relation. When we work with a concrete topic such as the fight against terrorism, the particular relation of one state towards another is always relevant. This is because the fight against terrorism is not (should not be) an individual action. The fight against terrorism always has causes and consequences.

Table 1: Types of roles according to responsibility

Role with responsibility	Role without responsibility
regional leader	independent state
regional protector	regional subsystem cooperator
ideational protector	developer
mediator-integrator	bridge
leader	role as an example
promoter of security	independent actor
	role of internal development
	isolated state
	protected state
	ally

Source: author according to Holsti (1973).

This role typology was created in the Cold War, where partnership mattered. In this period of time, partnership also matters in terms of the fight against terrorism. When the role is called for example „developer“, we are dealing with a state that helps to stabilize fragile countries. Such a state needs to have prerequisites in the material base, such as finance or military power. The role of the independent player is important for the collective actor because this kind of actor will play on his own interests. He feels unbounded by rules and norms and cooperates with whoever he wants. Such types of roles exist in any context. A regional subsystem cooperator is an actor who supports ties and participates in mediation in conflicts. Such a state is open to commitments in the region. The ally prefers close cooperation and creates special relationships and strategic partnerships. A security promoter has responsibility and commitments towards the region and international security. In this typology, we can see the influence of realism, but also constructivism due to some roles that put pressure on norms, rules, and perhaps also collective identity.

In this article, research was carried out with qualitative methodology via critical content analysis of discourse produced by the main politicians who deal with state security, especially the fight against terrorism, and more specifically fight against IS since 2014 in V4 states. I have used the role types introduced above; the aim here is to detect a constructed role where role conception consists of attitude frames, decisions, activities, and commitments to the community constructed by politicians.

In the four selected cases (Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland) I have focused on discourse created by politicians, mainly decision makers. I have analyzed their speeches and interviews and according to the words used, I have assigned them types of roles. The documents used were taken from official government websites from foreign ministries. At first glance, it was not visible what roles they play; with deeper research, however, it became clear what the roles of the V4 are in the fight against terrorism, especially IS.

The fight against terrorism in the EU – current trends and limitations with respect to the V4

The fight against terrorism in the EU holds a prominent position among security topics. Until 2001, not so many countries in the EU had experience in the active fight against terrorism. Only Great Britain, Germany, Italy and Spain were those who had operational bodies to fight against such a threat. Cooperation on an EU level to fight terrorism was not a priority, due to the significance of sovereignty, in which every state secures itself. Terrorism was a threat to internal security (Druláková 2011: 63). In the Maastricht Treaty, terrorism was dealt with in the third pillar on an intergovernmental level. However, when we look back, it could have been dealt with at any level of EU security, i.e. in each pillar (Zimmermann 2006) due to the connection of particular topics of EU security.

After 9/11, all EU states decided to take part in the reaction; however, the common action of EU was not activated. This threat showed no limits for terrorist attacks and the EU insisted on the idea that terrorism is still a matter of internal security; developed bodies (Europol, Eurojust) should fight against terrorism only on an intergovernmental level, e.g. only cooperation between states has emerged (Bendiek 2011: 5). After these attacks, EU states proposed many types of action, however the only common EU action was a joint plan, which was hugely criticized as a wide-ranged plan with no proper deadlines or specific „to do's" for collective bodies (Bossong 2008: 33). Some states have decided to participate in the actions of other international organizations such as NATO or actions together with the USA. None of them wanted to remain inactive, because 9/11 showed that the EU is not excluded; terrorist cells were established in Europe as well and such kinds of terrorism do not respect borders (Keukeleire – Delreux 2014: 152). After the first massive action, states took part in international missions such as ISAF and created Provincial Reconstruction Teams to stabilize countries that inadvertently hosted terrorist organizations. Countries of the V4 also took part. However, it was not a common EU activity – the EU did not take part.

In 2014, more destabilized states have emerged. The EU had its chance to take action together in the case of Libya for example; however, after long discussions, the EU decided not to become involved in conflicts directly on EU borders, which was a huge mistake according to Engberg (2014). This passive attitude is typical for EU states when the threat does not concern them directly – this applies not only to V4 states, but all EU states.

Scholars who focus on the evaluation of EU action, especially on EU missions, Katarina Engberg (2013, 2014), Nicoletta Pirozzi and Sammi Sandawi (2009), Dov Lynch, Antonio Missiroli and Ane Peen Rodt (2011, 2017), agreed that lack of activity can come from: (1) EU strategic culture; (2) Post-heroic society; (3) Historical relations with EU states; (4) Fight for power inside the EU; (5) Internal relations and disputes within the EU 28; (5) Lack of one vision on missions and the EU role in world/region; (6) Non-existence of an EU army. All of those presuppositions together create the context of the EU's lack of active action despite all the road maps and action plans (see more on this in Bauerová – Hlaváčková – Vošta 2018).

Typically small states are more passive than EU powers, so we need to explore the reasons for this. The V4 is a group of states that are small (geographically and according to their power), except Poland, which is not small geographically but in terms of power can be considered a small state. We can give several explanations for why small states of the EU do not participate so often in missions or in other external actions at all, not only in the fight against terrorism abroad: (1) Small states are more vulnerable to populism. Small states, typically the V4, are young democracies and are easily vulnerable to „euro bashing" used by populist parties inside states. (2) We can also observe strong Euroscepticism in V4 governments. This can obstruct various actions. (3) Politicians are concerned about double standards within the EU so this creates a feeling of inferiority. This goes along with the underrepresentation in the EU's external institutions such as EEAS EU headquarters. (5) A lack of resources or motivation to participate are arguments used by politicians. Later, I will point out discourses and arguments made by particular politicians to support these reasons for passivity and some reasons that push politicians to be more active in the field of securing Europe (more in Hlaváčková 2018).

It should be mentioned that there are also motives and reasons that push states to participate. Those reasons can be seen in general, but each of them explains reasons for small states of the EU, especially the V4. For example, Russia's assertive revisionism in Eastern Europe brings V4 states to action. Another reason, which today seems to be the strongest, is that terrorism is a threat that can be decreased by missions or other external activity. This is linked to other reasons that push states into activity (and politicians are able to legitimize external action before society) – migration and migration flows. In this respect, it is also possible to help failed and destabilized countries, because they influence the security of V4 states (mainly financial resources).

Having now explained the reasons of (non-)participation in some kind of action, I would now like to focus in more detail on the action of V4 states. For a detailed explanation of participation, I have chosen the reaction to IS in the coalition against them.

Case studies of V4 states in the fight against IS

The Czech Republic

In 2015 the Czech Republic (CR) appeared on the list of states targeted by IS. This was a result of the action of CR to join the coalition that decided to fight against IS warriors within Europe and beyond. CR was one of first states to react to a call for help from the Iraqi Army by sending weapons and munitions to the country. After some time, the Czech government also sent battle planes. CR's participation in active support also included the training of Iraqi army pilots and police forces. The main impetus for such an activity was to stabilize Iraq and, by doing so, defeat the so-called Islamic State.

The image of a small state is projected into some arguments in which Czech politicians spoke about limited resources (i.e. finance and personnel). The discourse of politicians tends to argue that „we are a small country, but we do our best"; „We are active; we endeavor and try to help."[9] All arguments were mentioned without responsibility, and only added that: „we strengthen the security of Europe through our country's participation in the region of the Middle East." Politicians say that the threat cannot be ignored. Former Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka said that it is reasonable to be a part of the coalition in the fight against IS. Reversely, CR must also be on the list of the „Coalition of

9 Premiér Bohuslav Sobotka. Available at: http://www.bohuslavsobotka.cz/proc-musi-evropa-pomahat--v-boji-proti-islamskemu-statu (10 January 2019).

Devils", because it is a part of the active fight against terror together with Russia or China. President Miloš Zeman argued that we are in a „good club". Minister of Interior Milan Chovanec says that we are waging a war on terrorism, and the video where CR was included on the list is the most visible notion of terrorism in CR so far. Politicians have criticized the EU, claiming that it should coordinate action and that all states of the international community should participate in the stabilization of the Middle East. These words can be interpreted as the following: Czech politicians do not feel as if they can participate or organize something, only the EU and NATO should do this (CR, however, is a part of decision-making bodies). These actions together are the only solution to the migration crisis.

Czech support to fight IS has taken on new faces: for example medical team for an American army hospital in Iraq or the training of L-159 pilots.[10] CR has sent munitions to the Iraqi army and Kurdish militias. One example of less honest activity that CR has taken part in was a trade with the Iraqi army. CR sold 15 L-159 Alca planes including services and training. The mandate of the training mission finished at the end of 2018. Such activity was hugely criticized by the Czech opposition and other countries. Firstly, it was only a deal to get rid of old machines; today it is called aid in the fight against radicals. There is also another aid to the Middle East, for example, in the form of material support. Material aid was sent to Jordan – 3.8 million bullets for assault rifles and 3 million bullets for machine guns. The total value was 14 million CZK.[11] The Iraqi army also received 3,000 new machine guns and 3,600 old machines guns together with 7. 2 million bullets for 21 million CZK. Part of this load was delivered by the Americans to the Kurds. Before this, the Czech Republic sent 8 million bullets for machine guns and 5,000 rockets for RPG7. This was old equipment donated by the Czech army. In 2015 another gift was made by the Czech side – 10 million bullets for machine guns and 5,000 hand grenades to Kurdistan and Iraq.[12]

Czech discourse on how to fight against IS has been divided since the beginning of the debate. President Zeman said that there is a need to join actively in the fight against Islamist centers.[13] Former Prime Minister Sobotka showed the opinion of government, which was only to take passive action – i.e. support, but not be involved in the war. Despite its activity, the Czech government said it would not participate in airstrikes against IS. In Czech discourse, no other reason the country should help was found, only the need to cooperate in the

10 Since August 2016 – 31 men, 10 instructors from Czech army airport Čáslav

11 Transport of bullets was on Jordan kingdom.

12 Česká televize. Česko pomáhá v boji proti IS. Available at: http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ct24/domaci/1928384-cesko-pomaha-v-boji-proti-islamskemu-statu-po-vojenskych-expertech-vysle-i-lekare (20 January 2019).

