

Marion Reiser
Everhard Holtmann (Eds.)

Farewell to the Party Model?

Independent Local Lists
in East and West
European Countries

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Marion Reiser · Everhard Holtmann (Eds.)

Farewell to the Party Model?

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Introduction

Marion Reiser, Everhard Holtmann

Local independent lists as political actors are a common phenomenon on the local level in many European countries – in established Western democracies as well as in the ‘new’ democracies in Central and Eastern Europe.

In some West European countries, these non-partisan groups have been an established and stable element in the local political system for decades. Typically, they understand themselves as protectors of a harmonious factual political style. In their opinion, good local politics is not compatible with party politics so they consequently perceive themselves as non-parties. During the last two decades, presence and success of local lists have steadily increased in these countries. Furthermore, during the last years local lists emerged also in countries which had been formerly fully party-politicised on the local level. Explanations offered for these developments are often based on the observation of a general decline of trust in established parties and politicians. Hence, it has been argued that the disenchantment with political parties is a fertile ground for local lists.

For the Central and East European countries, this argument can be employed only to a certain extent. Local lists established themselves in the early 1990’s as important actors on the local level especially due to a lack of party organisation in the process of democratic consolidation.

But despite the remarkable rise of non-partisan lists and their important role in many European countries, little systematic research is available that highlights the relevance of these non-partisan groups in national and comparative perspective. This volume aims at providing a first comprehensive overview on theoretical and empirical research on local lists in Europe. Thereby, the book focuses on two different aspects: First, it attempts to develop a theoretical and conceptual analytical framework for the comparative research of local lists. So far, there is no common definition for these non-partisan groups. How are independent local lists defined in different national contexts and how do we have to refine these in order to allow an international comparison?

The second concern of this book is to compare independent lists on the local level in Europe empirically. Thereby, the presence and success of local lists in different European countries is of interest. In this context, two perspectives of comparison prove to be useful: over time – is the existence of local lists and their success growing or declining? – and over space – how do they compare among

different communities, types of communities or regions? And how can these differences be explained? Next to presence and success, the profile of local lists is of scientific interest since they present themselves generally as alternatives to national parties in local politics. In what ways does their profile differ from that of political parties?

The first contribution of this volume is by *Everhard Holtmann*. He raises central questions, focuses on theoretical and conceptual considerations and develops reference points for the comparative analysis on local lists.

The second part of the volume comprises twelve national case studies. In order to get an overview of the current research status and to allow first comparisons, all contributions include information on the institutional framework on the local level, a theoretical and conceptual framework for the analysis on local lists, and empirical analyses on local lists; however, it must be kept in mind that the availability of empirical data varies considerably between the different countries.

The first five contributions analyse independent local lists in *East and Central European countries*. All authors focus on the role and importance of non-partisans in the process of democratic consolidation and in this respect, on the process of consolidating party systems. *Petr Jüptner* assesses local lists in the Czech Republic in the light of recent changes in the institutional framework which affect the formation of these non-partisan lists. *Ivan Koprić* presents data on independent local lists in Croatia which have also gained importance with the consolidation of the democratic political system. Based on the heterogeneous empirical findings he attempts to develop a theoretical frame for the comparative analysis of local lists within their specific local context. *Gábor Soós* compares local lists and local branches of national parties in Hungary and asks whether or not local lists have a distinct profile. *Vello Pettai*, *Rein Toomla* and *Elvis Joakit* present findings on “citizen electoral alliances in Estonia”. They focus on the long-term development of electoral alliances in the process of democratic consolidation and analyse the reasons for their rapid decrease of significance since the 1990’s. In view of the importance of non-party lists in Poland, *Agnieszka Dudzińska* assesses the profiles of local lists and develops a typology.

Following these contributions, the chapter on Germany serves as a bridging example between the East and West European countries. Therefore, the authors *Stefan Göhlert*, *Everhard Holtmann*, *Adrienne Krappidel* and *Marion Reiser* ask to which extent differences in performance and profile of local lists exist between East and West Germany.

In the subsequent part of the volume, six national case studies deal with non-partisan lists in West European countries. In the last 15 years, these countries have witnessed an (enormous) growth of independent local lists and their electoral support. Based on that, *Marcel Boogers* raises the central question if

local lists in the Netherlands are – in comparison to the local branches of national political parties – rather an anomaly or a prototype of the modern cadre party. *Kristof Steyvers*, *Herwig Reynaert*, *Koenraad De Ceuninck* and *Tony Valcke* discuss criteria for the definition of local lists and analyse the ecology, sociology and policy of local lists in Belgium. On basis of their analysis they also compare local lists to national parties. *Ingemar Wörlund* assesses local lists in Sweden in the context of the strongly party politicised local political system and the general disenchantment from political parties. *Jacob Aars* and *Hans-Erik Ringkjøb* focus on the long-term development of supply and support of non-partisans in Norway and ask in what ways local lists differ from local branches of political parties.

While local lists are a stable and long-term element in local politics in these four – or including West Germany five – West European countries, local lists have only recently emerged in the last two analysed countries. In Portugal, due to a change of the electoral law, non-partisan lists have been allowed to run for municipal elections only recently. *Maria Antónia Pires de Almeida* traces the development of these lists and asks for their current relevance in the Portuguese local political system. In England, local associations are also a new phenomenon. In view of the factual dominance of the three big parliamentary parties also on the local level, *Colin Copus*, *Alistair Clark* and *Karin Bottom* analyse independents and political associations in this early stage of development.

