

## The problems of party systems typologization in the Czech municipal policy

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### Abstract

*Článok sa zaoberá problémami v typologizácii miestnych straníckych systémov v Českej republike. V úvode autor porovnáva počet miestnych politík v Českej republike a iných európskych krajinách a poukazuje na zložitú situáciu na českej miestnej politickej scéne. Ďalej pokračuje problematikou počtu politických subjektov v straníckom systéme. V nasledujúcej časti sa venuje problémom ako pri preberaní stávajúcich typológií, tak aj pri konštrukcii typológie novej. Ďalšia časť práce je venovaná viacúrovňovosti miestnych straníckych systémov a vytvoreniu novej schémy možných variant fungovania lokálnych straníckych systémov v Českej republike, ako nástroja pre ďalší výskum. V závere nájdeme zamyslenie nad možnosťou uplatnenia zmienenej typológie.*

**Keywords:** Local policy, party system, the party system format, typology, governing party, government coalition, government alternation, multilevel party systems

### Introduction

The research of the municipal policy within Czech political science whose modern beginnings can be dated back to the first half of the nineteen nineties still does not count among the main field of interest of political scientists. Naturally, this fact is not caused solely by the local level's poor attractiveness for the scientists but also because of the political science's comparatively late reintegration among other scientific disciplines in the Czech Republic and the subsequent delay caused by getting acquainted with and investigating the national level. Another factor is certainly represented by the fact that municipal policy is examined from two points of view. The first, "holistic" perspective basically does not take note of local particularities and views municipal policy as the lowest level of the entire policy and that is why the logic of municipal policy functioning is (at least partly) deducible from the logic of higher levels functioning. The second research branch respects the statement that there are as

many municipal policies as municipalities.<sup>1</sup> A significant factor of this research perspective is represented by the individual case study method on which general statements are established. As this procedure is highly elaborate and demanding, it is not a great surprise that – although in libraries of faculties providing the study of political sciences there are over decades of case studies – even in 2005 Balík counted none but four publications whose significance goes behind individual case study.<sup>2</sup>

In this work, I am going to keep to Fiala's premise stating that the number of municipal policies equals the number of municipalities which means that in the Czech Republic there are 6249 municipal policies to be investigated.<sup>3</sup> Really, there is a considerable number of municipalities in the Czech Republic, definitely the highest among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Almost 80 percent municipalities have fewer than 1000 inhabitants whereas for example in Bulgaria, Poland or Lithuania there is not a single self-government with less than 1000 inhabitants. In West European countries such as Belgium, Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden there is less than one percent municipalities with fewer than 1000 inhabitants whereas in these countries 70 – 90 percent municipalities have more than 10000 inhabitants. It is therefore obvious from what has been stated so far that as for the factionalism of local self-governments the Czech Republic equals even France with its most fragmented system in Western Europe.<sup>4</sup> The need of developing far bigger effort when collecting necessary data along with the problem of methodological conception of the research of municipal policies in the Czech Republic also clearly emerges from the aforesaid. Now we must consider if the fact of the supposed more than six thousand municipal policies equals the same number of party systems and consequently also the fragmentation of the mentioned on such a level that would be unable to be typologically understood. Proceeding from the investigation of national party systems, we will learn that each political party system is compared to other system unique and not entirely identifiable although political scientists have been trying to find correspondences among the systems for decades. Some attempts are relatively successful, others to a rather smaller extent. I am going to pursue a similar mechanism within my research of municipal party systems in the Czech Republic.