13 More detailed to attitudes of president Zeman see in Naxera – Krčál (2018).

fight against terrorism. Nothing personal or connected to culture or religion arose. No responsibility on CR's part was mentioned. The country always claims it will participate, however without any responsibility. This means it does so voluntarily, which is visible in the case of other states as well. This attitude hugely defines the role that CR plays in the context of the fight against terrorism, which is focused on IS. We can say that such an attitude seems aimed only at „showing the flag", which is done very often by small states. The only pledges that were made were to contribute „various kinds of weaponry to the Iraqi army including L-159 fighter jets" that will help train Kurds fighting IS in Iraq. CR has sent more than $1.5 million in humanitarian aid for victims of the Syrian conflict and financially supported the International Organization for Migration's and UNICEF's work with refugees in northern Iraq.

External expectations of CR were constructed by other states and representatives of international organizations and by the norms and rules within these organizations. The Czech Republic wishes to fulfill expectations of a „good" NATO member. Under NATO's rules, it felt obliged to fulfill NATO's commitments. Internal expectations refer to what is expected from politicians, government, presidents and prime ministers and other ministers internally, i.e. inside the state.

Internal expectations prevail in terms of what the country should do and why. On the contrary, such expectations also capture how others will react to particular activity. In the Czech Republic (and Slovakia) politicians said that it is „reasonable to be part of such a coalition", politicians expected the fulfilling of its international obligations. Czech politicians did not speak about the fight against terrorism as a norm or rule. The fight against terrorism can bring prestige; this was visible in Czech discourse. It was also mentioned by politicians that aid is a good business because the Czech Army sold airplanes to the Iraqi army because those airplanes are at the end of their „expiration date". The Czech government counts this „aid" in the total expenditure of donated aid. It is also a good way to explain to their citizens the reason for their participation, using arguments like „it is expected of us" or „we need to fulfill our commitments to the international community."[14]

Hungary

According to Security Advisor to the Prime Minister Bakondi, IS represents an extremely serious security risk. All EU states should monitor movement along all three migration routes, i.e. Balkan, Italian and Spanish routes, which has increased recently in respect especially to fighters with EU citizenship. Hungary is

14 Especially in the Czech case is obvious that some topics are used to „stay in the sunshine" of politicians. For more details on this topic see Naxera (2018).

also participating in the war on terrorism, especially the war against IS. According to the government, it is „the greatest global danger to the civilized world." Hungary has been a member of the coalition against terrorism from the very beginning and is one of the 27 countries that are sending troops into battle against IS.

This V4 country participated in the active fight against IS and the promise of government was to increase its military participation. There are Hungarian troops in Iraq and the number was increased to 200 since the end of 2017 (to 2019).[15] Troops were deployed since 2015 with a training mandate in Erbil.[16] Péter Szijjártó, minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, made the pledge during an international conference against terrorism held in Washington that Hungary would actively participate, a pledge they subsequently fulfilled.

Discourse in Hungary is more open to active action with US leadership. The Hungarian government preferred the strategy of US president Donald Trump with the words that: „someone has to lead the fight against terrorism." This position was compared to the previous US administration under Barack Obama, who criticized Hungary for violations of democracy. Since democracy is no longer the focus of US foreign policy, the relations between US-Hungary can improve and both sides can cooperate on the fight against IS. The reason for Hungarian participation is „because the terrorist organization is one of the causes of migration pressure on Europe, and because the Islamic state is striving to destroy Christian communities in other parts of the world." The reaction to fight against IS was called unavoidable, and Zsolt Németh (chair of Parliament foreign affairs committee) said also that this is combined with ethical considerations which underpin Hungary's deployment of troops.

The Minister said that 9/11 clearly showed that the threat of terrorism is a global phenomenon, highlighting that the primary target of all political leaders must be to guarantee the security of their people and countries.[17] Politicians referred to historical experience and claimed that „Hungary may never fall again", i.e. that Hungary will never again fall victim to Islamic „conquest", as stated by Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjén[18].[19] To respond, Minister of Hu-

15 About Hungary. Hungary to send more troops. Available at: http://abouthungary.hu/news-in-brief/hungary-to-send-more-troops-fight-in-war-against-terror/Hungary to send more troops to fight in the war against terror (30 November 2018).

16 About Hungary. Hungary to send more troops. Available at: http://abouthungary.hu/news-in-brief/hungary-to-send-more-troops-fight-in-war-against-terror/Hungary to send more troops to fight in the war against terror (30 November 2018)./

17 Ministry of foreign affairs and trade. The threat of terrorism is a global phenomenon. Available at: http://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/the-threat-of-terrorism-is-a-global-phenomenon (29 November 2018).

18 The President of the Christian Democratic Party said at a press conference held before a public forum on the national consultation. Prime minister. Hungary can never fall again. Available at: http://www.kormany.hu/en/prime-minister-s-office/news/hungary-can-never-fall-again (20 November 2018).

19 Prime minister. Hungary can never fall again. Available at: http://www.kormany.hu/en/prime-minister-s-office/news/hungary-can-never-fall-again (20 November 2018).

man Capacities Zoltán Balog told that the task is not only to help where there is trouble but to also draw the attention of the international public to the topic and to initiate international action.[20]

The Hungarian government linked the need to act against the genocide against Christian minorities. It said it had a Christian commitment to Christian values. The government said that sending troops is nothing special, that „combating ISIS is a fundamental human and ethical responsibility, and it is also our obligation as an ally." The need for solidarity towards those Christian and other religious minorities around the world that are being persecuted[21] is a natural obligation of Hungary as a state that has a Christian identity as well as Christian ties in its history. Another reason why Hungary developed such activity is that the government has seen the need to stop migration flows from this region. Specific activity was sent to Kurdistan – Training Coordination Centre in Erbil in Northern Iraq – to provide support. For Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Péter Szijjártó, the role of US and their strategy to fight IS is the most important; in the long term it will be impossible to handle the migration crisis without the total eradication of IS. Not only active participation can stop terrorism, but also activities in stopping the financing of terrorism, especially IS and the reduction of terrorist propaganda.[22]

The discourse was divided. In the parliament, some parties, including Jobbik were against the active participation in the fight against IS. However, the government has decided to be active in the future as well. They had already said in 2017 that the US can „rely on Hungary" in the fight against IS and strengthening NATO's European army. Therefore, a clear preference for NATO was expressed but no comments were made about responsibility.[23]

In comparison to the Czech Republic, Hungary is more active and more open to the active involvement of its army. There has also been criticism of NATO from the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade that „NATO could do more than it did so far."[24]

20 Prime minister. Taking care of persecuted christians. Available at: http://www.kormany.hu/en/prime--minister-s-office/news/taking-care-of-persecuted-christians-is-a-natural-obligation-of-hungary (15 November 2018).

21 Ministry of Human resources. Budapest declaration. Available at: http://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry--of-human-resources/news/budapest-declaration (10 December 2018).

22 Ministry of foreign affairs. Peter Szijjarto pledges increased and extended hungarian military participation in the fight against terrorism. Available at: http://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and--trade/news/peter-szijjarto-pledges-increased-and-extended-hungarian-military-participation-in-the--fight-against-terrorism (30 December 2018).

23 Daily News Hungary. Hungary's foreign minister US can continue rely Hungary fight terrorism. Available at: https://dailynewshungary.com/hungarys-foreign-minister-us-can-continue-rely-hungary-fight--terrorism/ (20 December 2018).

24 AP News. Available at: https://www.apnews.com/0b9b211f2c784ab1a5f5bda0f38b0acb (30 December 2018).

External expectations created in Hungary showed that politicians often mentioned NATO, however they also often mentioned their motivation in „following US strategy“. This has connotations with US President Trump, who has not criticized Hungary for its internal politics (contrary to the previous US President Obama). It could be expected that all V4 states feel pressure to be part of the antiterrorist coalition. What is interesting is that no politician spoke about the EU as an actor to combat IS. Internal expectations in Hungary were that politicians expect the fulfilling of its international obligations.

Another impetus for participation was visible in following: in Hungary, it was mentioned that terrorism threatens Christian values and that they need to be secured. Hungary has experienced migration flows and took steps to stop it, and the fight against terrorism is one possible solution to this. Hungary has also joined on the ground, but not in the battlefield.

