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THE PROFILE OF LOCAL POLITICAL ELITE AND STRATEGY PRIORITISATION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL IN ECE COUNTRIES¹

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Abstract: This paper examines the outlook and strategies of local political elites in Eastern and Central European (ECE) countries. The specific focus is on four elite groups in four towns that have similar demography and employ similar developmental strategies: Tecuci (Galați county, Romania), Česká Lípa (Liberec region, the Czech Republic), Oleśnica (Lower Silesia voievodship, Poland), and Gyula (Békés county, Hungary). The investigation will be carried out through the prism of the members of the Municipal Councils in order to identify (a) the values of these local political elites (b) their interactions with other groups and networks of power at local level, and (c) their priorities. The level of decentralization specific to each of the four countries is employed as the major explanatory variable for the differences encountered. In addition, the explanation focuses also on legacies of the *ancien régime*, experienced locally. From the study, three models of local leadership in ECEs are proposed: “predominantly elitist”, “democratic elitist”, and “predominantly democratic”. Future studies can build upon this proposal by verifying the validity and pertinence of the models in similar cases throughout the region.

Keywords: local political elites, strategies, socio-demographic profile, Eastern and Central European (ECE) countries

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I. Introductory remarks. Theoretical assessments

“[Society’s elites are] persons with the organized capacity to make real political trouble without being promptly repressed” (Higley, 2010: 161-176).

The social biography of local political elites can be perceived as “a set of social resources which are transformed in official positions and in influence, positions and influence that are not available those who do not possess such resources. The access to the political class demands the employ with increased ability of the personal resources [...]” (Stoica, 2003: 107). Moreover, as Harasymiw has aptly observed, “the composition of political elites is relevant to the content of public policies” (Harasymiw, 1984: 3), the members of the local elite’s social background being partly responsible for the policy priorities within their community. Hence, the elites’ social characteristics constituted, at an initial phase, the key components of their eligibility in the recruitment and party nomination processes.

Conversely, analysing the opinions and attitudes adopted by the local political elite is instrumental and paramount in the description of this group. In reference to the views, perceptions, opinions, and attitudes of the local political elite, and starting from the plausible assumption that the preferences, orientations, and values of the leaders matter more than those of the masses, Robert Putnam (1976: 80) identifies four major orientations in the attitudes of the political elite. These are cognitive orientations (predispositions based on which individuals interpret the existing reality; e.g., the attitudes regarding the social conflict); normative orientations (assessments regarding the way the society should be; e.g., the attitudes, ideologically motivated, towards the economical equality); interpersonal orientations (perceptions about the other segments of the political elite); and stylistic orientations (“structural characteristics of the beliefs systems of the political elite” (Stoica, 2003: 179)).

Certain values embraced by the representatives of the local political elite can be explained by their social background. For instance, it is expected that those coming from lower class families are inclined to favor economic equality. Other values are acquired through socialization, which includes the type of education received, episodes of primary socialization, and so on. These values and orientations are further drawn into political interactions with other groups. Eventually, politics is about personal interaction—between individuals perceiving the same goal, between those pursuing different aims; between institutions, between institutions and other groups, between institutions and the citizen, etc. Government is about interactions between the rulers and the ruled. It is about the formation of power networks. Ultimately, members of the political elite, by the very nature of their occupation, must interact with other individuals, groups, and institutions. As a matter of fact, the interactions, contacts, links, and connections of local political elites, their nature and their complexity, are indicators in assessing the degree of integration of this particular group within the existing societal framework. As Stoica

(2003: 153) states “[a] high frequency of interactions can be seen as an indicator of a solid integration of the political elite”. As a result, the activities and actions of the political elite become viable and meaningful for society.

A series of scholars have convincingly argued that the political elite are a very coherent, homogenous group of individuals, establishing strong unbreakable connections with some other groups. Famously, C. Wright-Mills argues, in his *The Power Elite* (1956) that the political elite (the “political directorate”) is tightly linked to the economical (the “corporate chief tenets”) and military elites (the “war lords”). The connections, Wright-Mills further contends, stem from childhood; the members of these three groups shared the same familial and educational backgrounds, established links since high school or college and, since then, preserved the same personal relations. They typically meet in informal rather than formal settings and there are even psychological similarities between them (e.g., their behavior is the same in contexts of crisis) (Wright-Mills, 1956).

The local political elite is formed, after all, to lead, decide, and implement public policies; in short, to promote the general good of citizens. Generally, it is perceived that the local political class should provide for the town and its citizens. The priorities of the local political elites concerning municipal public policies in different domains represent an instrument for describing their orientations, their perceptions regarding the problems the town where they exert their influence and power, and their views regarding the capabilities in finding solutions for such problems. Solving public problems enhances the reputation and popularity of local political elites. The socio-demographical profile, the interactions with other groups, and value-orientations of the local leadership (just as those of the political elite at the national and regional levels of government) tend to influence a certain strategy prioritization locally. Yet, these dependent variables are shaped, in turn, by independent factors (institutional, cultural, or historical). This paper refers to, and briefly tackles, two of these factors: the level of decentralization and the legacy of the former regime.

II. Methodological remarks: the case studies, research objectives, questions, and methods

The present research is concerned with the issue of local leadership in East-Central Europe. Concretely, the intended research started as an attempt to examine, in a comparative manner, the profile and the role of the local political elites in four transitional democracies (Romania, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary) and the elites’ impact on local development. Basing the case selection on the logic of the most similar design systems, the study focuses on four small towns, Tecuci, Česká Lípa, Olešnica, and Gyula. These towns are quite similar in terms of demographics (roughly 40,000 inhabitants) and developmental strategies (an economy based on the alimentary

industry and on commerce activities, etc.)². Hence, the scope of the research was initially rather descriptive and exploratory; an inductive, observatory process that inquires into a range of aspects worth pointing out when dealing with and discussing on the study of political elites. Surely, after gathering the *data* and being confronted with the stark differences among the four towns (in terms of the elites' socio-demographical profile, interactions, value-orientations, and, eventually, of strategy prioritization at the local level), the question about the factors, the independent variables that might account for both these differences and similarities, will be inevitably raised.

Therefore, four principal research questions are of interest here:

What main socio-demographical features do the local political elites of Tecuci, Česká Lípa, Olešnica, and Gyula display?

What values, perceptions, and orientations are embraced by the members of the local political elites in Tecuci, Česká Lípa, Olešnica, and Gyula? What are their attitudes towards key aspects concerning democracy, decentralization and autonomy, and cultural-geographical self-identification?

What are the most frequent contacts and interactions of the local political elites of Tecuci, Česká Lípa, Olešnica, and Gyula ?

How do the local political elites in Tecuci, Česká Lípa, Olešnica, and Gyula prioritize locally?

Under the guidance and supplementary insight provided by these two tentative explanations using the degree of decentralization and the “legacy” of the communist *ancien régime*, a typology of local political elites in ECE is constructed, with the aim of illuminating and systematizing the diversity in local elites' profile, interactions, attitudes and orientations, and priorities. The next two sections constitute an attempt to account for the discrepancies among cases, by introducing the typology of local leadership in ECE and the two explanatory variables. The limitations of the models proposed are presented in the concluding sections.