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<sup>1</sup> Fiala, P. (1994): *O komunálních volbách a komunální politice*. Proglas, roč. V, č. 10, s. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Balík, S. (2005): *Metodologie výzkumu komunální politiky*. In: Fiala, P.; Strmiska, M. (eds): *Víceúrovňové vládnutí: teorie, přístupy, metody*. Brno: CDK, s. 163-175, s. 166-167.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.czso.cz/csu/2007edicniplan.nsf/t/9D00431C22/\\$File/okresy.xls](http://www.czso.cz/csu/2007edicniplan.nsf/t/9D00431C22/$File/okresy.xls) (17. 11. 2007)

<sup>4</sup> (more than 70 percent municipalities with inhabitants up to 1000, the number of municipalities per the number of inhabitants is almost identical with the Czech Republic) <http://www.mvcr.cz/casopisy/s/2006/22/pril2.html> (17. 11. 2007)

The problems of typologization of local party systems bring several difficulties. Compared to the national party systems which are usually classified either in the form of formats bond with the number of parties in the system or in the form of types that typologize the systems by virtues of the mechanism of their behaviour, the local party system research entails one more problem: the party system multilevelity. Further intricate decision asks whether to apply some of the already existing national level typologies to the local level.

However, this text aims not to create municipal party systems typologies but only to give an outline of possible alternatives of party systems behaviour on the local level. It is necessary to note that there is not enough space in this work for the creation of a universally valid typology nor enough empirical materials have been collected so far. In this work, I am going to focus on the problems of formats first, then the types of party systems and next I am going to concentrate on the problems of multilevel understanding of party systems. An attempt at a brief outline of possible typologizational frame will follow and the text will be finished by the Conclusion.

### **The number of political parties in the system**

The problems of the party systems format can be considered the most uncomplicated or at least the least demanding within the depicted problems although even this issue is not free of difficulties. The party systems format relates to the number of political parties existing within the party political system. According to Sartori<sup>5</sup>, the party system format is interesting only thanks to the fact that it influences the mechanism of party system behaviour. In other words, then number of the parties in the system provides the party system with certain mechanical presumptions of its functioning. Party system formats are currently classified as follows:

- 1) Monopartisms – or single party systems,
- 2) Bipartisms – or systems with two political parties and
- 3) Multipartisms (i.e. systems including more than two political parties).<sup>6</sup> Although some political scientists distinguish for example tripartisms or quadripartisms etc. within the multiparty format, our classification would be pointless if we kept to this scheme. Further question, however, emerges asking if it would not be useful to divide

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<sup>5</sup> Sartori, G. (2005): *Strany a stranické systémy. Schéma pro analýzu*. Brno: CDK, s. 123-134.

<sup>6</sup> Compare eg. Novák 1997: 123-132 or Klíma 2003: 147.

the category of multipartism into the following two categories by Sartori: the category of limited (3-5 or 6 parties) and extreme pluralism (more than 5 or 6 parties).

In connection with the party system format a problem of the choice of political parties for the system arises. Shall we count all of them? Or just some? And which criterion should we use? Once more, we can take advantage of Sartori's definition of a relevant party or political party having a so called coalition or blackmail potential at its disposal. Thus the political party which is (at least potentially) considered a possible coalition member taking part in government is gifted with coalition potential. The blackmail potential is thereafter the potential of a political party which, though excluded from the sphere of political parties with coalition potential, possesses such a strong position that it and its opposing position has to be taken into account. Irrelevant parties therefore are or can be the political parties which, out of any reason, are not invited to participate in government nor hold an irreplaceable post within the opposition. Now, in terms of the relevant parties' conception these are the parties that even can regularly gain seats however their power is so limited that they are actually not taken into account and thus are – at least for the functioning of the system – worthless.

Now, I would like to attempt to answer the question which party systems format can be expected in the Czech municipal policy. We have to consider the differences in the number of each municipality's inhabitants as the recourse. These range from the municipalities with a few decades up to the ones with more than a million inhabitants (Prague). Regarding the existence of proportional electoral system of municipal elections and the established five percent election clause it is possible to presuppose at least theoretically the maximum number of parties within the system to be 20 political parties. At the same time, we can also presuppose that at least in bigger municipalities more political parties will try to gain the seats and therefore we can also presuppose that the results of the electoral struggle on the local level will allow party systems on all above mentioned formats. Furthermore, in many municipalities, mostly the smallest ones, it is very often difficult to constitute but one ticket. This is the reason why within the Czech municipal party system we can expect one party format as well.