Slovakia

Slovakia was more reserved in the situation of active involvement in the fight against IS.[25] In 2014 they have considered two types of activities, military and technical aid. Firstly they have excluded the possibility to send soldiers. Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajčák has said: „We are aware of our responsibility since it is a threat that pertains also to us, so we will not close our eyes before it.“ Slovakia became a member of the coalition to fight terrorism as well, but according to the government it will not send soldiers to provide military training and contribute $ 25,000 to the International Organization for Migration for its work in northern Iraq. Minister Lajčák said that there is a will to fight the terrorist organization; however, it is highly powerful and therefore defeating it will require cooperation and common action.[26] It was obvious in the observed discourse that Slovakia had reasons to participate, however only with a small contribution. It seemed that the threat was not perceived to be their own, but as help to someone else.[27] This is a different attitude than in Hungary and Poland.

Reasons for such an attitude were mentioned by Minister of Foreign Policy and European Affairs Lajčák, who said that military action in countries fighting against IS must be done together with the political process. He justified the reason for non-participation with the argument that in Syria there are

25 Spectator.sk. Slovakia considers aid to fight against ISIS. Available at: https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20052236/slovakia-considers-aid-to-fight-against-isis.html (30 December 2018).

26 Ministerstvo zahraničných vecí a eurósprych záležitostí. M. Lajčák teroristov z dais mozeme porazit len společnými silami. Available at: https://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/detail/-/asset_publisher/Iw1ppvnScIPx/content/m-lajcak-teroristov-z-dais-mozeme-porazit-len-spolocnymi-silami/10182 (30 December 2018).

27 Telegraph.co.uk. Who is in the anti Islamic State Coalition and what they are contributing. Available at: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/11124070/Who-is-in-the-anti-Islamic--State-coalition-and-what-they-are-contributing.html (20 December 2018).

multiple actors in the conflict and to solve the problems, it is necessary to lower the number of participants. This was connected with the explanation that an improvement to this situation will diminish the threat and „people can come home", thus solving problems with migration.

There was a possibility to send troops to train Iraqi military and Kurds while politicians said that they have to help.[28] However, Slovakia has chosen passive support, which means that in discourse they are strong and have mentioned the responsibility to fight terrorism; however, in reality they are passive. The Slovak government has provided only humanitarian aid. Slovakia has sent at least £ 15,000 to assist soldiers in the Kurdish region of Iraq.[29] Another activity was that Slovakia shared experiences and know-how in the training of an Iraqi demining unit. It has the aim (through programs financially and with materials) to support migrants from. The third type of participation was help through IOM, which is intended to help people from Syria and Iraq who have left their homes because of IS. This amounted to 14 million EUR.[30]

As a typical small state, Slovakia remained more passive without any obligation to fight. However, Slovak politicians felt some pressure to participate in some way, and so they have chosen humanitarian support.

External expectations created by Slovakia's politicians have mentioned that they feel a responsibility in the fight against terrorism and that the threats „pertain also to us". Internal expectations refer to same reason as in other countries. Slovak politicians said that it is „reasonable to be part of such a coalition". In Slovak (and Polish) discourse, I have the found the justification that the international community needed help to defeat the threat. In Slovakia, politicians speak of only one solution, which is humanitarian aid. These reasons justify their activity (or the lack thereof) in the fight against However, there are also other reasons that politicians speak about their limits – limits of the state, personal, financial.

Poland

Poland was the only country who joined the fight against IS in an active mode. This took place in 2016 shortly after the coalition was established. There was a reason for this – the Polish government was waiting for a reply from NATO on

28 Global Times. Slovakia not to send soldiers to fight against IS. Available at: http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/885310.shtml (30 December 2018).

29 Telegraph.co.uk. Who is in the anti Islamic State Coalition and what they are contributing. Available at: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/11124070/Who-is-in-the-anti-Islamic-State-coalition-and-what-they-are-contributing.html (20 December 2018).

30 Ministerstvo zahraničních vecí a európskych záležitostí. M. Lajčák. Na stretnutí globálnej koalície. Available at: https://www.mzv.sk/aktuality/detail/-/asset_publisher/Iw1ppvnSclPx/content/m-lajcak-na-stretnuti-globalnej-koalicie-proti-dais-vojenske-tazenie-musi-ist-ruka-v-ruke-s-politickym-procesom-veducim-k-zmiereniu-/10182 (20 September 2018).

the extension of participation in the eastern border of the EU.[31] Poland promised support to Middle Eastern action when NATO will support active participation on the EU's eastern border.

Defense minister Antoni Macierewicz said that „the scale of its involvement would depend on NATO's response to Russia's assertiveness."[32] The first impetus for participation was that partners have suffered casualties and sustained losses, so this was a reason to liberate territories taken by IS in Iraq or Syria; otherwise, NATO would have serious problems. Poland and its politicians argued that they have made a serious effort to destroy IS. Before their active participation, ex-minister of Defense Tomasz Siemoniak said that „Poland does not envisage participation of its soldiers in military operations, though it intends to politically support the coalition and organize humanitarian aid." They later changed their opinion for several reasons: the threat has increased and it has become obvious that participation is needed even from small states of the EU. In the case of the fight against terrorism, actions on the NATO platform are more important for Poland. Poland's foreign minister Witold Waszczykowski said that „The Islamic state poses a threat to the entire Western civilization and Poland must be part of the global effort to fight it," We can see here a sort of responsibility or at least the will to play an active role in the fight against IS.[33]

The Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs also criticized countries of the EU for contributing only a small amount of funds to security.[34] Poland's contribution to the campaign against the Islamic State could involve reconnaissance and training, Macierewicz said. Due to Poland's participation, reluctance on the part of Polish society to re-engage militarily has appeared, not only in Iraq but in the Middle East in general. The question then arises about the sense of Poland's joining the international coalition against IS.[35] A Polish contingent composed of up to 150 soldiers backed by four F-16s was deployed to Kuwait and tasked with reconnaissance missions. Another 60 soldiers went to Iraq to

31 Duda said that he would like to see a permanent presence of NATO forces and equipment in Poland, but that this could be „of rotating nature".

32 Poland's involvement in the region has so far been limited to actions such as sending ammunition to Jordan, which is part of the US-led coalition.

33 Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland. Deputy minister Rafal Trzaskowski. Available at: http://www.msz.gov.pl/en/news/deputy_minister_rafal_trzaskowski_receives_delegation_of_us_congressmen (29 September 2018).

34 Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland. Poland must be part of fight against ISIL. Available at: http://www.msz.gov.pl/en/news/they_wrote_about_us/minister_waszczykowski___poland_must_be_part_of_fight_against_isil___pap_dispatch_of_22_july;jsessionid=63CA0EC738FF7E11DF0D40748A0AB52D.cmsap1p (20 October 2018).

35 Fundacja Im. KazimierzaPulaskiego. New strategy in the fight against ISIS. What role for Poland. Available at: https://pulaski.pl/en/new-strategy-in-the-fight-against-isis-what-role-for-poland/ (20 October 2018).

train and advise local Special Forces,[36] while 60 members of the Special Forces have been sent to Iraq according to Poland's top security official Pawel Soloch.[37]

In 2019 had appeared another reason to participate. On of the terrorists from 2015 Paris attack (member of IS) was sentenced in Poland to jail. Poland has the experience with a terrorist on its territory. Prime minister Morawiecki has stated, that NATO is a guarantor of Polish security, not EU.

In Poland, there was little concept of responsibility. They were the only country of the V4 who participated in both military operations and humanitarian aid.[38] As external expectations Polish politicians have reiterated that Poland wants to be a good (Western) ally and a good member of NATO. There was, however, a game being played here in the background concerning negotiations between Poland and the USA on the Eastern Partnership, where Poland promised to join the coalition if the USA takes part in stronger cooperation in Eastern Europe. Internal expectation were observed in the meaning that Polish politicians expected to be respected (by NATO members) when they participate in the fight against IS. It is understandable that small states (which are not in great danger) do not participate only because they would like to defeat terrorism, but also because they know that the international community (NATO) is waiting for their participation. In Poland, politicians spoke about responsibility. Politicians in all five states mention different reasons to participate. In Poland politicians mentioned that partners (in the fight against terrorism) have suffered casualties and they feel the need to help these partners. Only Poland was most active from all V4 states.

Roles and their limitations[39] as a conclusion

In the introduction I have set main research questions: (1) What roles do V4 states play in the fight against terrorism? (2) What are the limitations in their participation in the fight against terrorism in the EU framework? (3) What are the reasons for (non-)participation in EU external security actions to fight terrorism? Main purpose is to show differences in the attitudes towards ways of fight against terrorism and limitations that has occurred during years. Let's show the results.

36 WBJ. Poland to sen dut to 210 troops to fight against ISIS. Available at: http://wbj.pl/poland-to-send--up-to-210-troops-to-fight-against-isis/ (25 May 2018).

37 Defence Talk. Poland to send F16 jets. Available at: http://www.defencetalk.com/poland-to-send-f-16-jets-soldiers-in-fight-against-isis-67663/ (25 May 2018).

38 Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland. Foreign minister attends meeting of the global coalition to counter ISIL in Washington. Available at: http://www.msz.gov.pl/en/news/foreign_minister_attends_meeting_of_the_global_coalition_to_counter_isil_in_washington_d_c_ (25 May 2018).

39 This part of the article was introduced to a conference in Gdansk in 2017 called the Arab and Muslim world conference.