To define the elite groups at the level of the four communities, the paper employs the *positional method* of identifying and analyzing the local political elites, which operationalizes the phrase “local political elites” as that group comprising those individuals in legislative and executive positions within the local leading, decision-making structure. The resulting population of the empirical research was thus represented by the members of the Local/Municipal Councils in Tecuci (19 persons), Česká Lípa (25 persons), Olešnica (22 persons), and Gyula (21 persons) as they were in 2011-2013. The methods of gathering *data* favored by this paper include: the

² The manner in which the four towns were chosen corresponds to an initial selection based on the demographical and economic criteria, coupled with a convenience selection (i.e., those administrations that responded to the researcher's call).

administration of a standard written questionnaire, document analysis on the minutes of the meetings of the four Councils, and participatory observation during the sessions of the Councils and of their specialized Committees.

III. Results

1. *How elitist is the local political elite in Tecuci, Česká Lípa, Olešnica, and Gyula ?*

Following Eldersveld (1989), the present research asks the question of how “elitist” are the local political elite in Tecuci, Česká Lípa, Olešnica, and Gyula? This does not exclusively refer to the economic status the members of the Local (Municipal) Council display, but also to their general perceptions regarding democratic features such as citizen participation, social mobility, economic equality, and so on, and to the level of congruence between their values and perceptions and those of the people they represent (the electorate). In order to further assess the degree of social mobility within the local political elite, one major indicator analyzed here is the occupation of the fathers’ of members of the Municipal Council. Moreover, the social background of a local representative can provide a hint concerning his perceptions towards poorer sectors of the population, towards the socially disadvantaged. In the case of Tecuci, according to the answers in the questionnaire provided by the members of the Local Council, the majority of the local councilors (78.94%) come from a lower or working class-based background. In such cases, their fathers had only a lower to middle educational level (with only four or eight graduated classes after an elementary education). For Česká Lípa, the Council comprises largely individuals coming from lower and working class families (68%), showing only a very slight difference from Tecuci. For Olešnica, the percentage of councilors coming from a lower, working class background is the lowest amongst the four cases with only 65% bearing such ascendancy, comparable to the members of the Local Council in Gyula who records a proportion of 67% of cases of working class background. The application of “independence” model³ in the case of local political elite in Tecuci, Česká Lípa, Olešnica, and Gyula demonstrates a predominately ascendant social mobility⁴ of the members of the Local Councils. There

³ The “independence model” and the “agglutination model” (proposed by Lasswell (1965, pp. 9) and Putnam (1976, p. 22)) are two opposing approaches of answering the question on why some people enter politics, while others do not. The former refers to the dynamics in which all citizens have the same chances of entering the political elite, and the main consideration of entering politics is that of reflecting the main social cleavages in the society/ community. The latter refers to the dynamics in which only those citizens sharing some special traits enter political elite (e.g. prestige, high social status, high educational level, moral stance, economic prominence, etc.). Consequently, in the case of the “agglutination model”, the levels of ascendant social mobility appear higher, for they illustrate once more the peculiar position of the members of the political elite (in comparison to its constituency).

⁴ “Ascendant social mobility” describes the situation in which the sons/ daughters (in this case, the members of the Municipal Councils) belong to a social class that is superior to the one to which their fathers belonged.

are no descendingly mobile⁵ municipal councilors from a social perspective, and only three cases (15.78%) for Tecuci, eight cases (32%) for Česká Lípa, ten cases (45.45%) for Olešnica, and seven cases (33.33%) for Gyula, of socially immobile⁶. Using Boudon's (1973) formula for the calculation of the rate of ascendant social mobility of local political elite,

$$AM = \frac{\sum n_{ij} \times 100}{N}$$

$$AM = \frac{16 \times 100}{19} = 84.21 \text{ (for Tecuci), } AM = \frac{17 \times 100}{25} = 68 \text{ (for Česká Lípa),}$$

$$AM = \frac{12 \times 100}{22} = 54.54 \text{ (for Olešnica), and } AM = \frac{14 \times 100}{21} = 66.66 \text{ (for Gyula),}$$

The result shows that 84.21% of the members of the Local Council in Tecuci, 68% of the members of the Municipal Council in Česká Lípa, only 31.57% of the members of the Municipal Council in Olešnica, and 41% of the members of the Municipal Council in Gyula are socially and occupationally, in an ascendant social position in comparison to their fathers. The profile of the local councilor in the four cases is completed by other socio-demographical indicators (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1. The professional *status* of the municipal councilors in Tecuci, Česká Lípa, Olešnica, and Gyula

	Tecuci	Česká Lípa	Olešnica	Gyula
Engineer	47.36%	44%		23%
Teacher	21.05%	12%	50% + 8.33% (academics)	46%
Jurist (lawyer, notary public, etc.)	15.78%	12%	8.33%	7%
Physician	5.26%	12%		7%
Welder	5.26%			
Mechanic	5.26%			
Psychologist		4%		
Electrician		4%		
IT Expert		4%		
Architect		4%		
Musician/ artist – painter		4%	8.33%	
Entrepreneur/ businessman			8.33%	
Civil servant			16.66%	17%

⁵ "Descendant social mobility" describes the situation in which the sons/ daughters (in this case, the municipal councilors) belong to a social class that is inferior to the one to which their fathers belonged.

⁶ "Social immobility" describes the situation in which the sons/ daughters (in this case, the local/ municipal councilors) belong to the same social class as the one to which their fathers belonged.

Table 2. The age distribution in the Local/ Municipal Councils of Tecuci, Česká Lípa, Olešnica, and Gyula

	Tecuci	Česká Lípa	Olešnica	Gyula
20-29	0%	8%	0%	0%
30-39	5.26%	24%	7.14%	4%
40-49	31.57%	16%	42.85%	51%
50-59	36.84%	40%	28.57%	23%
60-69	21.05%	12%	21.42%	18%
70-79	5.26%	0%	0%	4%
Over 80	0%	0%	0%	0%

The inquiry into the socio-demographical indicators showed that typically, the profile of the local councilor would feature the following traits:

The typical profile of a local councilor in Tecuci is that of a 52.6 years old married man born in Tecuci, who graduated from a technical or technological university with a degree. He is likely to be a Christian-Orthodox (even though not a devoted practitioner), coming from a lower, working class or peasant family (having, as a result, no other relatives involved in politics), but being himself a member of the middle class with an average income of approximately 42,891 lei yearly. In addition, he likely to be involved in local private business in the sphere of commerce and food industry (73.68% of cases).

The typical profile of a local councilor in Česká Lípa is that of 47.24 years old married man born in Česká Lípa, who graduated with a technological master or advanced degree. He is likely to be a member of the middle class, an atheist (even though informally subscribing to the Christian-like moral construct), with a lower or working class background, with no relatives engaged in politics.

The typical profile of a local councilor in Olešnica is that of a 50.2 years old married man born in Olešnica, who graduated from humanist university studies (generally, a teacher). He is likely to be a Catholic (and a devoted practitioner), coming from a middle class *milleau*, but with no other relatives involved in politics, himself part of the middle class and former activist in the civil society.