### Current or new typology?

The issue of the party system types is definitely not easy when comparing party systems on national level either. During the second half of the twentieth century, several party system typologies were developed out of which the best known and widely used is Sartori's typology distinguishing the system of the predominant party, the system of two parties and moderate as well as polarized pluralism. As early as in 1998, Strmiska dealt with the issue of application Sartori's conception on the Czech scene<sup>7</sup> and he found it impossible to place the party system of the Czech Republic within Sartori's typology into neither moderate nor polarized pluralisms. It is important to note that even almost a decade later, the situation is not much transparent out of which clearly follows that the Czech party system still can be placed within Sartori's typology only under reservations.

Now it is time consider if a typology whose application on national level is contentious can be applied on the Czech municipal party systems. Again, this issue was dealt with by Strmiska as early as in 2005<sup>8</sup> when he was solving the problem of the regional party systems typology, i.e. a problem methodologically similar to the problem of this work. In his argumentation, he points out several problems of Sartori's typology which arise in the context of its application on regional level. It is the "unidimensional simplification" including the implicit "single-level simplification", a tendency to reduce the interaction of the parties to their competition as well as the problem of polarization that relates to the aforesaid. Regarding the difficulties with the application of Sartori's typology Strmiska devises his own regional party systems typology that builds on the preferred combination of two dimensions, i.e. the extent of the "government" parties' alternation and the assertion of a single party or coalition "government". Having combined these dimensions, Strmiska comes to the final regional party systems typology introducing four basic and two additional party systems types.

- A. A party system with single colour governments and more or less regular (and "full" as the definition puts it) alternation of the governing party;
- B. A party system with single colour governments without (regular) alternation of the governing party;

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<sup>7</sup> Fiala, P.; Strmiska, M. (1998): *Teorie politických stran*. Brno: Barrister&Principal.

<sup>8</sup> Strmiska, M. (2005): *Regionální strany, stranické systémy a teritoriálně-politický pluralismus. Pojetí a typologie evropských regionálních stran a regionálních stranických soustav*. Brno: Mgr, Anton Pasienska, vydavatelství a nakladatelství AP, s. 32-37.

- C. A party system with coalition governments and more or less regular (and – at least potentially – full) alternation of the governing parties;
- D. A party system with coalition governments without (regular) alternation of the governing parties or at least partial alteration of the governing parties without the change of the core of the government coalition;
- E. A party system with the alternation of coalition and (majority) single colour governments – with the full alternation of governing party or parties;
- F. A party system with the alternation of coalition and (majority) single colour governments – only with partial alteration of the governing parties (one party continuously governs either on its own or in a coalition).

Strmiska further reasons that his scheme is not in conflict with Sartori's typology as bipartism belongs to category A, the predominant party system to category B, moderate pluralism to category C and polarized pluralism to category D. Categories E and F do not have a counterpart in Sartori's typology.<sup>9</sup> Answering the question which formats are presupposed by single models we find out that model A presupposes two party or multiparty format, in model B we might find the precondition of monoparty, biparty as well as multiparty format and in models C, D, E and F only multiparty format can be presupposed. As we can see, Strmiska's scheme is not in contrast with Sartori, however, leaving the aforesaid Sartori's simplification and simultaneous combining the two dimensions, which play a very important part in terms of methodology as well as party systems functioning, bring really quality tools for the research and comparison of party systems whereas explicitly unrelated to any institutionally-political level. On the basis of these arguments I am going to keep to Strmiska's typology in my attempt to outline models of the municipal party systems functioning within the Czech context.

### **The multilevelty of the municipal party systems**

Multilevelty, especially in the municipal policy, represents a most serious problem. What exactly does the issue of multilevelty deal with? The problem is that in one party system

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<sup>9</sup> Strmiska, M. (2005): *Regionální strany, stranické systémy a teritoriálně-politický pluralismus. Pojetí a typologie evropských regionálních stran a regionálních stranických soustav*. Brno: Mgr, Anton Pasienska, vydavatelství a nakladatelství AP, s. 35.

appear political subjects which relate to various territorial levels. For example in the Czech local party system the interaction of political subjects from three levels can be at least theoretically expected.