V4 states and especially the small ones have chosen more passive participation, with the exception of Poland. We can see a conclusion of their participation in the table below.

Table 2: Types of aid towards states to fight IS

State	Iraq	Syria
Czech Republic	military aid	military aid
Hungary	military aid	military aid
Poland	military participation	humanitarian aid
Slovakia	humanitarian aid	humanitarian aid

Now, the main aim is to define roles that the V4 performs in the context of the fight against IS. External expectations are constructed by high-ranking politicians such as presidents, prime ministers, ministers of foreign affairs and others. All V4 states have mentioned NATO as a leading organization in European security, not EU. To sum up, All of them in the context of IS have made statements about NATO. Internal expectations prevail in terms of what the country should do and why. On the contrary, such expectations also capture how others will react to particular activity. All V4 states showed their expectation to be seen as a great partner, who can be trusted. In the discourse of decision-makers is possible to observe reasons that cannot be separated from the construction of identity of each state. I have followed the question of whether the fight against terrorism (IS) is the reason to participate and whether it is part of a state's identity. The analysis shows that it is not a part of identity and reasons vary from state from state.

Common to almost all five countries is that they are small countries with limited sources. We can hear politicians speak about „doing their best“ in the fight against IS. Responsibility is shuffled to the international community and other states. Only Poland was most active (due to a barter trade with the USA).

To detect a significant role, I had to divide the role into smaller pieces, i.e. into a process that creates the role (parts above). To find proper roles, I used Kalevi Holsti's table of roles and searched for the common activities of each state. Now it is possible to make some conclusions about the roles. The Czech Republic can be called a developer. Such a role is connected with stabilization and development of states who suffer terrorism (Iraq and Syria). The Czech Republic also surely plays the role of independent actor. This actor chooses whether it will join the action after assessing whether it is worthwhile or not.

No one can count on such an actor. Hungary and Slovakia also play roles of developer and independent actor. Poland also performs the role of ally. This role does not take responsibility for an action, but Poland plays a role with a sort of responsibility; it can be called a promoter of security. Such a role means that this actor takes responsibility in the promotion of security in the countries or region. Other actors can count on it for help.

Table 3: Role performance of V4

State	Role
Czech Republic	developer, independent actor
Hungary	developer, independent actor
Slovakia	ally (without responsibility), promoter of security (with responsibility), developer
Poland	developer, independent actor

Source: author

Participation in actions such as the fight against terrorism is driven by several factors. I have mentioned them above and I would like to stress some of them here. Small states usually consider NATO as a security provider (with the participation of NATO) and usually take some part in antiterrorist (anti IS) action. This is a phenomenon that does not affect any of the V4 states internally, so it is very hard for politicians to justify participation abroad. When the V4 participates, they are not vulnerable to duplicate such action in other organizations. The fight against terrorism (especially IS) struggles with EU internal constraints that relate to the process of any external security action. Most V4 politicians usually speak about the efficiency of such anti-terrorist actions; for them, more useful (i.e. related to each state) actions are carried out inside the state, not outside. The fight against terrorism is related to the stabilization of failed states and it is a long-term process. Such a process is not favorable for politicians, because they need immediate changes to show voters their success. In regard to the capability of deployment of small states, some of them, to show the flag, participate; however, they have problems with army unit deployment because of capacity. Each V4 member has other commitments in other missions and the capacity of a small state is not endless.

To sum up the analysis, there are few facts that I would like to stress in the discourses of these four states. (1) All V4 countries call for common action and responsibility of the international community and do not feel significantly responsible for the fight against IS, with the exception of Poland, which is a special case. Poland has decided to play a more important role, and in its discourse we can observe notions of responsibility. (2) They link NATO and the fight against terrorism inside the Coalition against Terrorism together as one action (which it is not). All states see the fight against terrorism as a commitment to the international community (NATO, not the EU in this case). (3) States participate because partners of the international community are involved too. A strong reason to be a good member of NATO is visible here. (4) Other countries (not only Hungary) held discussions that the fight against IS should stop migrations flows, that is strong argument towards their citizens. (5) Politicians also argue that military action has to go hand in hand with political solutions. To summarize, I think there is another reason that small states of the EU participate in the fight against terrorism: (6) They simply want to show their flag and gain prestige. If this were not true, they would help more than just by providing (humanitarian) aid or military support. They would actually participate (with the exception of Poland, which promised participation). However, small states and their politicians are conflicted when it comes to this topic, because military participation is not popular. Politicians could lose their support and maybe lose their jobs. But when should terrorism be defeated if not now? The fight against terrorism should not be optional.

For the EU, the non-participation of the V4 (except Poland) means that these states are not responsible in terms of European security and are not trustworthy. The question is why there is not so much activity in the fight against terrorism and when it will be more suitable to participate? Why the states leave active participation behind? The EU's small states should not make their decisions based on what is or is not a viable topic for their citizens and voters, but instead think about European security. Another question is how to overcome the feeling of redundant activity (small states think that only the big states of the EU matter and leave the responsibility to the bigger ones or other organizations when it comes to security).

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The Discussion of Possible Savings based on the Efficiency Argument in the Smallest Municipalities? The Case Study of the Vysočina Region[1]

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Politics in Central Europe (ISSN: 1801-3422)
Vol. 15, No. 2
DOI: 10.2478/pce-2019-0020

Abstract: *The unique municipality structure in the Czech Republic is one of the most interesting research topics in the Czech political space. The large number of municipalities with less than 1,000 or less than 500 inhabitants causes differences between Czech municipalities. There are differences in economic factors, differences in the development of municipalities, among other. All of these differences are discussed by experts, researchers and politicians in term of the efficiency of the smallest municipalities. The term 'efficiency' is used as the benchmark for a successful or an unsuccessful government. This research evaluates the argument of efficiency presented by Deborah Stone (2002). This argument was applied to the case of Kraj Vysočina, one of the regions with the largest number of the smallest municipalities in the Czech Republic. We analysed the selected argument of efficiency – economies of scale. Based on our quantitative analysis we have confirmed that evaluating municipalities through the prism of the economies of scale argument is not a good measurement of the efficiency of municipal government. The argument of efficiency is more complex and we cannot view it only in economics terms.*

Keywords: ***Efficiency, Economies of scale, Czech local policy, municipality, municipality's costs***

1 This article was written at Masaryk University with the support of the Specific University Research Grant provided by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic.

Introduction

Democratic political systems should support a plurality of power, not homogeneity. However, while the horizontal dimension of the separation of powers (legislative, executive, judicial) is fully accepted, the vertical dimension (the difference between the central state administration and local authorities) is not regarded as necessary. Nevertheless, in democracies this is a vital moment. Despite differences between countries (there are a number of different degrees of self-government and the extent of their powers varies), the rights of local communities to self-govern has been one of the essential characteristics of modern democracies since the 19th century. However, genuine self-government cannot be attained by simply dividing the country into a large number of units. Successful self-government requires that each autonomous political community (defined as a territorial community with a sense of its own unique identity) is able to foster dialog and political discussion within the municipality.

In this case, we face the problem of being able to accurately identify a cohesive local polity. This probably explains why there is such a large variety of low-level local government structures in Europe.

According to the Czech Statistical Office, there are 6,258 municipalities in the Czech Republic. About 23 % of these (1,440 municipalities) are home to 199 or fewer residents. The largest group consists of municipalities with populations of between 200 and 499 people; there are 2,000 municipalities in this group. Together, these two categories of the smallest municipalities make up 54.97 % of the total number of municipalities in the country (CSO 2017). The large number of small municipalities leads to the argument that their number and small size cause problems for the state budget (OECD 2016: 113). The advantages (for example, greater identification with the local government) are not discussed.

How can we explain such a large number of small municipalities? Some guidance may be found in the historical development of urban structures. Czech villages are known for their cultural separation and their relative physical closeness, due to the colonisation of historic landscapes. During the colonisation process, the residents of territorial communities formed distinct identities. As pointed out by Hornek (2016: 46), the Czech Republic is home to the highest percentage of small municipalities in Europe, while the number of municipalities (not settlements), is steadily decreasing in the European context.

These trends are pointed out in tables 1 and 2. In the first table we see the evolution of the number of municipalities from 1921 to 2017. The number of municipalities has always been very high in Czech territories. An exception occurs during the 1970s and 1980s when, due to the communist regime and European trends causing the amalgamation of municipalities (Hornek 2016: 27), the number of municipalities decreased. However, the number of municipalities increased again in the 1990s. In the last two years the number of municipalities has stabilised at 6,258. Even so, the number of municipalities in the Czech Republic compared to the European context is very high. In table 2 we see the structure of communities in selected European countries. We find a similar structure of municipalities only in France or Slovakia, not only because of the large number of municipalities, but also because of the prevailing number of municipalities with fewer than 5,000 (or 1,000) inhabitants (Hornek 2016: 31). Even so, the number of municipalities in the Czech Republic compared to the European context is very high.