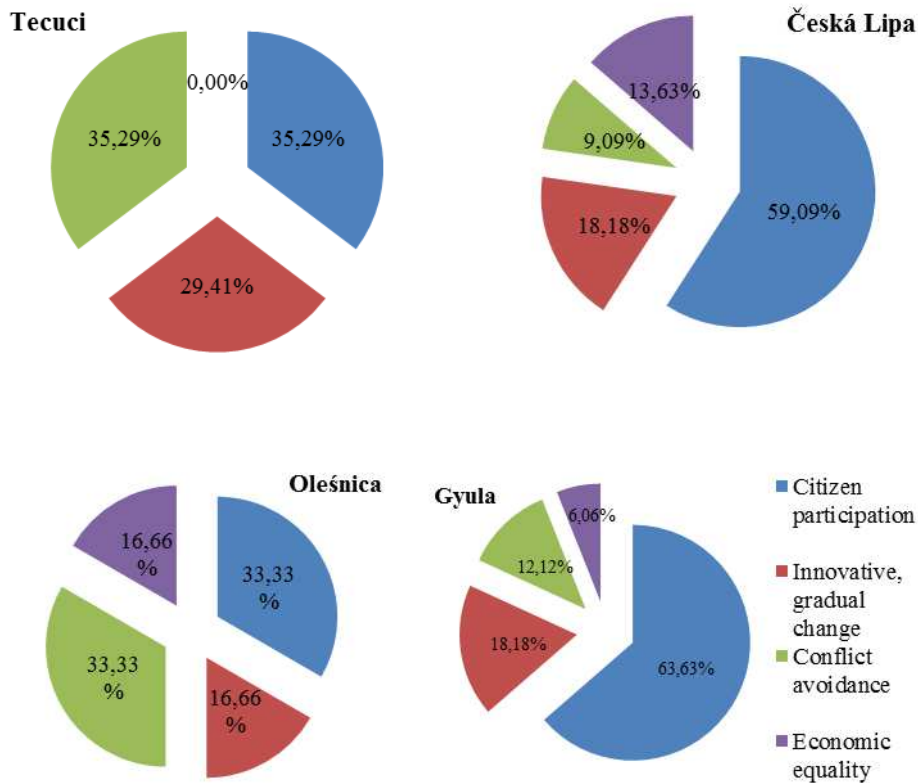
Finally, the typical profile of a local councilor in Gyula is that of a 50.1 years old married man born in Gyula, a graduate of humanist or social sciences university studies. He is likely to be a Protestant Christian (though not a devoted practitioner), coming from a middle class background (the "*petite-bourgeoisie*"), with himself being a member of the middle class, with no relatives engaged in politics.

What is, specifically, the importance of the socio-demographical profile of the local political elite? Marvick is illuminating in this respect: "*If we know how the participants [in the political game] got there, where they came from, by what pathways, what ideas, skills and contacts they acquired or discarded along the way, then we will have a better understanding of political events. [...] [K]nowing their abilities, sensitivities, aims and credentials, we are better able to anticipate what they say and do, and to evaluate elites, institutions and systems performance.*" (Marvick, 1968: 273-282)

2. *The attitudes and orientations of the local councilors in Tecuci, Česká Lípa, Olešnica, and Gyula*

The present research evaluated the attitudes of the local political elite towards four values referring to the fundamentals of the democratic process and quantified by question no. 9 in the administered questionnaire: citizen participation; gradual, innovative change; the importance of the political conflict; and, economic equality. The attitudes of the members of the Local Councils towards state intervention in the economy were also taken into consideration, while a sixth value referred to local autonomy and decentralization, two processes permanently on the agenda of the post-communist governments. The attitudes towards state intervention in economy and local autonomy and decentralization were quantified using an attitudinal intensity scale (I strongly agree with – I agree with – I partially agree with – I disagree with – I strongly disagree with – Don't know/ don't answer).

According to the answers delivered by the local councilors, within a democracy, the most valued features are those of citizen participation (with an average level of acceptance of 47.83%), and gradual change (an average level of acceptance of 20.6%). Economic equality and conflict avoidance pose some interesting problems to the value orientations of these elites. Firstly, there is a clear rejection of economic equality among the local councilors of Tecuci, which can be explained by a syndrome of total detachment, expressed rhetorically, from the *ancién régime*. Secondly, for the local councilors of Tecuci and Olešnica, conflict avoidance is significant, which would hint at a monolithic behavior inside the Council.



Graphs 1, 2, 3, 4. Values orientation of the municipal councilors in Tecuci, Česká Lípa, Olešnica, and Gyula (Q9: “Which of the following characteristics do you value the most in a democracy?”)

From analysing the two values – citizen participation and conflict avoidance – the results show that the members of the Local Councils in Tecuci and Olešnica could be characterized as “populists” (accepting citizen participation as a mark of democracy, but avoiding political conflict); the members of the Municipal Councils in Česká Lípa and Gyula are largely “democrats” (accepting both citizen participation and political conflict as features of democracy) (See Table 4).

Table 3. The features of local leadership, according to its attitudes towards state intervention in economy and economic equality

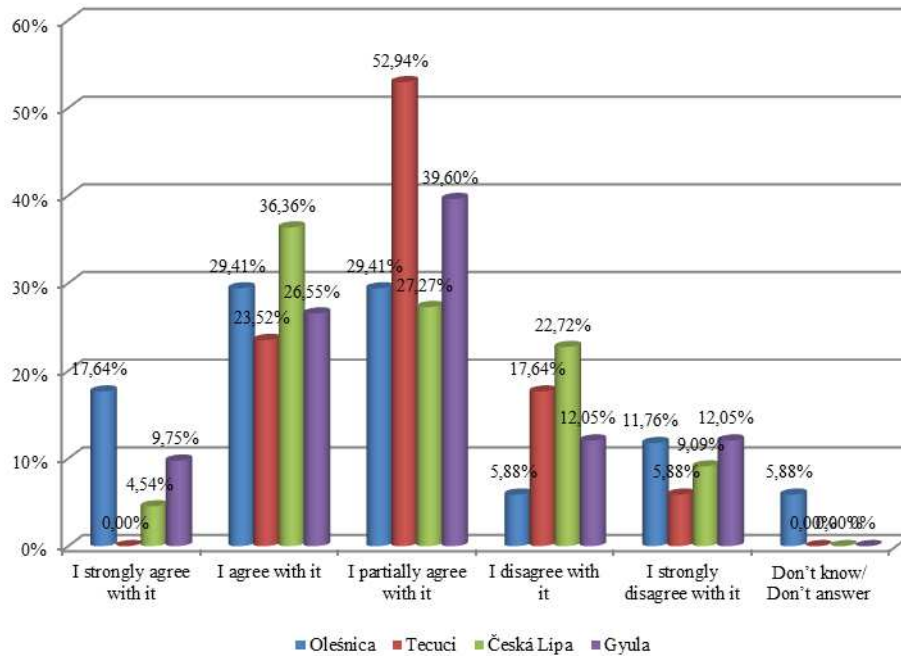
		State intervention in economy	
		Acceptance	Rejection
Economic equality	Acceptance	Statists-egalitarianists	Anti-statists-egalitarianists
	Rejection	Statists-anti-egalitarianists	Anti-statists-anti-egalitarianists

Table 4. The features of local leadership, according to its attitude towards political conflict and citizen participation

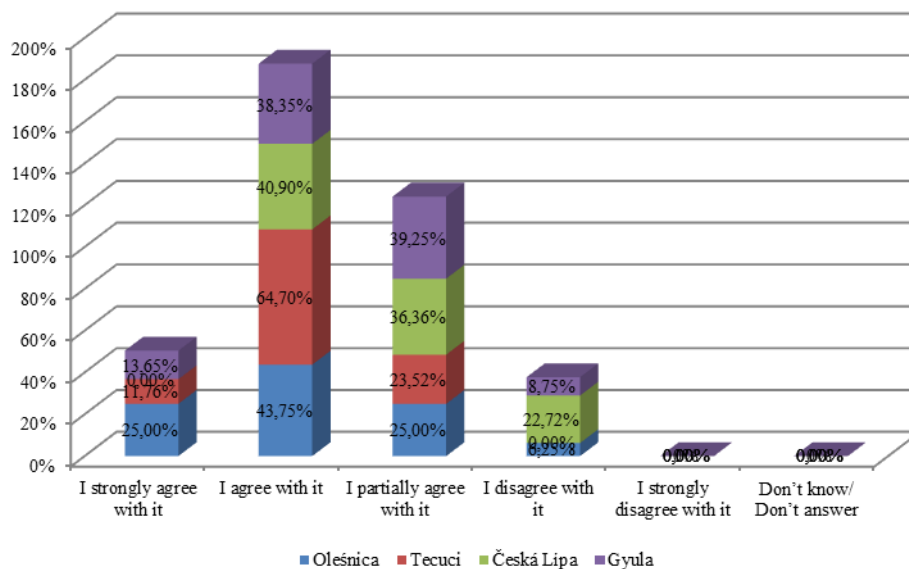
		Political conflict	
		Acceptance	Avoidance
Citizen participation	Acceptance	Democrats	Populists
	Rejection	Pluralists	Authoritarianists

