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Cleavages and political pluralism in the small municipality in Czech Republic

Sylvie Kobzev Kotaskova*, Czech University of Life Sciences, Faculty of Economics and Management, Kamýcka 129,165 21, Prague, Czech Republic.

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Abstract

This paper deals with the issue of the existence cleavages in rural communities in the Czech Republic. The paper is focused on an analysis of the party system in small municipality Kamenna and the pluralism and the political environment in the municipality of Kamenna. This paper aims to clarify the formation of cleavage in the given municipality. A partial aim is to analyse the voting behaviour in the municipality, as well as a subsequent evaluation of the political participation of the residents of the Kamenna municipality. In the analysis of voting behaviour, the paper focuses on analysing the dispersion of electoral votes and subsequent evaluation of how voters vote.

Keywords: Pluralism, Municipality, Cleavages, Political Process, Municipal Elections

* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Sylvie Kobzev Kotásková**, Czech University of Life Science, Faculty of Economics and Management, Kamýcká 129, 165 21, Prague, Czech Republic. *E-mail address:* kotaskova@pef.czu.cz / Tel.: +420 606 832 119

1. Introduction

The concept of cleavages, referred to as “konfliktní linie” in Czech literature, constitutes a conflict of the different interests of several groups of citizens, around which political entities can be created in the form of political parties or associations of independent candidates. Cleavages can be referenced assuming that the discrepancy between groups of citizens grows into an open, long-lasting conflict. The conflict then grows into a political issue helping to shape the relevant political parties (Cmejrek, Bubenicek & Copik, 2010; Bubenicek & Kubalek 2010).

The political environment in rural areas of the Czech Republic has a certain instability of local party systems and an absence of local party structures (Jüptner, 2006; Balik, 2009). Lists of candidates in small municipalities in the Czech Republic are often incomplete, and the occurrence of independent candidates on the candidate lists is also normal. This situation is due to the unwillingness of local residents to actively participate in the local political process, and the subsequent instability of local political entities. Candidate lists are very often created just before the elections, and the resulting candidate entities may then not necessarily reach a consensus with regard to the leading the municipality (Cmejrek, Bubenicek & Copik, 2010).

During municipal elections in small municipalities in the Czech Republic, there is a tendency to see personalized voting instead of voter support for an entire candidate list (Kopriva, 2010). Voters tend to rather identify with persons, i.e. the opinions of a specific candidate, and prefer such a candidate without taking into consideration the party affiliation or political programme of the relevant political party (Kopriva & Kotaskova, 2014).

2. Aim and methodology

The aim of the paper is to explain the formation of cleavage in the selected municipality. The aim of this case study is to examine and interpret the local cleavage and its relation to the case of small Czech municipalities. A partial aim is to analyse the use of preferential votes for candidates who run for the post of councillors in municipal elections in the Czech Republic.

The work is created based on data from the Czech Statistical Office. Specifically, it refers to the election results of municipal council elections in 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010 and 2014 in the municipality of Kamenna. Data from the election server are then processed analytically and compared. The research includes semi-structured interviews with representatives of the municipality and civic activists in Kamenna.

3. Characteristics of the municipality

The municipality of Kamenna is located in the South Bohemia Region in the České Budějovice District in the so-called Sudetenland. After World War II, almost all of the region’s original German inhabitants were expelled. Before the end of the war, the number of the residents in the municipality numbered 720 persons. After the war after the Germans were expelled, new residents began to move to Kamenna, who came mainly from the poorer classes. These residents were attracted by allocated land and abandoned property, and after the war a large group of settlers from Slovakia also moved to Kamenna. Many Romanian Czechs also came to the municipality (Kamenna Chronicle). The majority of these residents and their children live in the municipality today. At present, the population of Kamenna is 310 people (CSO). The municipality establishes a unit, voluntary municipal fire brigade with local operations, which ensures the implementation of the intervention in the cadastral municipality.

4. Analytical part

In Kamenna there is pluralism in the party system in all elections to the municipality council (1998, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014), wherein the number of candidates exceeded the number of representatives. The existence of a pluralistic environment index is also suggested by the Index of Effective Number of Parties (Table 1).