First, these are the local offices of national political parties. They relate to the national level through their party hierarchy and party discipline<sup>10</sup>. Further level that we can expect is the regional level, i.e. the presence of a regional political party or parties whose action do not affect the full area of the state but only one or a few regions. Two types of political subjects can be traced among such parties. First, the subjects performing their actions in several regions having failed to gain sufficient full area support. This means that despite their effort they did not succeed on the national level. The second type is represented by political subjects intentionally operating in one or more regions, for example by reason of rehabilitation or defence of their religions' interests. Such subjects can appear on the national level as well but the fact that they do not seek full area support and relate solely to a territorially defined area ranks them on the regional level.

The third level we can expect to appear in the local party systems is the local level. Political subjects of this level can include such formations that intentionally specialise on the local political sphere. For example the reasons can be represented by a self-profit oriented candidature of business sphere candidates or a by wish to gain or preserve the advantages for a certain organisation of which the candidate is a member or representative or also by purely altruistic reasons. However, the aforesaid reasons cannot be related to subjects as a whole – it is always necessary to consider them along with the candidates as individuals. The political subjects of the local level mostly avoid the political party label and often call themselves associations or movements etc. and in the Czech Republic they mostly consist of independent candidates tickets.<sup>11</sup> Now we have reached an important point: the question if such associations can be perceived as political parties. The problem lies in the field of interest of P. Fiala<sup>12</sup> who tries to solve it. Fiala compares several definitions of political parties which in their minimal forms mostly define a political party with various words as a group of people who unite in order to attain political power. As we can see, in such definition an association of independent candidates can stand as a political party. This is why in this work I am using the term of political subject as a synonym for a political party. Further problem concerning

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<sup>10</sup> For party discipline see Sartori 2001: 190-195.

<sup>11</sup> In this context, independence has to be perceived as independence on political parties so that we can speak of candidates without party affiliation.

<sup>12</sup> Fiala, P.; Strmiska, M. (1998): *Teorie politických stran*. Brno: Barrister&Principal, s. 14-49.

the associations that we have to draw attention to is the fact that they are very often founded ad hoc, without any personal or programmatic sequence which significantly makes long-term party system research difficult.

Needless to say, the three levels are relevant for the Czech Republic and it is not possible to generalize them onto a general level. In certain states more levels may be found, in other states less. The result depends on the surface area of the state or its organisation (e.g. unitary or federated). Now let's focus on the question of the levels or their combinations that can be expected within the Czech context.

- 1) National level – merely an office or offices of nationally operating political parties operate in the party system;
- 2) Regional level – merely regional political subjects operate in the party system regardless of the number;
- 3) Local level – merely local political subjects operate in the party system regardless of the number;
- 4) Nationally-local level – political subjects of national and local level operate in the party system;
- 5) Nationally-regional level – political subjects of national and regional level operate in the party system;
- 6) Regionally-local level – political subjects of regional and local level operate in the party system.
- 7) Nationally-regionally-local level – political subjects of these three levels operate in the party system.

It is important to state that not all the seven theoretical models currently exist. To be specific, this applies to models 2, 5, 6 and 7 as there are almost no political parties in the Czech Republic that would be possible to assign among regional parties. So far, two regional elections (in 2000 and 2004) were held. In the regional elections in 2000, in seven out of fourteen regions there were ten political subjects in nomination altogether whose titles aimed at the status of a regional subject however whose constitutions at the same time did not meet with a regional subject dispositions as these were mostly coalitions of political parties with



national field of activity. In 2004 nine such subjects stood in the elections.<sup>13</sup> In my opinion, the status of a regional political party can be ascribed solely to Moravian regionally patriotic parties<sup>14</sup> that stand for election in Moravian regions as well as to Demokratická regionální strana (Democratic Regional Party) and to Strana svobodných severu (North Free Party)<sup>15</sup> that stand in the region of Liberec so far. It is also important to notice that the aforesaid political parties have not won a seat yet although their support in the local systems might be sufficient for winning mandates.<sup>16</sup> Out of this reason I am obliged to leave the four models in the scheme even despite their fractional actual fulfilment. Furthermore, in 2008 next regional elections will be held and there is a theoretical chance that they might become a reason for new regional political parties to enter party systems.