The answers provided in the questionnaire by the members of the Municipal Councils in Tecuci, Česká Lípa, Olešnica, and Gyula, in respect to the state intervention in economy and to the prospects of further decentralization and local autonomy, reveal the following. First, a local leadership in Tecuci who is very enthusiastic about decentralization, sometimes without actually being aware of the whole *palette* of responsibilities that increased decentralization generates, but quite undecided about the idea of the interventionist state (partly because the political elite coincides with the economic elite, and locally, it becomes easier to act as private entrepreneurs, though enjoying the state subsidies). Second, a local leadership in Česká Lípa who presents a real skepticism in respect to an already significantly decentralized distribution of power, and generally favorable to the state intervention in economy, particularly in times of crisis. Third, a local leadership in Olešnica who is much in favor of both the protectionist state and of increased decentralization and local autonomy (with significant proportion of respondents being “strongly in favor” of the two). Fourth, a local leadership in Gyula who generally holds a positive stance towards increased decentralization and its benefits, and a rather cautious stance regarding the state intervention in economy, partly because of the government’s attitude in respect to the most recent financial crisis.

Graph 5. The attitudes of the local councilors in respect to the state intervention in economy (Q10: “How do you perceive state intervention in economy?”)



Graph 6. The attitudes of the local councilors in respect to the prospects of increased decentralization (Q11: “How do you think about greater local autonomy and decentralization, granted by the central authorities?”)



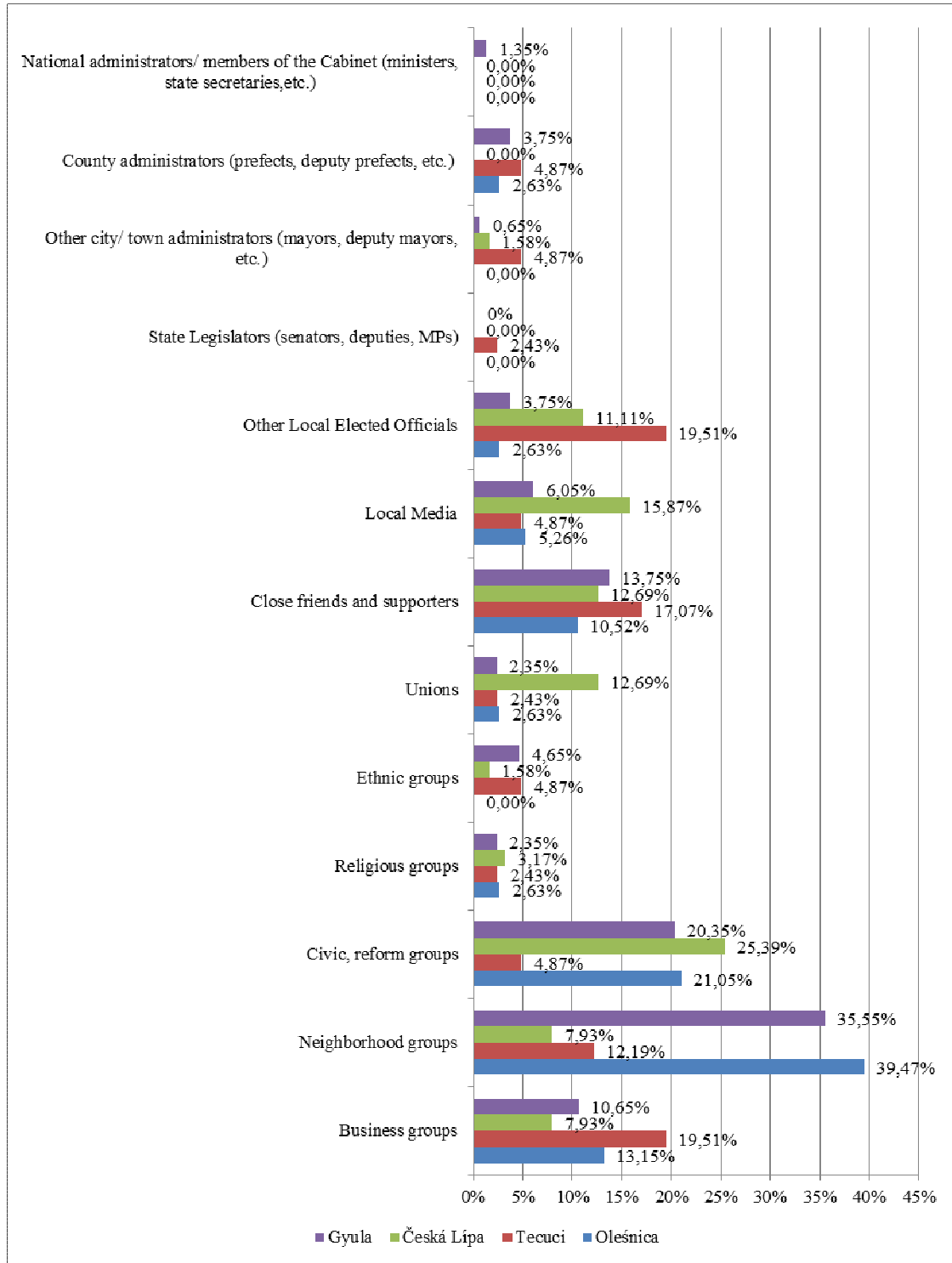
From the analysis of the two value orientations of state intervention in economy and economic equality, it is discovered that on one hand, the members of the Local Councils in Tecuci, Česká Lípa, and Gyula could be coined “statists-anti-egalitarianists” (largely accepting the state intervention in economy, particularly in times of crisis, but rejecting economic equality as a mark of a working democracy). On the other hand, the members of the Municipal Council in Olešnica could be labeled as “statists-egalitarianists” (accepting both the protectionist state and economic equality as a feature of democracy, hence the general idea of the “welfare society”) (See Table 3).

3. *The interactions and contacts of the local councilors in Tecuci, Česká Lípa, Olešnica, and Gyula, with other groups*

The present study proposes a rather dynamic approach to the analysis of local elite’s interactions with other groups and institutions, in which the members of the Local/ Municipal Councils were asked to answer the question about interactions in their capacity as individuals (i.e., as businessmen, as neighbors, as members of some families, as influential persons within the community, as persons trying to change the existing situation of the town, etc.) for better. In this evaluation, the Local/ Municipal Councils were not perceived as comprehensive, unified local institutions, establishing formal contacts, in a legal and conventional manner, with other institutions and with groups of individuals; rather, they were seen as groups of individuals, part of the local political elite, each of them preserving and forming network of interactions with different other groups. Moreover, when trying to advance their own or their community’s interests, these people become dependent on certain groups or persons, therefore establishing inevitable interactions.⁷ In addition, the frequency, nature, and content of the different interactions local political elites establish and maintain are of veritable significance for drafting and advancing the policy agenda locally and for prioritization strategy, generally.