Table 1. Pluralism in the municipality

Kamenna	1998	2002	2006	2010	2011	2014
Candidate list	2	3	3	3	4	3
Number of elected representatives	7	7	7	7	7	7
Number of candidates	10	15	16	23	36	25
➔ Number of Independent Candidates	10	15	16	23	36	25
Candidates/representatives (pi)	1.4	2.1	2.3	3.3	5.1	3.6
Index of Effective Number of Parties	1.7	2.0	2.0	2.6	3.8	2.9

Source: own processing based on data from the Czech Statistical Office

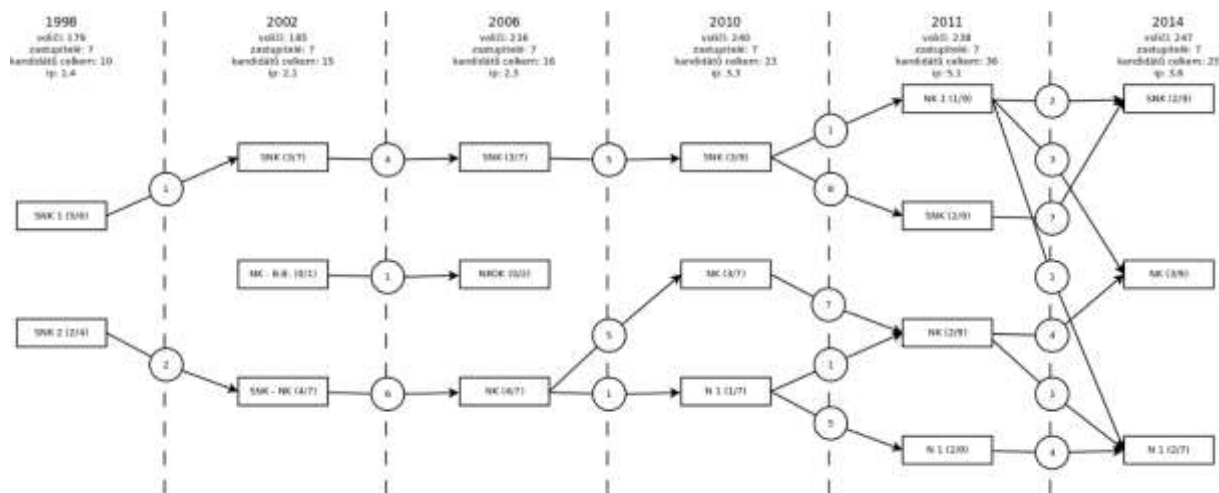
In Kamenna, the pluralism of the political environment continues to increase, the cause being the effort to obtain a representative seat, which subsequently caused increasing rivalry between candidates. The values of the Index of Effective Number of Parties, which are increasing, are an indication of the fragmentation of the party system.

In 2002, an independent candidate ran who received the minimum number of votes. This was reflected in the Index of Effective Number of Parties, whereas there are three candidate lists. In 2006, the situation was repeated; although this same independent candidate had two candidates on the candidate list, he again received the minimum number of votes. The Index of Effective Number of Parties achieved its highest values in 2011, during which repeat elections took place and four political entities ran for office. The plurality index also has a steadily increasing tendency. In the repeated municipal elections in 2011, the plurality index reached a value of 5.1.

It arises from the Act on Municipalities (No. 491/2001 Coll.) that if the number of representatives in a municipality is less than or equal to seven, the number of candidates on the list can be up to one third higher. Thus, up to nine candidates could be on the candidate list in Kamenna. A situation where the number of all candidates on the candidate lists was equal to nine occurred in the repeat elections in 2011.

The continuity of candidacy and its development in Kamenna during elections to the municipal council is shown in Figure 1 below. The diagram shows the number of candidates from the total number of nominees who acquired the mandate for each election held in the municipality. The diagram outlines the development of the party system and transfers of candidates between candidate lists across election years. Continuity of candidacy can help to identify the size of the so-called “core” of a particular political entity. From the diagram can also be inferred the affinity of the candidate lists. Data on the number of voters is specified for each election year, as well as the number of elected representatives and data on the breadth of the party system identified using the plurality index (pi) (Cmejrek, Bubenicek & Copik, 2010).