### **An outline of possible alternatives**

As I have stated beforehand, in this construction of a scheme of possible municipal party system types I keep to Strmiska's typology created for the regional party systems which is nonetheless not related to any institutional level. Strmiska himself states that his typology does not regard multilevelty and that as soon as it is taken into consideration the situation of the regional (and in my opinion it is even more accurate with the municipal systems) party systems types issue gets considerably complicated.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, if we take the multilevel conception in Strmiska's typology into consideration, we will find out that the number of categories will rise from the original six up to several decades:

A – single colour alternative governments –

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<sup>13</sup> Eg. Koalice pro Pardubický kraj (Pardubice Region Coalition) standing in 2004 comprised of the coalition of KDU-ČSL (Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party) and US-DEU (Freedom Union – Democratic Union) (Hoskovec 2005: 132-138).

<sup>14</sup> Hnutí samosprávné Moravy a Slezska (Movement for Self-Governing Moravia and Silesia), Moravské národní sjednocení (Moravian National Unification), Moravská demokratická strana (Moravian Democratic Party).

<sup>15</sup> The decision of the Supreme Administrative Court of the Czech Republic no. 2/2003-69 from 6. 4. 2005 suspended the party. In September 2007, the Secretary of the Interior in terms of the opinion of the Chamber of Deputies's control committee proposed to the Supreme Administrative Court the dismissal of Strana svobodných severu (North Free Party). The reason was the supposed non-performance of the duty provided by law to hand in annual financial register. (<http://www.mvcr.cz/rady/strany/index.html>) (17. 11. 2007)

<sup>16</sup> One case for all: in the municipal elections in 2002 Demokratická regionální strana (Democratic Regional Party) in Liberec gained three seats (<http://www.volby.cz/pls/kv2002win/kv1111?xjazyk=CZ&xId=1&xkod=563889&xdz=3&xnumnuts=5103&xtyp=1&xobecnaz=Liberec>) (17. 11. 2007)

<sup>17</sup> Strmiska, M. (2005): *Regionální strany, stranické systémy a teritoriálně-politický pluralismus. Pojetí a typologie evropských regionálních stran a regionálních stranických soustav*. Brno: Mgr, Anton Pasienska, vydavatelství a nakladatelství AP, s. 36.

- A1 national
- A2 regional
- A3 local
- A4 nationally-regional
- A5 nationally-local
- A6 regionally-local
- A7 nationally-regionally-local

B - single colour non-alternative governments –

- B1 national
- B2 regional
- B3 local
- B4 nationally-regional
- B5 nationally-local
- B6 regionally-local
- B7 nationally-regionally-local

C - coalition alternative governments –

- C1 national
- C2 regional
- C3 local
- C4 nationally-regional
- C5 nationally-local
- C6 regionally-local
- C7 nationally-regionally-local

D - coalition non-alternative governments –

- D1 national
- D2 regional
- D3 local
- D4 nationally-regional
- D5 nationally-local
- D6 regionally-local
- D7 nationally-regionally-local

E - coalition-single colour governments with full alternation –

- E1 national
- E2 regional
- E3 local
- E4 nationally-regional
- E5 nationally-local
- E6 regionally-local
- E7 nationally-regionally-local

F - coalition- single colour governments with partial alternation –

- F1 national
- F2 regional
- F3 local
- F4 nationally-regional
- F5 nationally-local
- F6 regionally-local
- F7 nationally-regionally-local

A question emerges at first sight if the extension of the original Strmiska's typology up to forty-two items meets its substantiation. As stated, the original six-item typology of regional party systems proceeds from the combination of two dimensions which are represented by the alternations of governing parties and the assertion of a single party or coalition government. This combination appears fully tenable in a situation in which regional political subjects are either fully absent or hold marginal positions so that they cannot be taken into account at all. Compared to the outlined situation it is necessary to expect markedly different conditions because – as aforesaid – the associations of independent candidates creation in local elections is a common phenomenon in the Czech conditions and it is also not an exception that regional subjects which are not a great success in regional elections assert themselves a little bit more intensively on the local level.