⁷ The main intention was only a hierarchical ranking and classification of thirteen groups with which a local councilor is prone to establish stable interactions. These are business groups, neighborhood groups, civic and reform groups, religious groups, ethnic groups, trade unions, close friends and supporters, local media, other local elective officials, state legislators (senators, MPs), other town administrators (mayors, deputy mayors), county/ regional administrators (prefects, deputy prefects) and members of the national executives (ministers, state secretaries, etc.). The selection of these thirteen groups was based on the “Lecture II” of S. Eldersveld’s study *Political Elites in Modern Societies* (1989: 62) (nine out of his fifteen groups were used in the present research, while the other four came as a logical result of Romanian, Czech, Polish, and Hungarian legal realities).

Graph 7. The interactions and contacts of the local councilors (Q8: “To which of the following groups do you have the most numerous contacts/ interactions?”)



The results of the questionnaire administered on the members of the four Local/Municipal Councils might be relevant in the construction of the networks of power at the local level for each of the four cases. However, due to the space limits of this paper, a series of observations will be drawn solely from the proportion (and, hence, the impact) of each of the thirteen groups out of the total number of interactions established by the local political elite in each town. Therefore, a first remark that can be easily drawn from the analysis of the results is the increased (geographical) isolation of the four groups of local political elites: the contacts with those groups that transcend the limits of the constituency (i.e., those with the national administrators, with county administrators, with other city / town administrators, with state legislators, etc.) account, generally, for only 1.38312% of the total number of interactions of the elite group. The most isolated (i.e., confined to their own constituency) are the municipal councilors in Česká Lípa (with an average of 0.395% of the interactions focused only on other town administrators, such as mayors), and Olešnica (with an average of 0.6575% of the contacts concentrated solely on county administrators, such as the voivodes). In fact, these two elite groups have no contacts with the national level and only sporadic interactions at the regional level. The level of geographic isolation decreased with the local elites in Gyula which is the only elite among the four cases to maintain relations with the central administration (with an average of 1.4375% of the total number of interactions) and Tecuci, which is the only elite out of the four elite groups to preserve its contacts with the state legislators (with an average of 3.0425% of the contacts). Usually, geographical – accompanied by an elitist – isolation indicates an elite that is particularly interested in the problems within the community it governs, having, at the same time, the necessary political power and discretion to decide on policy agenda and policy making and implementation locally. Equally valid is the fact that conveying local problems to the regional or central levels, in those cases in which reaching a solution locally would necessitate three-tiered approach, is of paramount importance in the dynamics of interactions and contacts between elites situated at different levels. In those constituencies in which political power and responsibility in decision-making appears insufficient to the local elites, the increased frequency of contacts exceeding the limits of the governed community is evident (e.g., Tecuci).

The special case of the ethnic and religious groups bears a veritable significance in multicultural communities, where leadership are able to channel the diversity of grievances and needs of the members of minorities and, sometimes, to influence the local agenda setting, particularly in the cultural sphere. Nevertheless, the actual impact of ethnic and religious groups (mainly, minority groups, but also the organized representatives of the religious majority) is terribly undermined in ethnically and religiously homogeneous communities, as it is largely the situation of the four towns under scrutiny. Understandably, the average significance of the interactions of the four elite groups with the ethnic groups is 2.775% of the total number of contacts, whereas the average significance of the interactions with the religious groups is 2.645%. The

political elites in Olešnica maintain no formal relation with the fairly small German minority, while the relations with the mainly Catholic organizations in the town account for only 2.63% of the whole *palette* of the elite's relations. For the municipal councilors in Česká Lípa, the contacts with the small Slovak minority represent only 1.58% of the contacts, while the contacts with the Protestants and the Catholics are equally insignificant. This is somehow paradoxical, given the fact that the majority of Czechs are atheistic.

4. *The priorities of the local councilors in Tecuci, Česká Lípa, Olešnica, and Gyula*

The following observations are meant to identify and to sketch the public agenda of the members of the Local/ Municipal Councils in Tecuci, in Česká Lípa, in Olešnica, in Gyula, by pointing out, based on the answers provided in the questionnaires, their priorities in solving certain problems the four towns confront and the level of importance they give to different local problems.

Table 5. The priorities of the municipal councilors (Q4: “To which of the field below do you consider a special attention should be given?”; Q5: “In which of the fields below do you consider significant measures can be taken at the local level (that sufficient political power exists at the local level for ensuring beneficial changes?”; Q6: “In which of the fields below do you consider efficient and beneficial measures had been already taken in your town during the last years?”; Q7: “On which of the fields below do you consider you are able to exercise a personal influence in taking effective measures?”)

The study and the administered questionnaire differentiate between four forms of prioritization: (a) spheres to which a special importance should be granted (political responsiveness and policy prognosis); (b) spheres in which considerable measures can be taken at the local level (political/ policy power and responsibility); (c) spheres in which effective measures had already been taken (political accountability and policy diagnosis), and (d) spheres in which the local councilor exerts a personal influence (personal responsibility and influence). For the four cases selected, the strategy prioritization focuses generally on economic equality (an average score of 21.0275%) and social services, including housing and unemployment (an average score of 19.8225%). To some degree less important, though still prioritized are such spheres of activity at the local level as education (an average score of 16.6575%) and public improvements (an average score of 16.43%). The least important for the strategy prioritization of the four local political elites are, predictably, minority rights/ interethnic relations (an average score of 2.6075%) and pollution (an average score of 2.875%).

A special attention should be paid on those indicators of policy prognosis and policy power/ responsibility. Hence, though the elites in Tecuci assign an increased importance to the so-called “hard” spheres of competence in local government (public improvements – 16.98%; public safety – 16.98%, and economic development – 24.52%), they consider that there resides power to implement changes locally only in such rather “soft” domains as: culture, sport and recreation/ youth activities (20.33%) and social services (18.64%). A sentiment of political impotence among those cases of less-decentralized elites is that although they identify quite clearly and pertinently the spheres in which important measures should be taken locally, they are either unwilling or irresponsible to operate changes for their communities in key spheres, vital for the development of their constituencies. Conversely, for both Česká Lípa and Olešnica, – the two cases in which significant degrees of decentralization improved the level of responsibility at the level of local policy and comprehensive and effective prioritization –, the local political elites tend to equate the spheres in which a special importance should be granted with those spheres in which considerable measures can be taken at the local level: e.g., public improvements (24.19% to 6.98%, for Česká Lípa, and 11.9%, for both indicators, in the case of Olešnica), social services (30.64% to 23.8%, for Česká Lípa,

and 16.66%, for both indicators for Olešnica), economic development (22.58% to 14.28%, for Česká Lípa, and 16.66%, for both indicators in the case of Olešnica). Measures already operated have been undertaken in those “hard” spheres, as well: public improvements and social services (23.07% and 25%, respectively, for Česká Lípa; 21.19% and 19.04%, respectively, for Olešnica). Once more, the policy responsibility and prioritization are indicated as higher for the highly decentralized local political elites.

A constant policy concern for local decision-makers, irrespective of the town they govern, is that of public safety, understood basically as policing and civilian intervention and management in case of emergency. The importance assigned to public safety is similar throughout the four cases: 16.98% for Tecuci; 3.22% for Česká Lípa; 4.76% for Olešnica; 4.25% for Gyula, with an average of 7.3025% importance locally.