Fig 1: The development of the local party system in Kamenna



Note:

SNK ... Association of Independent Candidates

SNK – NK ... Association of Independent Candidates – Independent Candidates

NK – B. B. ... Independent candidate Bohuslav Bašta

NK ... Independent Candidates

NKOK ... Independent Candidates of the Municipality of Kamenna

N1 ... Independent 1

Source: own processing based on data from the Czech Statistical Office

The diagram shows that the local party system in Kamenna is only counting on the Association of Independent Candidates. There is a confrontation of two groups of citizens in the municipality. The schematic development also points out the fact that there are two “rival” groups in Kamenna. One group of residents is formed around the former mayor of the municipality, and the second group around the current mayor of the municipality. In 2011 during the repeat elections, two related candidate lists were created in order to ensure the maximum possible support (interview).

The coefficients of variation values in Table 2 also show that voters in Kamenna tend to prefer a particular candidate, thus leading to cleavage of residents based on the support of the current and former mayor. The rate of use of preferential votes can be assessed by calculating the coefficients of

variation of preferential votes for individual candidates and parties in elections to the municipal council (Kopriva, 2010; Kopriva & Kotaskova, 2014).

Table 2: Coefficients of variation in elections to the municipal council

Kamenna				
1998	SNK1	SNK2		
	5	2		
VK	0.1	0.55		
2002	N.K.-B.B	SNK2	SNK - NK	
	0	3	4	
VK	Not possible	0.32	0.32	
2006	NK	NK o. K.	SNK	
	4	0	3	
VK	0.29	0	0.29	
2010	NK	N1	SNK	
	3	1	3	
VK	0.16	0.3	0.44	
2011	NK	NK1	N1	SNK
	2	1	2	2
VK	0.29	0.75	0.53	0.33
2014	N 1	NK	SNK	
	2	3	2	
VK	0.40	0.45	0.60	

Source: own processing based on data from the Czech Statistical Office

In municipal elections from 1998 to 2014, a total of 18 candidate lists were created. The values of coefficients of variation amounting to 0.2 indicate low dispersion of preferential votes for individual candidates compared to the average number of votes per candidate on the list. The values of the coefficient of variation up 0.2 were achieved in only three cases. This was a candidate list of the Association of Independent Candidates in 1998, the Independent Candidates of Kamenna in 2006 and Independent Candidates in 2010. In these three cases the dispersion of votes received by candidates on the list was imperceptible. It is therefore very likely that the parties obtained the majority of these votes on the basis of support for the entire party candidate list. An independent candidate ran in the municipal elections in 2002, and the coefficient of variation for his candidate list can therefore not be calculated.

For all other political entities, the coefficient of variation reaches higher values than 0.2. Values slightly higher than 0.2 generally show that the amount granted preferential votes for the best candidate is more than double compared to the least successful candidate on the same candidate list. Therefore, electoral support for political parties arises through the support of less than half by voting for the entire candidate list. In addition, it can also be assumed that there will be more voters who grant

preferential votes to individual candidates, as generally each voter will only give a few preferential votes to an individual candidate list (the voter does not use all of his available votes).

For coefficients of variation where the value is higher than 0.3, there can be no doubt that a greater number of voters selected specific candidates (selected different candidates from different lists of candidates within elections), and a lesser number of voters voted for the entire candidate list. The highest coefficient of variation values were achieved in the repeat elections in 2011, specifically 0.75 for Independent Candidates 1. A candidate was elected to the Kamenna municipal council from the fourth spot on the candidate list; the only obtained mandate was from the candidate list of Independent Candidates 1.

When looking at the overall electoral support of individual political entities in Kamenna, it is evident that the voting for individual candidates prevails over voting for entire party lists.