In the final chapter of this book, *Marion Reiser* summarises and discusses the theoretical-conceptual as well as the empirical results of the contributions and raises questions for future comparative research on local lists.

This volume presents the outcome of the international conference “Local Lists in Eastern and Western European countries – a comparative perspective” at the University of Halle-Wittenberg in April 2007. The editors would like to thank all participants of the conference and authors of this volume. Special thanks goes to the Collaborative Research Centre 580 “Social developments after structural change. Discontinuity, tradition, structural formation”, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), for their productive cooperation and the financial support of this project. The financial support provided by the International Office of the University of Halle-Wittenberg is also warmly acknowledged. Many thanks to the research assistants of the project “Non-partisan local lists”, *Adrienne Krappidel* and *Stefan Göhlert*, for their help in organising the conference. Very special thanks to *Rebecca Plassa* and *Tina Wiesner* for their valuable assistance in preparing the final version of this volume. Thanks also to *Dr. Kimberly Crow* for proofreading the manuscript.

Local Lists in Europe

Everhard Holtmann

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of independent local lists (Ill's) has not yet been a subject of international comparative research. Of course, there are manifold reasons for this lack of scientific attendance, but among the most serious are the absence of internationally agreed on definitions, a common conceptual framework, and above all, a first international oversight. The latter will be the ambitious project of this book, while the forthcoming paragraphs will deal with questions of a comprehensive definition and sketches of a possible conceptual framework.

The starting point is: how can we deal with the obvious *heterogeneity* of independent local lists regarding case studies of different European countries? Is there a definition that fits all cases? While keeping in mind national distinctions we must ask what influences the presence and success of independent local lists and how we can comprise these features in a comprehensive conceptual framework for comparative research.

2. The question of definition

To begin, we should deal with the question of definition. Local lists in European countries can be characterised by two criteria:

1. Ill's are focussed on a *local jurisdiction*. Independent lists are solely locally organised. Nevertheless, in the local arena Ill's are often confronted with *local parties sections*. Regarding this local co-existence of parties and non-party formations, we need a further distinctive mark for Ill's and that means:
2. A typical non-partisan local list is focussed – and limited – on *one single* local jurisdiction, dealing here primarily (if not to say only) with problems and tasks of 'its' municipality or county.

That means independent local lists practise a political self-restraint concerning supra-local politics. As local lists, they are 'localist'.

However, there are certain *clandestine sub-species* – even if they are formally local lists, which oscillate between covered party loyalty and partial detachment. In some articles presented in this book, Ill's run for example as “hidden local lists”, or as “formally independent lists” sponsored by political parties (senior parties pushing local junior descendents), or as “revealed party-independent” lists (i.e. see the contribution of Copus et al. in this book).

3. Party systems as reference point for independent list's analysis

Now to the conceptual question which is of course much more complex. One basic assumption is: party systems normally act – or, at least, *should* do so from a normative point of view – like ‘brokers’ between state and civil society. Agreeing to this does not mean to accept the classification scheme of “Cartel Party” uncritically (see for this debate Katz/Mair 1995 and Koole 1996). But in all modern political systems, parties are expected to perform this intermediate core function. Playing this role in the local fields of domestic politics, too, political parties here must bind together the societal system, where social conflicts emerge, and the political system is charged with managing these conflicts in terms and modes of politics. So both spheres are held in a specific interrelation by means of party politics.

Despite their custom to declare themselves as *non-parties* or *non-political* groups, Ill's can be seen as functional equivalents of parties. As our data for Germany show, in small municipalities quite often independent lists are the one and only group running for local election. But *where* political parties compete with independent lists in small local jurisdictions, political parties gain a high share of votes (see the contribution of Göhlert et al.). Insofar, Ill's often exist as a substitute when political parties are absent from the local political scene.

4. Independent lists as explaining and dependent variable

Keeping this in mind, we can say that political parties and the roles and functions of party systems are a main reference point for comparative analysis of Ill's. If we follow this premise we are able to analyse independent lists under two aspects: On the one hand, Ill's are an *explaining variable*, influencing – and simultaneously shaping – the party system in general. For example, competing successfully, Ill's can amplify the fragmentation in locally elected councils. Another formative effect of Ill's exerted on the party system is to channel latent or articulated sentiments of social protest into protest parties operating on local grounds.

We remember Giovanni Sartoris description of “anti-attitude”, given 30 years ago: this sentiment covers “a wide span of different attitudes ranging from ‘alienation’ and total refusal to ‘protest’” (Sartori 1976: 132). No doubt, it might be seen as a critical signal for eroding parliamentary democracy if local interest associations constitute themselves as *anti*-parties, and act up in an offensive manner against ‘old’ parties (see for the distinction between ‘Anti-Party-Party’ and ‘Anti-System-Party’ Mudde 1996 and Keren 2000). It is this formative role Ill’s are probably adopting in Central- and South-East European, especially in transformation states; but this has to be proven by further empirical studies.

Last but not least, Ill’s may move like harvesters in local soils grasping for estates of ‘defrosted party systems’. Doing this, independent local lists might not automatically *destabilise* the existing party system but realign floating votes under the norms and rules of democracy.