Somehow expectedly, the local focus of decision-makers diverges from such policy domains as pollution and interethnic relations and minority rights. First, given the absence of significant minority groups, the need for policy in this sphere is lower, i.e., in ethnically homogeneous communities, the importance of minority rights policies decreases, while in ethnically heterogeneous communities, policies in the sphere of minority rights are significant. Secondly, the importance of environmental matters and pollution in developing countries – as is the case with those in East-Central Europe – is still a topic of debate; moreover, in small urban settings, the matter of pollution does not pose considerable hardship in decision-making, though perceived as a liability.

IV. An attempted typology of local political elites in ECE

Based on the observations drawn from the four cases under scrutiny, regarding the local elites’ socio-demographical profile, the attitudes and orientations they display, their interactions with other groups, and their prioritization strategy at the community level, the present paper advances a tentative threefold typology, meant to isolate and to systematize the main differences between the cases. Consequently, the proposed taxonomy differentiates among: (1) “predominantly elitistic” local elites, (2) “democratic elitist” local elites, and (3) “predominantly democratic” local elites.

The “predominantly elitistic” (e.g., Tecuci) are those elites characterized by a significant degree of “elite distinctiveness”, i.e., perceiving themselves, as a group or individually, as separate from the bulk of the town’s population, as part of a special, superior caste of notables and local potentates, hence prone to favor the clear gap between the rulers and the ruled. Enjoying considerable levels of prestige and reputation, this type of local elites display however a sense of reluctance in effectively dealing with the community’s main problems, on the basis that power at the local level is insufficient to allow the leadership here to implement change. Therefore, it might be concluded that the “predominately elitist” local leadership corresponds to those communities presenting low degrees of decentralization and local autonomy. Additionally, the “predominantly elitistic”

local elites are tightly linked to a “political” model, for their recruitment is almost exclusively intramural, all those comprising the local leadership being party members and benefiting from the otherwise indispensable support of the party, whose local branches are highly dependent of the central one. Interestingly, the “predominantly elitistic” groups are those that most closely approximate the Aristotelian *desideratum* in their construction, conception and self-perception: they tend to adhere to an “ethical” model of the ideal local councilor, at least declaratively cherishing moral attributes that would provide them with some sort of moral superiority as prime marks of distinctiveness in respect to their constituency, to the population of their community.

The “democratic elitist” (e.g., Česká Lípa) are those elites whose traits and profiles point to some form of *aurea mediocritas* between a sense of distinctiveness and the prestige they enjoy within the community, on the one hand, and the effective and meaningful dedication to their community’s developmental plans, on the other hand. As such, though they form a “caste” of notables within the town and are hardly representative to the population of the establishments they lead, in socio-demographical terms, they can act decisively for the benefit of their town due to a considerable degree of local autonomy and decentralized prerogatives, responsibilities and attributions. The local councilors of the “democratic elitist” sort remain still largely dependent on the support of the political parties, but the local parties appear independent in respect to their central branch. Occasionally, “democratic elitist” type corresponds to intramural recruitment of locally-established parties, splinters or other quite localized political movements and organizations, responding to extremely specific needs and demands or describing relatively strong political localism and allowing for factionalism and decentralized, territorialized “back-bencher”-ism. In addition, the “democratic elitist” group overlaps with a rather “pragmatic” or “technocratic” model of the local councilor, as the most cherished attributes of the leadership come to be the professionalism of the local leadership, its capacity in decision-making, policy designing and problem-solving.

“Predominantly democratic” (e.g., Olešnica and Gyula) are those elites featuring a sense of identification with the masses, with the ordinary citizens of the community they happen to represent temporarily, a dominating “social sensitivity” that would determine their propensity towards social security and welfare strategies in local leadership. This type of local elites is juxtaposed to a tradition of decentralization and devolution mechanisms that permit them to identify and to implement policies responding to the needs of the town. The “predominantly democratic” type of local elites is probably the closest to the population it represents in terms of descriptive representation⁸, for it may

⁸ “Descriptive representation” refers to that type of representativeness underpinned on the mirroring of socio-demographical characteristics of the electorate/ constituency (ethnicity, gender, place of birth, age, religion, educational, marital status, etc.) into those of the elected representatives (Pitkin, 1967). The importance of “descriptive” (or “passive”) representativeness at the local level is confirmed by various empirical endeavors, among which: Browning, Marshall, & Tabb, 1984; Fraga, Meier, & England, 1986; Meier & Stewart, 1991; Meier et al., 2005.

include persons of lower education, or people previously involved in directly advocating for the interests of some segments in the community (pupils, women, unemployed, workers, etc.). These local leaders are usually quite familiar with the problems their town confronts with, being especially concerned with social issues (e.g., unemployment, social benefits, housing, etc.). The methods of recruiting elites in this context are highly inclusive, but the actual specificity of these elites is the extramural fashion (i.e., selection of candidates from outside the party cadres) in which they are selected, as their political affiliation is futile, if existent. The role of the party in the recruitment process, either local or central branches, is virtually insignificant. Consequently, the “predominantly democratic” local elites correspond to rather “pragmatic” and “moral” profiles, while the “political” model is virtually absent in their case.

V. Tentative explanations

As presented above, the present study advances a threefold classification of local political leadership, whose underpinnings employ mainly two explanatory variables: (a) the level of administrative-fiscal decentralization specific for each of the countries under scrutiny, and (2) the “legacy” of the former communist regime, expressed through the type of “elite political culture” (Jowitt, 1999). For the level of administrative-fiscal decentralization, the paper favors a rather reductionist approach on fiscal, expenditure-based decentralization, although it acknowledges the importance of various other forms of decentralization (vertical, decision-making, appointment, electoral, fiscal, personnel – Treisman, 2002; administrative v. political; territorial v. technical – Apostol Tofan, 2008; vertical v. horizontal; functional v. territorial – Stoica, 2003; internal v. external). For this purpose, it employs the average indexes of decentralization currently utilized by the World Bank and the IMF in the issuing of their annual reports⁹, operationalizing “decentralization” as the subnational share of general government expenditure. In order to properly account for the differences in the level of fiscal-administrative decentralization among the four cases, this paper adds to these indexes three thresholds: (a) a significant level of administrative and fiscal decentralization describes the countries whose average subnational share of general expenditure is higher than 50%; (b) a standard level of decentralization is specific for those countries with an average local and regional share of general government expenditure is higher than 30%, but lower than 50%; and (c) a low level of decentralization characterizes the countries with a subnational share of general government expenditure lower than 30%.

⁹ Along a series of domains of considerable interest at the local level (infrastructure, education, healthcare, public security, transportation, social services (including housing and unemployment relief), cultural and recreational activities, etc.), it evaluates the extent to which they are dealt with nationally, regionally and locally. This evaluation is constructed primarily based on pieces of legislation, bylaws, internal regulations of different administrative and executive bodies, as well as on some empirical endeavors undertaken by the World Bank and the IMF expertise.

Table 6. The proportion of subnational share of general government expenditure (expressed as percentage from the total national budget)

	Public order & Safety	Education	Health	Social Security & Welfare	Housing & Communal Amenities	Recreation & Culture	Transportation & Communication	Average
BULGARIA	2.17	59.53	44.11	8.30	68.95	26.69	12.19	31.70%
CZECH REPUBLIC	17.20	17.22	5.98	8.03	68.47	61.89	46.53	32.18%
HUNGARY	6.86	46.99	44.83	11.99	74.10	43.97	27.64	36.62%
POLAND	34.30	72.47	87.36	17.49	86.92	76.13	65.34	62.85%
ROMANIA	4.80	9.23	0.36	2.97	83.01	34.74	17.55	21.80%
SLOVAKIA	5.69	2.40	0.26	0.49	56.74	27.00	18.78	15.90%

(Source: International Monetary Fund, *Government Finance Statistics Yearbook*, IMF, Washington, D.C., 2001. The data is selected only for the countries of East-Central Europe, former satellites of USSR.)