Obviously, the high number of small municipalities cannot be explained only by historical reasons for fragmentation of the Czech municipal structure. The key factor was the communist regime and its pressure on the amalgamation of the municipalities. This pressure peaked in the 1980s, shortly before the end of the communist regime. The period following the democratic transformation and the new democratic regime (in 1989 and 1990) was characterised by the effort to be as different from communist regime as possible. In general, the consequences at the local level were a renewal of the self-government of municipalities and the freedom for local communities to apply for their self-government. From the view of the small amalgamative municipalities, the argument for their separation was clear: the amalgamation was an anti-democratic tool used by the communist regime and we have to avoid it. Based on this, the result was the increased number of municipalities and for any further development impossibility to merge the municipalities. In this context, the amalgamation of municipalities has a different meaning (anti-democratic behaviour) in the Czech Republic in comparison with other countries.

Table 1: Development of the number of municipalities 1921–2017

Year	1921	1950	1970	1980	1989	1993
Number of municipalities	11,417	11,459	7,509	4,778	4,120	6,196
Year	**2001**	**2010**	**2013**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**
Number of municipalities	6,258	6,245	6,253	6,253	6,258	6258

Source: Hornek 2016: 46; CSO 2015, 2016, 2017

Table 2: The structure of municipalities in selected European countries

Country	The number of municipalities (in 2007) *	% of municipalities with less than 5,000 inhabitants *	% of municipalities with less than 1,000 inhabitants **
France	36,683	95	77
Germany	12,312	77	–
Spain	8,111	85	61
Italy	8,101	71	24
Czech Republic	6,249	96	80
Hungary	3,175	91	54
Romania	3,173	35	2
Slovakia	2,891	95	68
Switzerland	2,785	89	–
Poland	2,478	25	0
Austria	2,357	91	–
Greece	1,034	53	–
Belgium	589	14	–
Latvia	527	91	32
Netherlands	443	2	0.2
Great Britain	437	0	0
Norway	431	55	4
Finland	416	52	5
Sweden	290	4	0
Bulgaria	264	11	0
Estonia	227	80	9
Slovenia	210	48	3
Denmark	98	3	0
Lithuania	60	2	0

Source: Hornek 2016: 31; Swianiewicz 2002: 25
* Source Hornek 2016: 31; List of countries was taken from this publication
** Source Swianiewicz 2002: 25; This publication does not work with some countries, so in the table this is noted with: "–".

In this respect, small villages are an interesting subject for research into municipal politics in the Czech Republic. We can include the phenomenon of small municipalities in the Czech Republic in research dedicated to the size of municipalities in general. Research dedicated to the size of settlements is a widespread issue, which is studied by authors across the scientific community. The size of the municipalities is not only of interest to political scientists but also to economists, sociologists, etc (Hornek 2016: 26). Important milestones in this research area include the publication written by P. Swianiewicz (2002) which focuses on the size of municipalities in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the theoretical principles defined by M. Keating (1995) for considering the optimal size of the municipality. The aim of these debates is mostly to provide arguments for merging municipalities, which is not our goal. What these texts have in common is a focus on finding effectiveness, efficiency or optimalisation. This is an additional aim of this text.

In this study we focus on the effectiveness of the smallest municipalities in the Czech Republic. The effectiveness argument is based on the theoretical concept of policy paradox presented by Deborah Stone (2002). The aim of this article is to introduce the real functions of the smallest municipalities in the Czech Republic and analyse the effectiveness of the selected argument.

Efficiency argument by Deborah Stone

„*Achieving an objective for the lowest cost*“ is the simple goal of efficiency (Stone 2002: 61). With this objective we make decisions in matters of everyday life. We pursue the same objective in political decision-making as well as in decisions by local authorities. Perhaps in local decision making we see the efficiency argument at work and expect the decision-making of experts to be more rational and correct more often than in everyday life.

In the case of political decision making, the challenge is to make decisions efficiently and we encounter the so-called ‘policy paradox’. Based on the policy paradox and efficiency argument presented by Deborah Stone, we see that the major problem in political decision making is that it is not the same as making economic decisions (Stone 2002: 70). Even in economic decision making it is sometimes difficult to observe the efficiency argument. Furthermore, decision making is more complicated in the political arena. Therefore, what problems and challenges face policy makers and how do we define efficiency in a political environment?

According to Stone, the efficiency argument in the political setting is based on the *‘ideal meant to guide how society chooses to spend its money or allocate its resources in order to get the most value’* (Stone 2002: 65). In other words, efficient behaviour will get maximum benefits out of given inputs. However, Stone notes that political decisions are complicated by obstacles thrown up by outputs as well as inputs. In the case of inputs, we have to ask three basic questions: *How can we count inputs (e.g. labour costs) that are simultaneously outputs to somebody* *else (e.g. jobs for the local community)? How should we decide which of the many benefits/outputs of any input to count in the equation? How should we count the virtually unlimited opportunity costs of resources used as inputs?* (Stone 2002: 67). There are also three possible problematic questions we need to address when considering outputs: *Who determines what is the correct output goal, or the objective of a program? How should we value and compare multiple objectives? How do different objectives or outputs benefit different constituencies?* (Stone 2002: 67). These issues could be summarised in two simple questions: *Who and what are important?* (Stone 2002:65). The answer to these questions can have multiple correct answers. Answers to these questions are political claims, the efficiency of which can differ based on who is looking at the problem. (Stone 2002: 65).

Generally, in the context of the theory of markets there is a consensus that efficient decisions are those based on a voluntary basis and on full awareness (the subjects are fully informed). However, the market environment faces several challenges due to these two principles. The first challenge is a market failure in the context of the principle of voluntary exchange. In the context of the market there are market failures, which make the behaviour in the market inefficient. The second challenge is the principle of full awareness (complex information). The information is not always easily accessible. People are often not willing to pay or meet high costs to acquire information. We also face the problem of misunderstood information (Stone 2002: 72). These challenges can be transferred to the political environment. Voluntary behaviour in the political environment is very close to coercion (e.g. the laws of the society[2]). The society is influenced by traditions, family habits and cultural practices which enter into the everyday decisions and behaviour of both individuals and the entire society. According to Stone, the principle of voluntary behaviour within the political community is very questionable. Equally problematic is observing the principle of full awareness in the polis. Within the polis information is always incomplete (we never have all the information). Information is always interpreted (not the original) and information is always submitted within a certain context and each person can understand the information differently. At the same time, we cannot predict the long-term development of that information. These are all examples of why decisions cannot always be efficient in the polis (Stone 2002: 77). The third challenge we face in the polis is the tension between the individual and social welfare. Here we see the misunderstanding of public good (well-being), which views the public good as a summary of individuals goods. However, just as in the market environment, where the market does not operate according to microeconomic theory, the polis does not operate according to sweeping political theory. Individuals are influencing each other, and often social well-being is

2 The law always provides rules of behaviour and sanctions applicable to infringements of the law.

a dependent variable that influences individual well-being. Social and individual well-being is influenced by many different factors and variables.

It is very difficult to find solutions to political problems. Often we hear the argument that any given solution is the only one that can achieve a particular goal. In this argument, we often hear the word 'efficient'. However, as Deborah Stone points out in her book *The Paradox of Policy*, talking about finding a political tool or mechanism is very misleading. Political problems are very complex and they are not permanent. Stone argues that *'(p)olicy actions, though, are really ongoing strategies for structuring relationships and coordinating behaviour to achieve collective purposes'* (2002: 261). The correct solution would therefore be to find a strategy that can be followed and to go with it.

Often, the economic arguments and solutions to political problems based on market rules and strategies are presented as the correct political tools and as the only right solutions. These arguments are solely associated with efficiency. In *The Paradox of Policy*, Stone gives an example of this argument in matters of racial equality in the United States. Stone says that J. Kennedy's argument for racial equality stood on the argument of efficiency and economic prosperity. He also stressed the morality of these decisions, which was unique. In order to properly understand the efficiency argument, one must be able to measure its effects. As Stone says, efficiency is always supported by the arguments of inputs and outputs, statistics, etc. (2002: 399). If we analyse the efficiency argument, or criticise it, we have to take into account that actual efficiency is not the goal. Efficiency is only an 'indicator' of how to best achieve a goal. Based on this, in analysing the efficiency argument, we have to ask the question: *'Do I accept the goal that the argument assumes?'* (Stone 2002:400).

In the case of the research on small municipalities, the economic arguments mentioned by Stone are the most common arguments used to evaluate the inefficiency of small municipalities. Based on these economic arguments, some authors argue that it is necessary to merge the municipalities, etc. In this paper we will deal with these arguments. In the introduction we mentioned author M. Keating and the four principles on which he argues in favour of merging small municipalities. These principles are also used in the debate about the efficiency of municipalities. One of the principles, which is also the default for this text, is called 'economic effectivity' (economic efficiency). This principle is based on the theoretical assumption of economies of scale (the size of the municipality decreases the cost of local government activities and local services). However, according to Keating, this principle is not entirely clear because these assumptions have not yet been empirically confirmed (Hornek 2016: 36).

The focus of this text is on the economic efficiency argument (the argument in terms of economies of scale) and finding an empirical answer. The aim is not to confirm this argument generally, but to find at least a partial response to empirical data samples. The Czech environment seems to be a good area for this analysis because the country has long discussed the effectiveness and efficiency of public administration, especially the effectiveness and efficiency of local governments. The starting point for this discussion is the OECD report presented in 2016.