On the other hand, the same *non-political* formation can also be seen as a *dependent variable* of party politics and party systems. In this perspective, non-partisan voters associations can be regarded as effects of existing party politics and its outcome. From this point of view, Ill’s come into existence as a *specific response* to party politics, either to its structural weak points and/or to its critical public perception. Giving an example for a response on structural defects: obviously, territorial networks of party organisations are full of holes, which is why Ill’s are often able to dominate, or even to monopolise the electoral offers for local voting. Therefore, Ill’s come into being because local party sections are absent from the local political scene mainly due to organisational, mostly resource-related reasons. As an effect, Ill’s remain the only competitors for seats in elected councils.

Furthermore, the rise of alternative lists – apparent as Anti-Party or Protest-Party – can be taken as an effect of a growing lack of confidence in party politics. The spectacular success of the Dutch ‘List of Pim Fortuyn’ in 2002 (which had had its local forerunners and stakeholders!) was based partly on the programmatic convergence between the main parties since 1977 (Pennings/Keman 2002: 1) and partly on discontent with the same parties’ outward appearance. There was a “feeling of many voters that the established parties have become part of the state and have lost their capacity to sense the problems of ordinary citizens” (ibidem). We do not know exactly if it is a typical career pattern of anti-parties or extreme-right-wing-parties to run as under cover independent lists up from local grounds. In general, whether filling the local gaps of political representation or serving as local garbage cans which collect growing disappointment with party politics: Ill’s can be described as products of the wider political context.

My next annotation refers to some genuine profiles of local political culture: Ill's are converting a wide spread but specific demand for 'properly managed' problem solving into town halls. "Factual politics has to have priority to party politics on the local level." – more than 98 percent of councillors of German non-partisan voter associations agree to this item (cf. Holtmann/Reiser 2006). Ill's' persistent surviving on the local level – most of national case studies presented in our book do confirm the existence over a long time – as well as their often self-declared party-distance and emphatically promoted 'factual doctrine' are the flipside of the phenomenon that locally oriented interests, local political preferences and local patterns of conflict perception and conflict regulation have a peculiar quality. Ill's are widely accepted as 'natural born loudspeakers' of this localism. From a more abstract point of view, Ill's may be described as a deviant case, compared with national or regional modes and habits of politics; but we should not neglect that they are a strong element of grass roots politics, competing and coexisting with political parties.

5. Operating 'inside' and apart from 'outside': strategic advantage of independent lists

This 'dual constellation' of parties and quasi-parties shows that many citizens are using different criteria for evaluating the legitimacy and performance of local politics 'inside', and of supra-local politics 'outside'. Indeed, most local communities are preserving a spirit of handling local affairs as 'specific social systems equipped with specific political functions' (Kevenhoerster 1976) – no matter, whether local government since decades or longer is embedded in a federal or a unitarian system of governance. The ever lasting – maybe only *felt* – characteristics of local social communities reproducing this spirit have been described:

- Social interaction is dense, near and more intensive.
- People are more familiar with public problems because being touched in their own backyard.
- There is an ardent desire for social harmony (due to conflicts which are inevitable and cannot be fled).
- There is an emotional orientation to and identification with 'our village' and 'our community'.
- Estimating local politics and its public representation, there is a wide spread status-quo-attitude.

Obviously it is this social system of harmonious aspirations and of 'dimmed conflicts' that tends to confirm its appropriate political advocacy in forms of

independent local lists. If this contextual situation does not change dramatically, this localist political culture will survive. That means we could expect an enduring coexistence – in terms of systems logic: a functional cohabitation – of political parties and Ill's on local grounds and, more clear-cut, in the entire multi-level-system.

6. Lines of convergence for parties and 'non-parties': the ongoing parliamentarisation of local politics

Nevertheless, a dynamic development is going on which challenges this clear-cut separation of national and local politics. Often there is no clear organisational division between political parties operating nation-wide and the non-partisan voter associations strictly locally focussed. Moreover: comparing both actors playing in local fields, *similarities are striking*. For example, there are similarities when looking at organisational features, motives for taking part in local affairs, and formal and informal procedures of recruitment. So, "partisan politics serves as a benchmark for assessing non-partisan alternatives" (see the contribution of Aars/Ringkjøb).

An explanation for this convergence is, first, there is a continuous and growing tendency to *legal and functional overlapping* of both levels of politics, which in former times were divided more clearly. The more the boundaries between national and local issues blur, the more a clear distinction of local autonomy and national tasks vanishes. The second idea implies that the more local governance gets entangled with the institutional framework of European and national multi-level-systems, the more the modes and procedural rules of politics on different levels will become homogeneous. Therefore, the well known *parliamentarisation of community power* will continue and even increase. More evident than in the past, independent lists cannot escape this *logic of collective action* in elected councils.

In fact, Ill's *have long been* a part of the processes of politicisation. That is because several main reasons for their constant electoral success are linked to political factors. First, Ill's profit from lacks of performance of the overall party system. Political parties are obliged – and in some way condemned – to take over and handle *specific systemic political functions* beyond the local radius. Only parties are multi-level players. Referring to the competition with Ill's on local grounds, this party privilege is much more a burden than an advantage. In fact, it opens the door for localist independent actors to recommend themselves as an alternative to 'failing' party politics.