Conclusively, (a) for the significant level of fiscal-administrative decentralization, the Polish case is representative; (b) the standard level of decentralization fits the Czech and the Hungarian cases, whereas (c) the low level of decentralization is specific to the Romanian case.

Recent studies have shown the impact of decentralization *formulae* on the outlook and the role of local political elites. Such an empirical concern has been focused primarily on Latin America, South Asia (Beard, Mirafab, and Silver, 2008; Smoke, Gómez, and Peterson, 2006; Burki, Perry, and Dillinger, 1999; Escobar-Lemmon, 2003; Bardhan, 2002; Garman, Haggard, and Willis, 2001; Falleti, 2005 etc.), and Africa (Cottingham, 1970), while the topic has been generally neglected for the developing democracies of East-Central Europe. Dora Orlansky (2000: 196) discusses the impact of decentralization upon the power-sharing between the central and the local administrative layers and upon the extent of political power and responsibility local elites are expected to exert. Discussing a series of examples from Africa and South Asia, Devarajan *et al.* (2009: 118-119) refer to the dangers of elite isolation with the increase

in decentralized communities and to shifts in delivery of public services once with the process of decentralization. Quite interestingly, Merilee S. Grindle (2007: 63-105) introduces the example of decentralization in Mexico, concluding that proper fiscal and administrative decentralization can result in high levels of political competition and satisfaction with the living in the town, both at the level of the local elites and the community. It becomes apparent that local leadership modifies its outlook and prioritization strategy in the context of change of administrative organization leading to increased decentralization. Jonathan Rodden (2004) presents the impact of different forms of decentralization upon the city management, but, most importantly, upon the degree of elite isolation and passive representation. Finally, opposing two main approaches in reference to the impact of decentralization policies – the “liberal-individualist” and “statist” approaches¹⁰ –, Aylin Topal (2012) describes forms of elite isolation after the proper implementation of decentralization policies and differences of agenda setting of local elites as response to increased decentralization. The fashion in which the elites adapt their outlook, value orientation and strategy prioritization is partially elaborated in the present paper, with a special focus on particular municipalities in four countries of East-Central Europe: Romania, Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary.

The levels of decentralization may impact the drafting of policy agenda at the local level, the strategy prioritization, the degree of elite isolation (i.e., the insistence on contacts and interactions confined to the governed municipality), some of the value-orientations, etc. Hence, it is expected that a significant level of decentralization would exhibit an equally high degree of elite isolation and would induce an orientation towards the so-called “hard” spheres of activities (e.g., public improvements, infrastructure, economic development, public order, etc.), a considerable degree of political responsibility and responsiveness, and the identification with a rather “pragmatic” and “technocratic” elite profile. On the other hand, it might be easily hypothesized that low levels of decentralization can only result in a geographically open elite, in a focus on rather “soft” spheres of activity and a policy prioritization accordingly (e.g., education, healthcare, culture, youth and recreation activities, etc.), due to a perceived impotence of

¹⁰ The „liberal-individualist” approach on decentralization “promotes decentralization policies on the premises of efficiency, equity, and responsiveness to local demands. [...] [D]ecentralization is the key to implementing the deregulation mechanisms of the state and democratization; decentralization policies open new channels for ethnic minorities and social groups to participate in the policy-making process” (Topal, 2012: 2; see also: World Bank (2004), Adib et al. (eds) (2008), Blair (2000), Bulki, Perry and Dillinger (1999), Campbell (1997, 2003), Guigale and Webb (eds) (2000), Parker and Serrano (2000), Peterson (1997), Ribot (2004)). The “statist” approach on decentralization suggests that “particular state institutions could have significant impact on socioeconomic development” (Topal, 2012: 2; see also: Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, 1985; Bardhan and Mookherjee (eds) (2006), Boone (2003), Dickovick (2007), Eaton, (2003, 2004), Grindle (2009), Montero and Samuels (eds) (2004), O’Neill (2003, 2005), Rodden, Eskeland and Litvack (2003), Rodríguez (1997), Willis, Garman and Haggard (1999)).

implementing change locally and a resulting low level of political responsibility, and the construction of an elite profile concentrated on “ethical” and “political” models.

The second explanatory variable refers to the legacy of the *ancien régime*. In order to operationalize this complex variable, this study utilizes the differentiation operated by Kitschelt *et al.* (1999) between three types of communist dictatorship in the countries of former Sovietized Europe: (1) “national accommodative” communist dictatorship (e.g., Poland and Hungary), (2) “bureaucratic authoritarian” or “welfare” communist dictatorship (Jaraus, 1999) (e.g., Czechoslovakia and East Germany), and (3) “patrimonial” or “modernizing-nationalizing” communist dictatorship (Petrescu, 2010) (e.g., Romania and Bulgaria).

Depending on the type of communist dictatorship faced by each of the four societies under scrutiny here, the elite developed a certain form of “political culture”¹¹, remnant features of which have been traduced, reproduced or preserved outright during the transition and the period of democratic consolidation. The study favors Jowitt’s concept of “elite political culture”¹² (1992: 51-52, and 54-56) to refer to those attitudinal and

¹¹ The definition and operationalization of “political culture” have resulted into an overwhelming diversity in understanding. Even though, almost all the studies tackling the topic of “political culture” revolve around the *spiritus rectores* G. Almond and S. Verba and their pioneering opus magnum *The Civic Culture*, for the specific study of political elites, R. Putnam famously referred to “elite political culture”, defined as some form of attitudinal and behavioral aggregates of the elite group, generally constant, hardly changeable, stable ones; the term accounts for “patterns of beliefs and attitudes [prevalent among the members of the political elite] about the economic, political, social, cultural systems” (Putnam, 1973). In applying the observations drawn from the usage of the concept “elite political culture”, one could only wonder if the four selected groups forming the Municipal Councils of the municipalities of Tecuci, Česká Lípa, Olešnica, and Gyula have acquired a sense of group consciousness as an elite. Such an “elite consciousness” at the local level is difficult to be operationalized and subsequently measured, but some attemptive endeavors might employ such indicators as: the degree of group cohesion, the acknowledgement of some “special” (i.e., specific) traits a local councilor should possess (excepting, of course, the moral, ethical dimension which is by no means one of group or status differentiation in the case of elites). Actually, though rhetorically catchy and discursively fashionable, the ethical image of the political elite, in the sweet Aristotelian tradition, is an obsolete one, and its obsolescence became conspicuous in the literature as early as the beginning of the 20th century, with the famous works of the Italian “elitists”, the trio Pareto – Mosca – Michels.