OECD and the inefficiency argument in the public sector – a small village in the Czech Republic

The inefficiency of the public sector due to the existence of very small municipalities and the large-scale fragmentation of local government in the Czech Republic was analysed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In a report about the development (also economic) of the Czech Republic in 2016,[3] one of the key findings in the field of public administration is inefficiency in local government. The OECD mentions the specific structure of local government in the country. The OECD analysis showed that fragmentation and a very large number of very small municipalities in the Czech Republic causes not only economic inefficiency (for example, high costs of salaries), but also inefficiency in services (health, education, etc.) (OECD 2016: 113). The OECD also criticised the incomplete structure of districts and regions (OECD 2016: 114). Problems caused by the small size of municipalities according to the OECD include: the high costs of small municipalities to participate in a voluntary association of municipalities, the loss of economies of scale (especially in the area of administration, with the resulting lack of remaining funds for other services), insufficient capacity and the highly difficult task municipalities face in recruiting educated and experienced staff for public administration, the low level of investments (in municipalities with less than 1,000 inhabitants investments are 20 % lower compared with municipalities with 1,000–5,000 inhabitants).

As a solution to these problems, the OECD suggests the amalgamation of municipalities. The OECD cites examples of European countries (Great Britain, Ireland, Portugal) where the amalgamation of municipalities has been successfully implemented. However, the OECD also notes that in some countries the amalgamation did not lead to a reduction in costs (although it did lead to an increase in the quality of services (OECD 2016: 118). As another example of how to solve the problem, the OECD presents the practice of Italy and Hungary, where small communities are required to cooperate in the administration of selected services (OECD 2016: 119).

3 The report of 2018 is mainly focused on the possibilities in health development in the country. The question of local government is only mentioned minimally. The report notes the need for further efforts to develop and promote the shared technical support to municipalities and further it is necessary to introduce rules for municipal funding, namely the rules relating to public debt (OECD 2018: 62–63). These recommendations were established in 2016.

Also, the OECD recommends that larger municipalities should take over the administration of some services, including education, health and social services. Other services can, according to the OECD, be provided using e-Government (OECD 2016: 119).

Based on this criticism, we will analyse the possibilities of savings in local government expenditure. The savings will be studied based on the argument of economies of scale. However, it is necessary to take into account the specifics of Czech local government and its practical functioning.

Specifics of Czech municipal government and Czech municipal financing

The OECD report is very general, and in many criteria overlooks the specifics of Czech municipalities. To look deeply at this problem, author Jakub Hornek in his publication *Politické dopady zadlužování malých obcí v České republice: případová studie Karlovarského kraje 2010–2014* focuses on the issue of small communities and their problems with financing. Hornek notes that small municipalities often do not establish any schools or medical or social centres (Hornek 2016: 56). Based on Hornek's argument, the OECD's facts could then seem nonsensical. This contradiction is caused primarily by the fact that the OECD and Hornek define small municipalities differently, with Hornek using a benchmark of 500 inhabitants and the OECD using 1,000. Hornek's definition corresponds better with the Czech environment. Furthermore, the Czech Statistical Office categorises small municipalities as even smaller – as municipalities with up to 199 inhabitants (CSO 2017).

The characteristics of small municipalities in the Czech Republic are not clear, according to Hornek. Determining the point at which a municipality is considered small and at which point it is considered larger is very difficult. In this article, we will work with the lowest level according to the CSO (municipalities with 0–199 inhabitants). It is necessary to mention that population size is not the only indicator here. Other indicators used in research in this area are the municipality area, services provided by the municipality, etc. However, in this research we are inclined to divide the municipalities by population.

Among the municipalities are many differences in the quantity and quality of the functions provided. Small municipalities always fulfil the political and economic[4] functions. These two functions are compulsory for the municipalities

4 According to Act no. 128/2000 Sb., municipalities have separate and delegated powers. Hornek uses categorisation from the publication Komunální politika (2009). According to this categorisation, municipalities can perform the following functions: safety (the establishment of municipal police, etc.), environmental (collection and disposal of waste, municipal purity, etc.), economic (finances and economy of the municipality, etc.), infrastructure (maintenance and management of roads, water supply, sewerage etc.), political (elections, the creation of municipal bodies, etc.), prognostic (approval of the development community, local and regulatory plan, etc.) and social (education, health, culture, etc.) (Balík 2009: 30–31).

according to law. In the economic function, besides drawing up the budget, final accounts, etc., there is the possibility that municipalities will also establish trading companies, municipal companies and other entities. However, small municipalities face the problem of a lack of finance (and, among other things, perhaps a lack of motivation) to exploit these options (Hornek 2016: 56). The environmental, social and safety functions are often transferred to larger communities in a small municipality's vicinity. However, delegated social functions cause, for example, low cultural activities in small municipalities. Administering the infrastructure function might also be problematic for small municipalities. Infrastructure in these communities (e.g. – whether conditions of pavements or roads or access to larger municipalities) is mostly bad. This stems from insufficient financial investments, co-financing agreements and subsidies and from a lack of personnel (Hornek 2016: 57). The same problems are also seen in municipal development. The structure of small municipalities' populations is also problematic for development. Municipalities face very low natural population growth, high unemployment, lower average levels of education, among other problems (Hornek 2016: 58).

All these problems are related to the setting of municipal financing in the Czech Republic. Economic management of the municipalities is defined by the Constitution of the Czech Republic and the European Charter of Local Self-Government and various legal modifications. The basic legislation is *Act no. 128/2000 Sb. o obcích* and *Act no. 250/2000 Sb. o rozpočtových pravidlech územních rozpočtů*. Using an explanation of these two laws, we will introduce the basic parameters of the economic management of local governments in the country. Act no. 128/2000 Sb. presents the basic definition of the municipalities, their functions and separate and delegated powers. Among one of the most significant separate powers is the economic management of the municipality (Act no. 128/2000 Sb. § 38). Economic management is based on the budget, budgetary rules (Act no. 250/2000 Sb.) and other tax mechanisms, subsidies and transfers (Kruntorádová 2015: 59).Discussing the general economic management of Czech municipalities, Kruntorádová highlights the problem of financing delegated powers, as Act no. 128/2000 Sb. only mentions that the municipality will receive a contribution for this activity and the law does not address this issue further (2015: 61).

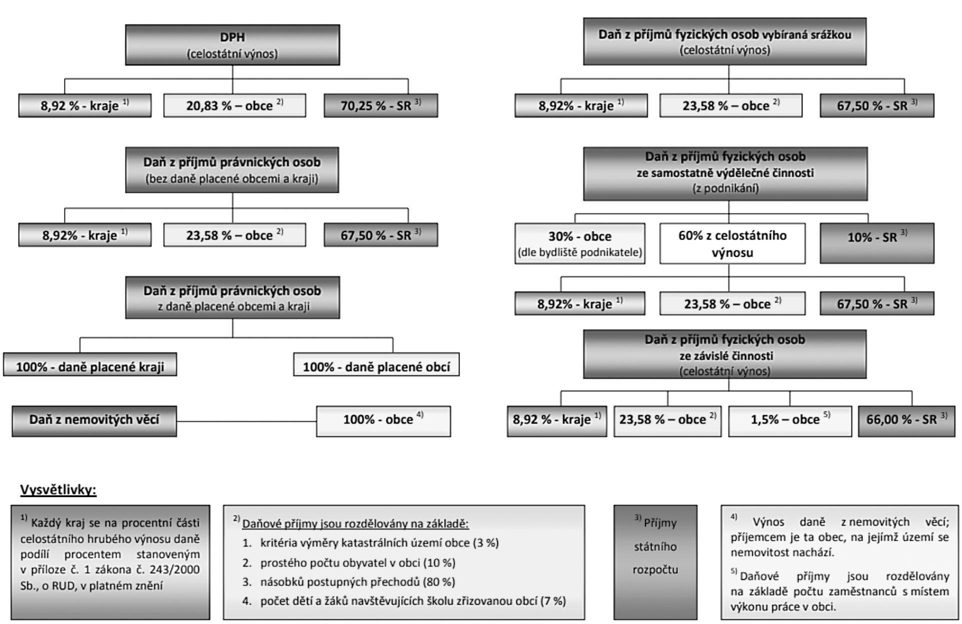
Budgets and management systems in the Czech reality correspond to the model of fiscal federalism. This model combines centralised management (state budget and state extra-budgetary funds) and decentralised management (self-budgets of municipalities and regions). Financial flows between these entities influence the budgets of each. According to Hornek, municipalities in the Czech Republic are *'generally self-sufficient, generating 70 % of their own incomes'* (Hornek 2016: 70).

The basic function of the economic management of local governments is to manage according to the approved municipal budget. Municipal budgets must be based on the financial outlook of the municipalities. The goal of management is to maintain and develop municipal property. Municipal councils are responsible for the budgets. Act no. 250/2000 Sb. also establishes additional responsibilities of the municipalities (e.g. accounting) as well as control mechanisms and institutions (Act no. 250/2000 Sb.).

Municipal budgets consist of municipal incomes and expenses. Incomes are divided into tax (e.g. property taxes, income taxes, taxes from profits and capital gains, local taxes, fees, etc.), non-tax (e.g. incomes from the municipalities' own activities and payments of surpluses from organisations with direct relationships with the municipalities), capital (e.g. receipts from sales of tangible fixed assets) and subsidies (non-capital or capital transfers received). The expenses include common municipal expenses (e.g. expenditures on salaries, non-investment transfers to public entities, etc.) and capital expenses (investment purchases, investment transfers, etc.). At the end of each calendar year, the municipalities expose their revenue and expenditure accounts, which are a summary of the implementation of the budget (Hornek 2016: 72–79).