7. Local competition with independent lists: not a win-win-situation for parties

In contrast to this, we can identify a specific ‘parties’ dilemma: From a normative point of view, as grounded in democratic constitutions, political parties are expected to function as interpreters of social interests, as conveyor belts for popular demands and as a laboratory for citizens’ participation. Instead of emphasising once more the well-known basic democratic functions in the input sector, we should focus on the output-dimension. Then, political parties appear as multiple actors forced to adjudicate upon divergent policy preferences. Primarily, they are expected to optimise problem solving. Or once more following Giovanni Sartori: it is the result that counts, not the offer of participatory democracy. It is the political parties’ exclusive function – at least of those loyal to the basic goals of the system and of parties in government especially – to manage problem solving in a manner which keeps divergent policy-lobbies and policy-rivalries in balance and which re-integrates centrifugal policy loyalties.

Accepting this steering function, parties cannot be winners. There is a high risk for them of producing problem solutions that are ‘sub-optimal’, insufficient and quite unpopular. Furthermore, parties tend to loosen the ties to their membership basis because the ‘negotiating state’ requires a decision-making process which limits internal participation and external transparency. Hence, we can identify the political parties’ continuous dilemma: They can’t escape being a functional part of the national coordination of policies within the ‘cooperative state’. That means parties are held liable for lacks of public welfare and of individual benefits and in a more general way for ‘state failure’.

This is not the only but one important factor which explains why the shrinking reputation of parties spills over to the local level. Another complementary effect is that parties which “govern rather than represent” (see the contribution of Copus) tend towards internal social de-alignment. Recent research studies show that major German parties, normally typified as People’s Parties (‘Volksparteien’), are less successful with the recruitment of low qualified citizens than in former times (Biehl 2004). No doubt, all these factors operate in favour of Ill’s: They profit from the parties’ ‘elitist’ profile as well as of the collective responsibility for ‘bad government’, generally ascribed to political parties. Obviously, by this ‘the system’ creates a local niche for non-party politics.

It is Ill’s which settled themselves into this niche successfully. At first glance, the weight of non-partisan associations seems to be contrary to the increasing dominance of patterns of conflict in the fields of local governance. But Ill’s are part of the above mentioned *longue durée* of *parliamentarisation*, which should not be confused with party *politicisation*. As we found in our survey, a

great majority (86 percent) of German non-partisan councillors agreed to the statement “Political conflicts are important in democracies. They lead to better solutions.” (cf. Holtmann/Reiser 2006). In fact, there is no reason to underestimate Ill’s’ ability to flexibly adopt the modes and mechanisms of party politics, *without* labelling themselves as parties.

In general, parties and party systems are an important explanatory factor for the rise – and sometimes, like in Estonia (see the contribution of Pettai et al. in this book), also for the fall – of Ill’s. But vice versa, as mentioned above, Ill’s can also re-arrange party systems, at least at the local level – picking up the growing demand for more situate interest-representation and for single-issue-solution (instead of long-term party loyalties), or following the more individualistic political road maps of a growing number of ‘post-modern’ citizens, or giving voice to protest movements. Better opportunity structures for Ill’s correspond with the described architecture of local communities and with characteristics of local political culture (normally the agenda of local politics contains single-issue-solutions).

8. Two heuristic paths for comparative analysis of independent lists: systemic and actor’s dimension

Last but not least: regarding the competition of Ill’s with local parties from a comparative point of view, *institutions do matter*. As outlined in most of the forthcoming scientific papers: the size of community, an existing threshold in local electoral law, directly elected mayors accompanied by a trend of *presidentialising* local political systems, given instruments of direct democracy and chances for cross-voting, existing rules for subscribing for candidates or an (independent) local list, the introduction of user-governed public service institutions and contracting out of services (cf. Bogason 1996) – all these institutional tools are chances and challenges for both Ill’s and local party sections, not depending on conditions like these may change from one to the next election.

From a systematic perspective, we have *two heuristic paths* to analyse Ill’s. First, we can refer to the *systemic dimension* in the way described to classify macro-political functions of parties and contrasting them with pure locally focused functions of Ill’s. Then the question is: does a clear functional sharing really exist, reserving complex steering functions to parties as multi-policy managing actors and leaving Ill’s ‘bowling alone’ with local items? Second, we can refer to the *actor’s dimension*: what can we learn about the strategic behaviour and about the political ‘compass’ of Ill’s representatives? Is a new generation growing from non-partisan lists consisting mainly of single-issue lists all over Europe (or *not*,

as Jacob Aars and Hans-Erik Ringkjøb found out for Norway; cf. Aars/Ringkjøb 2005)?

Also, we should not forget that the fall of communism and the upset of post-communist political and economic systems in East Europe may have brought forward another new type of Ill's. If so, we have to ask whether there are visible parallels and divergences comparing 'old' European democracies with the new transition states on their local grounds. Perhaps then, we are able to identify *groups* or *types* of national Ill's – like parliamentary and presidential systems on another classifying level well known in comparative politics – instead of looking on each country separately.

By observing the above mentioned divergent developments and different environments and in closing these remarks, we can deduce a number of questions for comparative analyses: does the change of structural and institutional contexts only emerge as a challenge for political parties? If we are right that local communities, as mentioned above, are no longer closed social domains and furthermore, if there is no other alternative for Ill's than to join certain parliamentary patterns of interaction: what will the consequences for independent local lists be? Does it become more difficult for them to maintain their traditional label 'non-political'? Will they accelerate going on the path to in fact *political* actors? Is there a stronger shift from a more traditional type of Ill's conserving a predominantly 'non-political' parochial profile to a younger, more political (perhaps post materialist) profile of new local 'near-by parties'? And last, but not least: in what way do Ill's differ in Western and Central-Eastern Europe? And what are their convergences and similarities?