We can therefore expect a fairly big number of the local party systems as multilevel systems or systems in which multilevel political subjects or possibly subjects from different levels co-exist and communicate. Nevertheless, is it possible to consider the mentioned

expectation a sufficient argument for the extension of the original typology? This question begs a simple “no” answer which – in my opinion – would be a rather impetuous statement. Of course, the mere fact that the subjects of various levels appear in one system does not suffice for the extension but a phenomenon of different nature is related to multilevelity. I have already written about the problems of Sartori’s single-level and unidimensional simplification which on the interactive level we might expect merely in the systems in which only national political parties offices operate but regarding the fact that in the regional and even more in local political subjects identifications different from ideological views on the society or politics can be expected, it is also possible to expect interactive patterns among individual subjects in the system which differ from the patterns observed on the national level. Related to the problems of diversity in the sources of the political subject’s stability or the political subject’s identification is a problem of the organisation of individual subjects which is connected with the area of programmatic operation of individual subjects or their responsibility for their decision making concerning governing bodies in terms of their political subject. These are the reasons which – in my opinion – justify the extension of the original Strmiska’s typology. Yet only further research will show if reality goes hand in hand with the aforesaid theoretical construct and will confirm the justifiability of the present typology or on the contrary if it will have to be modified on the basis of empiric data or even rejected as a step in the wrong direction.

## **Conclusion**

Although the research of the municipal politics including the municipal party systems in the Czech Republic has not been paid much attention yet, we can obviously suppose that this is going to change soon. The first works devoted to these topics were already written, the others are being worked on. This text should help broaden the knowledge in local party systems, too. The typologization on its general level becomes the effort of the scientists of most scientific disciplines including social science. It is similar within political sciences although the problems of political or party systems’ typologization to a greater extent entails difficulties via generalizing elements inevitably connected with it. In fact, it is a process during which in terms of assigning individual cases to relevant types it is necessary to prioritize certain features of a case to other features that were marginalized as they had not been chosen as

determining features for a chosen typology although they may play no less important role in the mechanism of system behaviour. Therefore the process of designing a typology in actual fact includes the necessity of the choice of few criteria on which individual investigated cases will be assigned to certain types. That is why the choice of the criteria as well as the features should be paid special attention because this is a crucial thing in terms of the final state of the typology.

The presented scheme cannot be considered the final typology but merely the starting point for further research so that its validity can be either confirmed or disproved. Indeed, at the first sight it is obvious that the forty-two items typology seems to be exceedingly broad however, when we realize the reduction from the original 6249 municipal politics, the number of the categories seems rather lower. Nonetheless, we only need to realize how many forms of the municipal party systems we may meet in future research. Possibly the differences among the party systems will not be so important as to justify the existence of so many categories. After all, even now the possibility of uniting models A4-A7, B4-B7, C4-C7, D4-D7, E4-E7 and E4-E7 into mixed categories emerges. However, in this phase I would rather leave them where they are. Let only the empiric empirical research disprove their persistence in the scheme. After all, we also may not rule out the possibility of finding the original Strmiska's typology sufficient once again.

At the conclusion I need to say that the whole article is intended as a reflection on the problems of typologizing the party systems in terms of the research in progress. Consequently it is not to be perceived nor treated as a proposal of a definitely valid party systems typology as such. It is also necessary to say that the presented scheme was designed for the research of the local politics in the Czech Republic and hence I need not emphasise that it does not aim to pretend going beyond the borders of this state.

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