The issue of income depends on the size of the municipality's population. The following diagram of the distribution of tax within a budget reveals the tax revenues of municipalities.

Chart 1: Diagram of distribution of budget tax determination



Source: Diagram of distribution of budget tax determination; Ministry of Finance in 2018

The diagram shows that 10 % of the income is determined by the number of inhabitants in the municipality. The population in the municipality is not reflected in multiples of gradual transitions (point three in the diagram). And this part of the tax determination comprises 80 % of tax income. Here the smallest municipalities are at a disadvantage. The smallest municipalities (up to 50 people) do not benefit from a discounted rate.[5]

Additionally, this is the reason for the financial problems of the smallest municipalities.

Methodology, research questions, and data collection

In this text we assume the argument of economies of scale, which in this case mainly analyses the amount of municipal expenditure. For this reason, we focus on the expenditure side of the municipalities. The main premise is that the expenditures are composed of *expenditures that could not be saved* and those *that could be saved*, all in terms of economies of scale. As expenses that could not be saved, we consider the expenses that will remain in the municipal budget even after transferring its management to another municipality (either by joining in a voluntary association of municipalities or merging with other municipalities). Examples of such expenditures are expenditures on repairs, administration of roads, water supply, sewerage, lighting, etc. The second group of expenses comprises those that could be saved by transferring the management of the municipality to another entity. This group of expenses mainly includes costs associated with the activities of local government. Here we see expenses arising from the operation of the municipal authority, which could be spared if the municipal management is transferred to another municipality.

The argument of economies of scale says that with the growing size of the municipality, the amount of expenditures decreases. In this analysis we work with the assumption that the expenses are reduced, especially those that can be saved.[6] In the whole analysis we will work with the breakdown of expenditures presented in the previous paragraph.

This article aims to introduce the real functioning of the smallest municipalities in the Czech Republic and, based on their example, analyse a selected argument of efficiency, i.e. the economies of scale. For our analysis and to fulfil the objective we determined the research question to be:

How much of the municipal budget is made up of expenditures that could be saved (in case of the smallest municipalities)?

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5 Also for this reason we choose to categorise municipalities by population.

6 E.g. We do not expect that after transferring the management of the municipality to another municipality, or in the case of municipal mergering, spending will be lower on roads, pathways, water supply and sewerage.

Based on the answer to this question we can determine what portion of spending by the smallest municipalities could be saved if their management was moved to another municipality. This answer will be discussed in the context of the efficiency argument. Based on the analysis, it will be possible to determine if the efficiency argument is possible to use in this research area. The paper will also include a discussion about whether we can talk about effectiveness in this context.

To answer the research question, we monitored expenditures of municipalities using their final revenue and expenditure accounts, within which municipalities specify their incomes and expenses (according to Act no. 250/2000 Sb. municipalities must follow the regulation of budget structure when drawing up their final accounts). This regulation defines in detail the rules for the presentation of income and expenditures in budgets (Decree no. 323/2002 Sb.). Based on this, in the municipal final accounts we found which expenditures and revenues were used for what purposes and determined which expenditures municipalities could save and which they could not. Municipalities are required to monitor the types of income and expenditures in terms of this classification: generic, sector, consolidation, source and transfer (Decree no. 323/2002 Sb.). For our purposes, the most important aspect to monitor is the sectoral classification. The sectoral classification divides revenues and expenditures into the types of activities from which income is derived and on which spending is applied. The sectoral classification does not include the income tax, subsidies and financing operations, which is not a limitation on our research. Budget structure defines the following sectors:

1. Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (e.g. the cost of municipal agricultural equipment, etc.)
2. Industrial and other sectors of the economy (e.g. maintenance of local roads, etc.)
3. Services for inhabitants (e.g. the operation of schools and health facilities, etc.)
4. Social Affairs and Employment Policy (e.g. the operation of a home for the elderly, etc.)
5. National Security and Legal Protection (e.g. municipal police and volunteer firemen posts, etc.)
6. General Public Administration and Services (e.g. spending on elections, referenda, municipal government, etc.) (Decree 323/2002 Sb.).

Based on this classification, we realise that sectors 1–5 are sectors that the smallest municipalities do not have (for example, elementary schools), or that in our breakdown belongs to expenditures that could not be saved (e.g. local roads). Sector 6 includes the expenses related to the activities of the municipal office and local government. Also, there are activities that could not be saved (e.g.

the cost of elections). However, there is the section called Regional and Local Government, which in the case of municipalities is further specified in section no. 6171 Local Government Activities. This section includes the municipalities' own administrative activities. Also included are expenses from the social fund established for municipal employees, municipal office operation, etc. (Decree 323/2002 Sb.). In our research, we analyse this section because it includes expenses which could be saved in the case of merging the municipalities or in the case of joining a voluntary association of municipalities.[7]

In our research, we monitored the final account of the municipalities, their income and expenses, to present the real functioning of the smallest Czech municipalities. The expenditures will then focus on the sectoral breakdown, especially on section 6171 Local Government Activities. Finally, we compare the expenditure side of the village and their expenditure on Local Government Activities.

The research is based on quantitative data, and statistical indicators and methods are used for evaluation of the results.

Data Collection

The quantitative research works mostly with sample data, not the entire population (Field 2009: 31). For the purposes of this research, the municipalities of the Vysočina region were selected. Municipalities were selected only from one region in order to ensure socio-economic and historical similarities. The Vysočina region was chosen because it is home to the highest number of municipalities in the Czech Republic with a population of up to 199. The research works with 214 municipalities.

Data about the municipalities was collected from the database of the Czech Statistical Office. Data about the municipal budget was collected using the MONITOR tool produced by the Ministry of Finance. Final revenue and expenditure accounts of the municipalities were downloaded from the websites of individual municipalities. The final accounts were, where available, supplemented by annexes to the final accounts – primarily the final municipal budget measurements and the Statement for Assessing Implementation of the Budget of Local Governments, Voluntary Associations of Municipalities and Regional Councils. Data affecting the municipal budget was monitored for 2016 and 2017. Primarily, data for the year 2016 was used due to the completeness of the data. The reason is that in the data collection period (summer 2018), we assumed that not all municipalities had published the final account for the year 2017.

7 Here we have to point out the existing limit of this research. We are not able to divide the expenses directly into two categories (could be saved and could not be saved). These categories were created for the purposes of this research.

The deadline for publication of the final account is not set by law. There is not a fixed deadline for the publication of the final account, so publication can be affected by a lengthy process of approval (Act no. 250/2000 Sb.). However, during data collection, despite an assumption to the contrary, we found that some municipalities do not electronically archive final accounts from previous years. Because of this the dataset was supplemented by information from 2017.[8]

The total number of municipalities of up to 199 inhabitants in the Vysočina region is 330. The dataset consists of 214 municipalities. The number is lower due to the incompleteness and unavailability of necessary data from municipal websites. These data collection obstacles did not obstruct our research. This research takes into account possible weaknesses in terms of applicability to the entire country.

Data analysis

There are 704 municipalities in the Vysočina region. After the Středočeský Region, it is the region with the highest number of the smallest municipalities. Table 3 shows the municipality structure in Vysočina region. For example, there are no municipalities in the region with more than 100,000 inhabitants. The largest group of municipalities consists of villages with less than 199 inhabitants, and the second largest group consists of villages with less than 499 inhabitants.

Table 3: Population structure in the Vysočina region

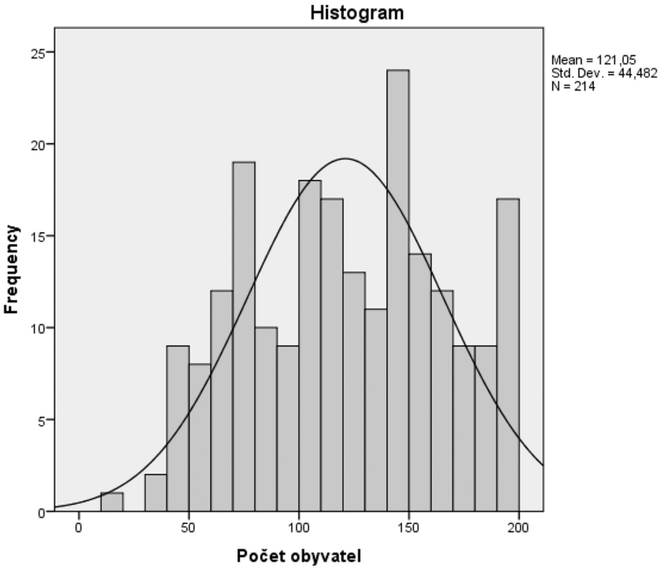
less than 199	200 – 499	500 – 999	1000 – 1,999	2,000 – 4,999	5,000 – 9,999	10,000 – 19,999	20,000 – 49,999	50,000 – 99,999	over 100,000	total
331	208	98	36	14	9	4	3	1	–	704

Source: CSO 2017

In this paper we analyse 214 municipalities. The smallest surveyed village has 15 inhabitants, the average is municipalities with 121.05 inhabitants. This value is not the best indicator of the distribution of the data (see histogram 1). A better indicator is the median and modus population (Field 2009: 38). The median value of the population in the surveyed municipalities is 120. 5.