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Local Lists in the Czech Republic¹

Petr Jüptner

1. Introduction

Since the first democratic election in 1990, the independent coalitions have belonged to significant political participants on the local level. At the beginning of this century, their importance still rose and the independent participants reached representations in various forms, even on the higher levels of the Czech political system. In the following text, we will describe the definition, occurrence, successfulness, character, importance and perspective of the independent and non-partisan coalitions in the Czech Republic. The goal is to create a set of basic assumptions, enabling us to compare independent and non-party groupings existing in the Czech local politic system and other European countries.

The second chapter analyses the institutional assumptions and conditions for the independent coalitions. The analysis of the municipal order and the election system is followed by description of the residential structure, and uses mainly demographic data of the Czech Statistic Office. The importance of the independent and non-partisan coalitions is directly linked to the residential structure. This fact is held for the Czech Republic, which belongs in the European context, not only among countries with the most broken structure, but simultaneously, among the European Great Powers of independent candidates. The most significant abutment of the second chapter is the analysis of institutional conditions for working of the independent coalitions, thereby analysing the impact of these conditions on the types of the occurrence forms of independent local lists. The institutional framework is introduced as a main aspect, determining the in-

1 This article is a result of a grant research of the Czech Science Foundation n. 407/06/P077 “Europeanisation of Czech Local Politics. Political Science Analysis of European Legislative Trends”, and its elaboration was supported by research project MSM0021620841 “Development of Czech Society in the EU: Challenges and Risks”. A pillar of the methodology apparatus was a new usage of existing data. In this connection, it should be mentioned that the coalition research in the Czech local politics, was based on the questionnaire research and the data analysis. The data comes from seminar work realised within the frame of the course ‘Czech Local Politics’ at the Faculty of Social Science of Charles University (Jüptner 2004, 2006).

dependent coalitions' occurrence forms. In this connection I solve a question of inclusion in which context I want to overcome an institutional approach.²

In the third chapter a typology of independent candidate lists is generated. Specifically, there are five main types of combined criteria, both in institutional and functional areas. Beside the characteristics of individual types, their success is outlined, along with their occurrence locations. The fourth chapter places these particular types in the context of the Czech partisan system on the local level. The system was divided into four stages, depending on the size of municipalities. Aside from the election records, we were coming out of an already existing analysis of local coalitions, and the functional models of political systems (Jüptner 2004, 2006).

While the institutional aspects determinate the independent candidate lists in the larger municipalities, the Czech rural areas cannot ignore a political culture role. In the fifth chapter, the focus is based on the connection between the independent coalitions, and the political culture, using the self-defined concept of "local perception of politics" (Jüptner 2005).

In the conclusion (Chapter 6), there is an attempt to beside the inclusion deal with the connecting terminology questions. Positions are evaluated, with a perspective of the institutionalised and non-institutionalised independent coalitions, where these questions are implicitly defined for potential follow-up research.

2. Institutional framework of local lists in the Czech Republic

2.1 Most important aspects of the municipal order and local elections in the Czech Republic

The supreme self-governing body of the municipality is the assembly, which ratifies the ground plan and budget of the municipality. Some of its other competencies are, for example, real estate conveyance, committees' establishment, municipal organisations³, establishment, and liquidation. There is also decision-making regarding donations and subsidies exceeding the amount of approximately 700 Euro. It represents a specific local parliament determining the basic rules for operation and directing measures of the municipality. Assemblies of the Czech municipalities comprise from 5 to 55 members⁴, and they are directly

2 In the Czech Republic you can find independent coalitions among even the local registered political parties.

3 For example municipal police, municipal services or theatres.

4 This provision does not refer to the City of Prague.

elected on the basis of the proportional election system. Mandates, using D'Hondt method⁵, are allocated to the party-lists exceeding a five percent election threshold⁶. Within local elections, Czech voters have a choice of cross-voting, with the quorum required for vertical shifts on the list of candidates, exceeding 110 percent of the preferential votes average within the given candidate list.⁷ There is a four-year term of office, whereas, the local elections are combined with the Senate (Upper Chamber of the Czech Parliament) elections in approximately one third of the country. Turnout is rather stagnant, and reached 46.4 percent⁸ in the last local elections of 2006, which is higher than the 2006 Senate elections or 2004 European Parliament elections.⁹ The function of assembly members is honorary, except from the so-called full time assembly members, the number depending on the decision of particular assembly, and deriving above all from the size of the municipality. While in the smallest municipalities, the mayor is normally the only person to fulfil his full-time function, in the cities, it can also be the councillors (members of the executive body of Czech municipalities), and some of the assembly members. For passing a resolution, an absolute majority of the assembly members is required, and the assembly meets at least once in three months.¹⁰

In the Czech Republic, the mayor¹¹ does not wield any significant executive power. His main objective is to represent the municipality externally, where his tasks of calling and chairing the assembly proceedings are linked to his informal strong position within the individual municipal political systems. Among his most important formal competencies are appointing and withdrawing the executive director of the municipal office or blocking council resolutions. He is elected by the assembly members, and is also a member of the community council (executive body of Czech municipalities) after he has been elected. Unlike the ordinary assembly members, the mayor has to be a Czech Republic citizen. During an absence, the mayor is substituted by deputy mayors.¹² The number of deputy mayors derives from the local agenda quantity (i.e. from the size of the municipality).

5 Before elections in 2002, the divider Saint Lagüe was applied.

6 Closing clause is in effect since orderly elections in 2002.

7 This deformed adjustment of panachage can lead to the misinterpretation of the whole electoral system in the view of the voters.