Cleavages are generally constituted by the dominant discrepancy affecting the forming party systems in small municipalities. Cleavages are subsequently caused by identifiable cleavages that affect the formation of plurality of local political spectrums (Cmejrek, Bubenicek & Copik, 2010)

It arises from the development of the elections to the Kamenna municipal council that the local political environment corresponds to the specifics of small municipalities. The party system in Kamenna is unstable. The pluralistic environment in Kamenna has been registered since 1998. The results of the pluralistic environment in the municipality are different personal interests and mutual antipathy of the persons running for election to the municipal council. However, explaining the creation of the pluralistic environment in the municipality based on the conflicting behaviour of individual actors may be largely misleading (Bubenicek & Kubalek 2010). Assuming that the dispute is defined as a confrontation between disparate ideas for future development that may be associated with specific personalities in the municipality, political parties, the Association of Independent Candidates or so-called "Cores" (Juptner, 2004), then we can talk about cleavage, or a stable discrepancy.

In order to determine the main actors of cleavages in Kamenna, it was first necessary to analyse the continuity of candidacy. Using FIG 1, it was possible to identify the origin of the "core" of persons, and the affinity of the political parties. Pluralism in Kamenna is recorded since the 1998 election, when two rival groups of local residents the municipality were created. The division of residents into two groups still persists. The first group of residents are represented by the former mayor Marian Kutlak and his supporters. The second group of residents is represented by current mayor Josef Bašta. In 2006, Marian Kutlak was re-elected mayor, and was subsequently accused of a lack of initiative in favour of the municipality, and of having little interest in the political events in the municipality. The conflict between the two mayors, hence the two groups of residents, escalated during the election in 2010, when supporters of Marian Kutlak and Joseph Bašta were re-elected to the council. Three mandates were acquired by the supporters of Marian Kutlak, and four for the supporters of Josef Bašta. The representatives and their alternates, who supported Marian Kutlak, including Marian Kutlak himself, resigned. According to the Act on Municipalities (No. 128/2000 Coll.), the existing council had almost no powers, and it was necessary to call new/repeat elections. In the repeat elections in 2011, four Associations of Independent Candidates ran. Of the four running parties, only two parties were competing against each other. The remaining two parties served as support for the affiliated candidate list (interview - municipal councillor). The fact that there is a mutual personal antipathy is evident from the election programmes of the associations, which are almost identical. The importance of the elections in 2011 for residents of the municipality is underscored by a record voter turnout, which reached 84%. As already mentioned, there are two groups of competing residents in the municipality. One group of residents support the former mayor of the municipality, and the other the current mayor. Josef Bašta;s (current mayor) roots in Kamenna date back the post-war period, while Marian Kutlak (former mayor) has only lived in the municipality for 25 years. There is not a confrontation in Kamenna with regard to different ideas of the residents about the future development of the municipality, and

thus this is not cleavage in the true sense of the word. Since the ideas of the residents of both groups on the future development of the municipality are almost identical, it is very likely that this is only a personal disagreement and mutual antipathy. Some political scientists (Copik, Kopriva, 2005; Jüptner, 2004) claim that the most frequent political disputes in small municipalities are personal relationships, rather than fundamental varying views on how the municipality is run.

5. Conclusions

There was an increase in running political entities in Kamenna during the election from 1998 to 2014. During the repeat elections in 2011, four parties ran for election to the municipal council. In view of the fact that during each election to the municipal council the number of candidates exceeded the number of elected representatives, it can be stated that the political environment in the municipality is plural. The reasons for the growing number of running political entities are personal disagreements and mutual antipathy between two rival groups of the residents of the municipality. The first group of residents are represented by former mayor Marian Kutlak, the second by current mayor Josef Bašta and his supporters. The fact that there is a mutual personal antipathy is evident from the election programmes of the associations, which are almost identical.

An analysis of the preferential votes confirms that voters in Kamenna tend to prefer a particular candidate and elect members of the municipal council via a personalized vote. There are not many running political entities in Kamenna for which it can be expected that their electoral support was created in particular on the basis of support for the entire party list. Even though in municipal elections the preferences for candidates is expanded via voting, the elected representatives usually acquire their mandates thanks to their position in the electable spot on the party candidate list.

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