8 In terms of information about income, expenditure and balance was also monitored in the budget for the year 2017.

Histogram 1: The population in the analysed municipalities



Source: own analysis

In the analysed municipalities we monitor the revenues and expenditures from 2016 and 2017.[9] The average income of studied municipalities was 2,766,000 CZK. The average expenditure was 2,390,680 CZK. The average balance between revenues and expenditures in the reporting periods was positive; the average is a sum of 382,720 CZK. Table no. 4 clearly presents values and also modus and median.

Table 4: Revenue and expenditure of municipalities

in thousand (CZK)	Expenses	Income	Balance
Average	2,390,680	2,766,000	382,720
Median	2,011,000	2,521,500	375,000
Modus	869,000[a]	1,191,000	303,000[a]
Minimum	348,000	539,000	-4,916,000
Maximum	1,087,100	1,788,100	1,232,700

a) Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown
Source: own analysis

9 Examined each year, depending on the publication of the final account. In this research we do not take into account the differences between years. Based on the research design we do not expect significant changes in individual years. Possible differences are not limiting for this research and do not influence the final results.

As mentioned previously, average values are not an entirely accurate indicator. For example, when looking at the values of balance, it would seem that the surveyed municipalities manage budgets with positive balances. It seems that their budgets are not in deficient. However, in the sample, 49 municipalities had a budget deficit. It is important to note that only four municipalities have a long-term budget deficit.[10] In other municipalities, a budget deficit was found only in one year.

Local Government Activities – Analyses of Expenditures

The average value of expenditures on local government activities in selected municipalities is 404,940 CZK. The median value is 303,500 CZK. If this number is multiplied by the total number of municipalities with less than 200 inhabitants in the whole Czech Republic, we get the estimated total number of issued expenditures. The total estimate is 437,040,000 CZK issued for the purposes of local government. This number is certainly not small. And if we look at the share of this expenditure in total, the expenditure on local governmental activities constitutes 20.1% of total expenditures.

Table 5: Expenditure – Local Government Activities

in thousand (CZK)	Local Government Activities
Average	404.94
Median	303.50
Modus	135[a]
Minimum	20
Maximum	2375

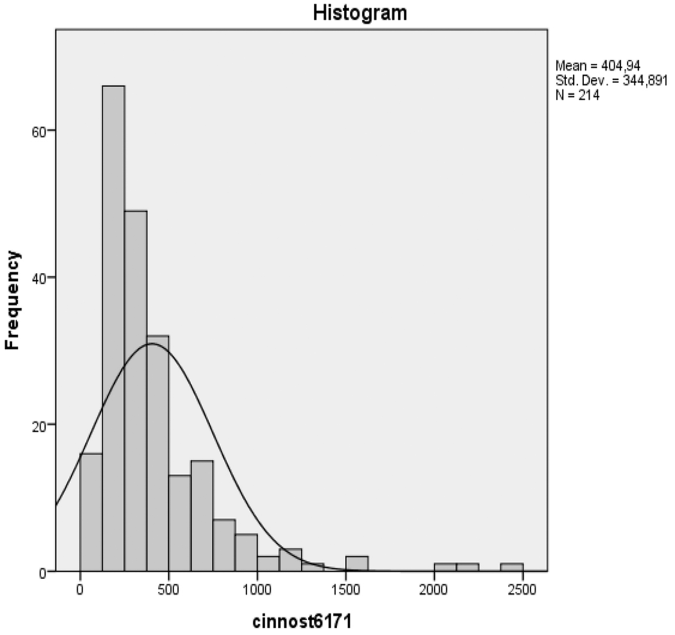
a) Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown
Source: own analysis

The average may be distorted due to the distribution of the data (see Histogram 2 and 3). The most common group represented consists of municipalities with expenditures for local government activities within the range of up to 500,000 CZK (in Histogram 3, the share of expenditures on local government activities is most often up to 20% of total expenditures). The overall average increases exemptions, and we can cite as an example the municipality Kostelní Myslová (expenses for local government activities accounted for 1,151 million CZK). In this case, the majority of spending on local government activities was used to buy equipment for biomass processing, which is a one-time (not regular)

10 Municipalities Březská, Stone, Racice Ždírec had budget deficits in the period from 2015 to 2017.

expense. In the municipality Trpišovice, which had a sample of the highest expenditures on local government activities, the highest component of expenditures was under the category of Purchase of Other Services. Unfortunately, these expenses were not itemised in this municipality.

Histogram 2: Expenditure – Local Government Activities



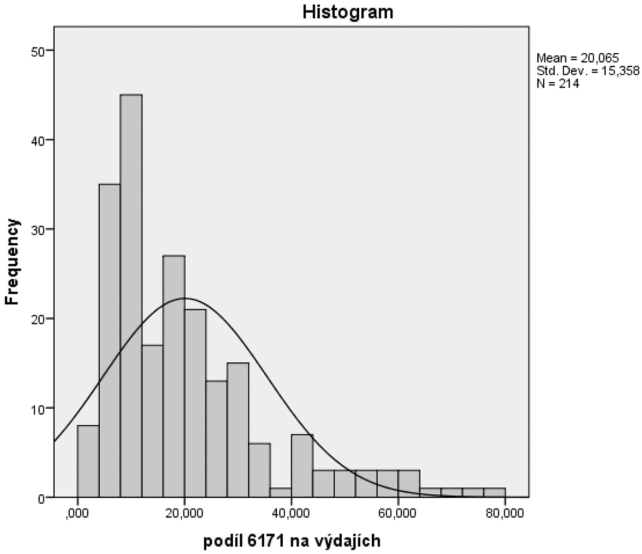
Source: own analysis

Table 6: The share of expenditures on Local Government Activities of total expenditures

%	Share
Average	20.1
Median	16.1
Modus	0.73[a]
Minimum	0.73
Maximum	79.28

a) Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown
Source: own analysis

Histogram 3: The share of expenditures on Local Government Activities of total expenditures



Source: own analysis

The most common spending on local government activities ranges from 101 to 300,000 CZK, which we found in 94 cases (44 %). Overall, expenditures by municipalities on local government activities was less than 500,000 CZK and constitutes 76.2 % of total expenditure in the Vysočina region. The frequency of other expenditures on local government activities is presented in table 7.

Table 7: The frequency of expenditures on Local Government Activities

	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
0–50 000	2	0.9	0.9
51 000–100 000	10	4.7	5.6
101 000–200 000	44	20.6	26.2
201 000–300 000	50	23.4	49.5
301 000–400 000	32	15.0	64.5
401000–500 000	25	11.7	76.2
501 000–600 000	11	5.1	81.3
601 000–1 000 000	29	13.6	94.9
1 000 000 and more	11	5.1	100.0
Total	214	100.0	

Source: own analysis

Final discussion

The analysis of the data can be used to answer the research question. Analysed municipalities in the Vysočina region spent on average 20.1% of their total expenditures on local government activities. In this paper we analysed this type of expenditure as the kind of expenditure that could be saved in the case of a municipality merging or in the case of a municipality joining a voluntary municipal association. The median value is about 16.1% of total expenditures. Overall, the smallest municipality in the period generally had no problems with debt (with the exception of four cases). Mostly, income outpaced expenditures in studied municipalities. These results show the financial reality of the smallest municipalities in the Czech Republic. However, we have to take into account the limit of this research. We have to point out that our conclusions were tested on the case of Vysočina region only. Furthermore, as we have mentioned above, the division to the expenses which could be and could not be saved were created only for the purposes of this research.

If we want to evaluate the efficiency argument within the context of economies of scale, we encounter two basic problems mentioned by Deborah Stone. First, who decides what is an efficient amount? And secondly, what counts as efficient/effective (Stone 2002: 65)? A standard for what constitutes an efficient amount or what is considered the best cost for local government activities does not exist. There is no body or authority that would be able to determine such a standard. In addition, there is no definition of what constitutes expenditures on local government activities. The aim of economies of scale is to save the greatest amount of economic resources. When analysing this argument, we should keep this in mind. Even here, however, we encounter the above two problems. The found values and presented results (only) empirically describe the reality of observed municipalities. Theoretically, in the case of transferring the administration of the smallest municipalities to a larger municipality, or in the case of merging municipalities, 437,040,000 CZK could be saved in the Czech Republic. However, it is necessary to point out the limits of this saving. In section no. 6171, local government activities could be included in the expenditure on wages (e.g. part time jobs as accounting, technical services personnel, etc.). Some municipalities could use this section as a summary of all expenditures on municipal government. Here we face the previously mentioned problem that in the smallest municipalities there is a lack of human capacity and, for example, accounting is not provided by experts. These expenditures would likely not have disappeared in the case of merging, etc. This number is therefore a theoretical estimate.

Finally, this research confirms Keating's scepticism about the empirical analysis of the argument of economies of scale. In the empirical study we face the limits of the plurality and uniqueness of studied objects and, what's more, in the Czech reality, the great differentiation between municipalities. And last but not least, we also face the problem of how to determine what is efficient/effective. At the same time, this analysis showed the existence of certain types of expenditures that should be studied further in order to find ways to better allocate these expenses.

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