8 The turnout in larger cities is traditionally lower than in smaller municipalities, where the voters often know the candidates personally.

9 See <http://www.volby.cz>.

10 Act on Municipalities (No. 128/2000 Coll.).

11 In Czech, a different term is used when referring to *mayor* of municipality and *mayor* of statutory city, where in English, no such distinction is applied.

12 In Czech, a different term is used when referring to the *deputy mayor* of municipality and *deputy mayor* of statutory city, where in English, no such distinction is applied.

The council is the executive body of the Czech municipalities. It is responsible for public property management and other regular duties, such as managing the budget in accordance with the approved procedure, establishing committees, organising the municipal office structure, and managing municipal organisations. The number of its members ranges between five and eleven¹³, whereas in the smallest municipalities, the council is not established at all.¹⁴ The council is elected by the assembly, where the mayor and his deputies become members automatically.¹⁵ Unlike the meetings of the assembly, the council sessions are closed.¹⁶

2.2 Residential structure of the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic has a population of 10.3 million inhabitants¹⁷ who live in 6,249 municipalities.¹⁸ More than one quarter of the municipalities (1,614) have a population of less than 200 residents, where more than half of the municipalities (3,630), have less than 500 residents, and only 63 municipalities have at least 20,000 residents.¹⁹ There are 529 municipalities with city status.²⁰ Undoubtedly, such a fragmented residential structure, combined with a poor network of local political parties' branches, is one of the factors for frequency of occurrence of independent and non-partisan coalitions in the Czech Republic. One of the main reasons for the high number of municipalities is the development after the regime change in 1989, when many historically independent municipalities, which were integrated in the period of the communist dictatorship, split up within the democratisation process. The commanded integration during the communist regime is also one of the reasons why current relevant discussion on the integration of municipalities does not exist. Still, it is possible to say that existing legislation creates conditions for the limitation or at least, stagnation of the number of municipalities. Only municipalities with at least 1,000 residents can become independent nowadays,²¹ and smaller municipalities feel discriminated by the

13 The number of the council members can make up a maximum of one third of the total assembly member count.

14 A council is not elected in municipalities with less than 15 assembly members.

15 Act on Municipalities (No. 128/2000 Coll.).

16 Act on Municipalities (No. 128/2000 Coll.).

17 There are only 131 municipalities with at least 10,000 inhabitants.

18 Data based on the official statistics of the Czech Statistical Office and up-to-date as per 1st January 2007.

19 See <http://www.cszo.cz>.

20 See <http://www.cszo.cz>.

21 Act on Municipalities (No. 128/2000 Coll.).

way the state tax revenues are allocated to them.²² Thirdly, some of the large Czech cities have struggled for the integration of small municipalities within their agglomeration, by means of lucrative proposals.

By far, the largest residential area is the centrally located City of Prague (1.19 million citizens)²³, followed by Brno (367,000 citizens), Ostrava (309,000 citizens) and Pilsen (163,000 citizens). A significant number of these selected 14 regional capitals have approximately 100,000 citizens (e.g. Pardubice, Hradec Králové, Ústí nad Labem, České Budějovice, Liberec, Olomouc).²⁴ From the view of the municipal institutions, they constitute a special group of the 23 largest residential areas, referred to as statutory cities.²⁵ Those municipalities are authorised to divide their area into municipal districts or wards that are self-administered.²⁶

The regional level of the Czech political system is an intermediary layer between parliamentary and local politics. Coalitions classified as ‘independent’ are in the 2004-2008 term, represented in eight out of the 14 regional self-governments.²⁷

2.3 Institutional context of independent and non-partisan electoral coalitions

In 1990, the constitution adopted a democratic legislative amendment for the municipal elections,²⁸ which defined the conditions of active political participation of independent candidates and their coalitions. The entry of the non-partisan coalitions into the political arena was only possible when it was accompanied by enclosed petitions from citizens of the municipality supporting the candidacy. This condition was a certain substitute of signatures needed for the registration

22 The smallest municipalities compared to larger, and especially the biggest, receive significantly less bulk of finances per person from the state.

23 Prague is not only the capital city, but a region as well. Due to this fact, the municipal order cannot be applied here, and its status is defined by a special act.

24 Data based on the official statistics of the Czech Statistical Office and up-to-date as per 1 January 2006.

25 Kladno, České Budějovice, Pilsen, Karlovy Vary, Ústí nad Labem, Liberec, Hradec Králové, Pardubice, Jihlava, Brno, Zlín, Olomouc, Přešov, Chomutov, Děčín, Frýdek-Místek, Ostrava, Opava, Havířov, Most, Teplice, Karviná and Mladá Boleslav.

26 In the Czech Republic a different term is used when referring to the *mayor* of a statutory city and *mayor* of municipality (in English no such distinction is applied). Furthermore, there is a difference between municipal office (municipality) and city hall (statutory city).

27 Nevertheless, this concerns entities formally registered as political parties, as the list of candidates for the regional assembly elections can only be put forward by political parties and movements.

28 Act on Municipalities (No. 367/1990 Coll.) and the Act on Community Assembly Elections (No. 368/1990 Coll.).

of political parties and movements,²⁹ whereas, the size of the municipality determined the number of signatures needed. There are two forms of candidacy of non-party coalitions defined by law: individually standing independent candidates, and coalitions of independent candidates.