¹² “Elite political culture” is “a set of informal adaptative (behavioral and attitudinal) postures that emerge as response to and consequence of a given elite’s identity-forming experiences”. Ken Jowitt (1992) defines “elite political culture” somehow in opposition to what he coins as “regime political culture” (i.e. “a set of informal adaptative (behavioral and attitudinal) postures that emerge in response to the institutional definition of social, economic, and political life”) and “community political culture” (i.e. “a set of informal adaptative (behavioral and attitudinal) postures that emerge in response to the historical relationships between regime and community”). For Jowitt, as opposed to any other scholar of “political culture”, the said collocation is actually defined in terms of behavioral analysis of the *ancien régime*: the “political culture” is “the set of informal, adaptative postures – behavioral and attitudinal – that emerge in response to, and interact with, the set of formal definitions – ideological, policy and institutional – that characterize a given level of society.”

behavioral traits inherited from the *ancien régime*, conserved from the central to the local level. For instance, a former “patrimonial” regime would result in an increased monolithism of the new political elites, whereas a “bureaucratic-authoritarian” would produce a political elite who is technocratically-oriented. Finally, a “national-accommodative” former regime is prone to generate in contemporaneity an elite who is rather fragmented, factionalist, allowing for opposition, contestation and certain degree of “back-bencherism”, along with a pragmatic attitude in decision-making and profile identification (see Kitschelt *et al.* 1999 and Jowitt 1992). Moreover, a series of socio-demographical indicators in the elite profile construction are tempered by the nature of the former regime, as is the case, for instance, with the rate of ascendant social mobility, which is generally higher in previously “patrimonial” communist regimes, while decreasing in the case of formerly “bureaucratic-authoritarian” communist dictatorship, where there had existed a small group of “*petite bourgeoisie*”, rather than a large mass of peasants out of which democracy later selected its elites.

V. Concluding remarks

The study proposes and favors the differentiation among three types of elites, underpinned on the specific content of elite political culture and on the set of attributions provided by a certain degree of decentralization:

“**Predominantly elitistic**” (e.g., Tecuci), corresponding to a former “modernizing-nationalizing”, “patrimonial” communist dictatorship, followed by “elite reproduction”, and low levels of administrative decentralization and local autonomy, presently; characterized by a significant degree of “elite distinctiveness”;

“**Democratic elitist**” (e.g., Česká Lípa), corresponding to a defunct “national-accommodative” communist dictatorship, followed by “elite circulation”, and high levels of decentralization and local autonomy, in the present;

“**Predominantly democratic**” (e.g., Olešnica and Gyula), corresponding to a former “bureaucratic-authoritarian”, “welfare” communist dictatorship, followed by “elite circulation”, a tradition of administrative decentralization, and significant levels of local autonomy, nowadays.

Clearly, both the level of decentralization process undertaken in each of the four East-Central European countries (Romania, Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary) and “the legacy” of the old communist regime have generated different outcomes in the local elites’ profile, attitudes, prioritization, and interactions. More significant levels of administrative and fiscal decentralization indicate a more responsible, pragmatic local elite, though largely isolated to the central authorities and sceptical, cautious towards the benefits of decentralization. Conversely, a low level of decentralization is prone to produce an elite who is prepared to acknowledge political responsibility only for those “soft” spheres of policy-design and implementation at the local level; they seem impotent

to act effectively in such local domains as economic and infrastructural development, for instance. Yet, the impact of decentralization on the “impoverishment” of small-to-medium-sized towns – as are those studied here – remains an open question, worthy of proper and comprehensive consideration. Equally, the “elite political culture” generated by each of the three types of defunct communist regime puts a specific imprint on the profile and attitudes of the present local elite in ECE. A background of “modernizing nationalizing” communist dictatorship influences a high level of social mobility among the elites and high degree of monolithism, while a “national accommodative” legacy is conducive to relatively low levels of social mobility and a more favourable attitude to economic equality and gradual change.

As mentioned, the initial intent of the research was predominantly exploratory; with the gathering of the data, the differences pinpointed needed to be accounted for. The resort to two tentative explanations and an attempted typology of local leadership in ECE bears inherently both future research trajectories and limitations for the models proposed here. The envisaged study proposes a more encompassing approach, extended to the cases of other countries of former Sovietized Europe (Bulgaria and Slovakia), employing the tentative typology proposed by the paper, hence further testing its validity. The features, definitions and types of decentralization and the “legacy of the past” differ greatly from one instance to the other. It is particularly this diversity that entails differences in the local “elite (general) outlook”, i.e., its attitudes, priorities, value orientations, interactions, profiles, degree of representativeness, patterns of recruitment, etc. Indeed, the evidence this paper advances refers precisely to the impacts of both the degree of decentralization and the “legacy of the former regime” upon the general portrait of the local political elite. Four such impacts of the two variables are discussed here, namely on: (a) local elite’s socio-demographical profile, (b) local elite’s interactions, (c) local elite’s attitudes towards key features of democracy and the state, and (d) local elite’s strategy prioritization. Nevertheless, these differences in the local elite’s “outlook” in East-Central Europe cannot and should not be traced back to the level of decentralization and the “legacy of the past” alone. Due to the limitations of this study, other, equally important, independent variables explaining the variations for the selected cases, are not considered (e.g., patterns of recruitment, the “system” variables, such as the characteristics of the political and the party systems, the tradition of “decentralization”, etc.), variables which remain instrumental in accounting for the results. The paper acknowledges also other significant limitations, such as: matters of representativeness and significance in the case selection (the actual limits of “the most similar systems” research design); the shortcomings in generalization and statistical analysis, due to the small number of units of analysis; the limits of comparison, due to the actual relevance of the selected cases, and those sprung from the use of the questionnaire as the main method of data collection; the difficult operationalization of “decentralization” and of the “legacy of the past”, etc. While being aware of the important limitations, this endeavor might contribute significantly to the existing literature on the

effects of decentralization and the “legacy of the past” on the portrait of the local leadership in East-Central Europe. Further research on other countries and regions undergoing processes of decentralization or democratization (e.g., Latin America, south-east Asia, India, etc.) might add a comparative note to the present endeavor.

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Spheres in which the LC exerts a personal influence	Gyula	20.65%	20.65%	3.05%	15.65%	14.55%	10.35%	1.05%	1.05%	26.65%
	Olešnica	21.62%	21.62%	2.7%	16.21%	8.10%	2.7%	0%	0%	27.02%
	Česká Lípa	35.48%	12.9%	9.67%	3.22%	19.35%	9.67%	3.22%	0%	6.45%
	Tecuci	33.33%	9.09%	3.03%	12.12%	9.09%	21.21%	0%	6.06%	6.06%
Spheres in which effective measures had been already taken	Gyula	18.25%	18.75%	3.75%	9.65%	19.25%	3.65%	2.35%	13.75%	23.05%
	Olešnica	21.19%	19.04%	4.76%	4.76%	19.04%	0%	2.38%	0%	23.8%
	Česká	19.23%	0%	0%	23.07%	25%	7.69%	1.92%	0%	23.07%
	Tecuci	14.58%	10.41%	2.08%	8.33%	20.83%	6.25%	6.25%	10.41%	20.83%
Spheres in which considerable measures can be taken at the local level	Gyula	23.45%	19.05%	9.45%	3.75%	17.05%	15.75%	2.35%	5.45%	15.75%
	Olešnica	11.90%	21.42%	9.52%	4.76%	16.66%	16.66%	4.76%	0%	14.23%
	Česká Lípa	26.98%	4.76%	3.17%	19.04%	23.8%	14.28%	1.58%	1.58%	4.76%
	Tecuci	13.55%	13.55%	10.16%	11.86%	18.64%	5.08%	0%	6.77%	20.33%
Spheres to which a special importance should be granted	Gyula	12.65%	20.45%	8.35%	4.25%	24.45%	20.35%	3.25%	5.05%	13.25%
	Olešnica	11.9%	21.42%	9.52%	4.76%	16.66%	16.66%	4.76%	0%	14.28%
	Česká	24.19%	9.67%	4.83%	3.22%	30.64%	22.58%	1.61%	1.61%	1.61%
	Tecuci	16.98%	15.09%	11.32%	16.98%	7.54%	24.52%	1.88%	3.77%	1.88%
		Public improvements	Education	Health care	Public safety	Social services ¹³	Economic development	Pollution	Minorities rights and interethn	Culture, sport, recreation and youth