Table 1: Number of signatures needed for candidacy of independent candidates and their coalitions according to the Act No. 368/1990 Coll.

| Number of municipality/city district inhabitants | Number of signatures needed in the petition |
|---|--|
| up (to) 1,000 | 20 |
| up (to) 3,000 | 30 |
| up (to) 20,000 | 100 |
| up (to) 50,000 | 200 |
| above 50,000 | 400 |

The new Act on Community Assembly Elections (No. 152/1994 Coll.), brought forth major changes in the legislative definition of independent candidates, and also introduced a new form of candidacy for independent candidate participation: the coalition of political party and independent candidates. The main change, implemented according to the political assignment (Půlpán 1998),³⁰ was a dramatic increase in the number of signatures needed for the establishment of an electoral coalition, without the presence of a political party. This change had a major and long-term influence on the formation of independent coalitions within the Czech party system, and not exclusive to just the local level.

New candidacy provisions of independent coalitions in the cities basically excluded the competition's ability of non-party coalitions, because of their obligation to submit signatures for nearly one tenth of permanent residents of a given municipality.³¹ This provision created a situation where a formation of local political parties in middle-sized municipalities became easier than complying with provisions for the submission of an independent candidacy. For example, in a city with 14,000 inhabitants, the number of signatures needed for independent candidates was comparable to the number of signatures needed for the registration of a nationwide political party, whereas, obtaining signatures in order to support an independent coalition is mandatory for each separate election. Fur-

29 Registration of political parties, according to the Act on Associating in Political Parties and Political Movements (No. 421/1991 Coll.), requires submitting a democratic charter and signature list of 1,000 rightful voters.

30 Journalist David Půlpán was informed by Mr. Henych, Chairman of the Central Election Committee.

31 Relevant signature proportion is calculated from the overall number of municipality residents, including minors.

thermore, people who sign the petition have to be permanent residents of a given municipality. Due to this fact, the former representative of the Czech parliament, Dušan Kulka, who was worried about the establishment of non-transparent regional parties (which would destabilise the Czech political system on its newly forming regional level), unsuccessfully urged for decreasing the upper limit of needed signatures to 1,000.³² These worries turned out to be legitimate. In the 1998 municipal elections, even statutory city assemblies were infiltrated by certain ‘independent parties’ – in other words the independent coalitions registered, as political parties and movements.³³ The greatest boom of these ‘non-partisan parties’ came in the 2002 local elections, where since 2000, some gained access to the regional assemblies, to the Upper Chamber of the Czech Parliament (since 2002), and the European Parliament (2004). The essential question is the way of classifying these ‘independent parties’, from a political science point of view. It is assumed that the institutionalisation of independent coalitions via establishing political parties is the result of legislative provisions for the foundation of independent election lists. From a practical point of view, it is possible to subsume ‘independent coalitions’, ‘non-partisan unions’ and even parties which, via their title, programmatic profile or perception, assume a contrary position or alternative towards the standard political parties.

Table 2: Number of signatures needed for candidacy of independent candidates and their coalitions according to the Act No. 152/1994 Coll.

| Number of inhabitants | Signatures needed for an independent candidate | Signatures needed for coalition of independent |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| < 500 | 5% of inhabitants | 7% of inhabitants |
| 500 < 3,000 | 4% of inhabitants (≥ 25) | 7% of inhabitants |
| 3,000 < 10,000 | 3% of inhabitants (≥ 120) | 7% of inhabitants |
| 10,000 < 50,000 | 2% of inhabitants (≥ 600) | 7% of inhabitants |
| 50,000 < 150,000 | 1% of inhabitants ($\geq 1,000$) | 7% of inhabitants |
| > 150,000 | 0.5% of inhabitants ($\geq 1,500$) | 7% of inhabitants |

3. Typology of independent local lists

Independent political coalitions can be divided into institutionalised and non-institutionalised groups. Appending to the non-institutionalised independent coalitions are the independent candidates and coalitions defined according to the

32 First elections to regional assemblies were held in 2000.

33 For example Demokraticka regionalni strana, Zlinske hnuti nezavislych, Prava volba pro Plzen or Hnuti pro Havirov.

election law, and support their own candidacy with the required number of signatures. In addition, this set of independent coalitions can be divided into legislatively independent candidates and coalitions of independent candidates.

Table 3: Typology of independent local lists in Czech Republic (Jüptner)

| | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Non-institutionalised ones | (individual) Independent candidates |
| | Coalitions of independent candidates |
| Institutionalised ones | Local municipal parties |
| | General municipal parties |
| | Regional parties |

Individuals participating as independent candidates can be found especially in the smallest municipalities up to 500 inhabitants. Mandate allocation is, in regard to the overall number of votes on candidate lists, a disadvantage³⁴ for independent candidates. Therefore, they run for elections in the smallest municipalities with uncompetitive political systems. Their candidacy is also the expression of the so-called municipal perception of politics, which has an apolitical or anti-political character, and municipal politics is perceived as an individual matter without any lists, coalitions or parties. Therefore, in the smallest municipalities, voters favour voting for individuals running as independent candidates.³⁵

Associations of independent candidates in the Czech Republic are of significantly heterogeneous character and it is almost impossible to categorise them according to socio-economic or geographic indicators. Independent associations neither hold legal entity, nor do they have an official organisational structure or hierarchy. Their genesis is ‘natural’³⁶, and accepted in the small municipalities and emanates from the political culture at the local level.

Yet, this definition is not complete. The diversity of independent coalitions underlines the fact of candidacy in the form of locally named and presented coalitions from the point of view of political marketing in the Czech Republic, and also in the bigger cities, represents interesting know-how. This also applies for interest groups or rather politically oriented groups including the former supporters. These groups use the search for signatures as a certain ‘pre-campaign’.

On the other hand, institutionalised independent political coalitions are registered as political parties and movements because of the electoral order. How-

34 An independent candidate is on the candidacy list presented individually and cannot profit from votes from other candidates on the same list.

35 This fact is negatively perceived by the Ministry of Interior, since there is no possibility of replacement for the blank independent candidate’s mandate.

36 In these municipalities the independent coalitions are not considered as a candidacy alternative form, but not infrequently as a standard and ‘natural’ form.

ever, this inclusion to independent groupings is based mostly on their title, programmatic and political style. These ‘independent parties’ do not include in their registered title the expression ‘party’, but use expressions such as ‘coalition’, or ‘independent coalition’. From a formal point of view, proposing to differentiate these party coalitions into three groups generates the following: local municipal lists, general municipal lists and regional lists. (Jüptner 2004).

Local municipal lists are formed in order to participate in municipal politics of one city. Yet, due to the above mentioned reasons, they usually appear in cities with more than 15,000 inhabitants and the typical places of occurrence are statutory cities. The parties’ titles usually contain the name of the city where they function and their existence does not have to be permanent. In the post-election time, these parties usually terminate due to a mandatory provision for political parties to file an auditor’s report annually.³⁷ Such examples of contemporary and already non-existing municipal lists are: Independent Union of Blansko Citizens (Nezavisle sdruzeni obcanu Blanska), Tenants Union of Prague 1 (Sdruzeni najemniku Prahy 1), Tabor 2002, Semilaci, Movement for a better Usti n. Labem (Hnuti za jeste lepsi Usti na Labem), Praguers for Prague (Prazane Praze) or The Seven – party for Slatinany, Skrovad, Trpisov, Kunci, Presy, Podhuru and Kochanovice (Sedma-strana pro Slatinany, Skrovad, Trpisov, Kunci, Presy, Podhuru and Kochanovice).

General/*universal* municipal lists offer and enable participation in local politics of all municipalities in the Czech Republic. Often, they declare their focus on municipal politics or declare they are defending the interests of small municipalities,³⁸ while they also associate themselves with an independent mayor. These entities generally lead election campaigns and recruit their candidates according to the well-established formulas of political parties. In other words, they do not differ in these aspects from standard political parties. Their activities in the inter-election interval are of minimal intensity, internal structure has a weaker division,³⁹ and informal mechanisms play an important role. Especially some general municipal lists reached, in the manner of set of independent formations, the biggest successes. Namely, the Independents Movement and Union of Independents⁴⁰ made the representation in several regional assemblies,

37 An obligation to submit the auditor’s report is a particularly huge administrative and financial load for the local municipal lists. Therefore, the majority of these coalitions die away, not long after their establishment.

38 For example, they require legislative amendments of tax relocation in favour of smaller municipalities.

39 For example, the organisational structure of former Union of Independents (SNK) was not based on the local, but territorial organisations.

40 Independents Movement and Union of Independents represent the most successful formation of the general municipal lists in the Czech Republic.

the Senate (Upper Chamber of the Czech parliament) and in the European Parliament.⁴¹ There was a distinct rivalry among the most ambitious entities of this category in the times of their biggest glory, for both ideological and pragmatic reasons. Accompanying feature of these parties' conceptions is the faith in the 'idea of independence', which should, according to their members, be present in politics. Independent politicians often competed for the monopoly of being called 'independent', for example, in a form of dispute for the web domain 'nezavisli.cz' (independents.cz), and often present themselves as 'truly independent', while they consider their rivals as 'false independents'. The combination of anti-partisanship and standard party performance, led to their rapid inauguration and numerous electoral successes. Yet, since 2004, their feeble organisational structure has led to their weakening. The Independents Movement dissolved and a weakened Union of Independents merged with another 'municipal party' – the European Democrats.

Regional lists cover a certain region, where they do not usually concentrate on the regional level of the Czech political system, but rather on the municipal. They are mostly member coalitions of dissolved or weakened political parties. Former local party organisations took advantage of their mutual regional ties and established formal political parties labelled as independent regional formations, for the sake of maintaining participation in local politics. As the Czech political system is unstable, especially in the centre of the right of the political spectrum, the regional party founders came predominantly from this area and it is possible to include them into the civic group.⁴² For example, parties such as the Democratic Regional Party (Demokraticka regionalni strana) and Choice for the Town (Volba pro mesto), were founded by former members of Civic Democratic Alliance (Obcanska demokraticka alliance). In the Movement for Harmonious Development of Municipalities and Towns (Hnuti za harmonicky rozvoj obci a mest), there is a strong participation of former Freedom Union (Unie svobody) members. Some entities of this category have lost their purposes after their initial success, (Democratic Regional Party/Demokraticka regionalni strana), others have transformed into general/*universal* municipal lists in regards to their title (Choice for the Town/Volba pro mesto).

41 The general municipal lists are considered as the most successful type among the institutionalised independent coalitions.

42 We might consider the Czech partisan system as stable. An exception is the right centre of political spectrum, where there is often birth, growth and death of the political parties speaking to this electorate. Regional parties are repeatedly founded by former members of those instable parties, which are still gear to participate in the local politics.