

# Value Attainment, Orientations, and Quality-Based Profile of the Local Political Elites in East-Central Europe. Evidence from Four Towns<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The present paper is an attempt at examining the value configuration and the socio-demographical profiles of the local political elites in four countries of East-Central Europe: Romania, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, and Poland. The treatment is a comparative one, predominantly descriptive and exploratory, and employs, as a research method, the case-study, being a quite circumscribed endeavor. The cases focus on the members of the Municipal/Local Council in four towns similar in terms of demography and developmental strategies (i.e. small-to-medium sized communities of around 35,000 inhabitants, with economies largely based on food industry and commercial activities): Tecuci (Galați county, Romania), Česká Lípa (Liberec region, Czech Republic), Targovishte (Targovishte province, Bulgaria), and Oleśnica (Lower Silesia province, Poland). Hypothesizing that the local elites of the former Sovietized Europe tend to differ in outlook, priorities, and value attainment, as compared to their Western counterparts, the paper considers the former's attitudes and perspectives in regard to seven values: a series of values customarily connected with the concept of 'democracy' (i.e. citizen participation, political conflict, gradual change, economic equality), state intervention in economy, decentralization and increased local autonomy, cultural-geographical self-identification. The study uses, as well, five models of value attainment in what concerns the 'ideal portrait' of the local councilor (Putnam 1976): ethical, pragmatic, technocratic, political, and gender. According to the results of a study applying a standard written questionnaire among the local councilors of the three communities in the period December 2010-February 2013, the paper distinguishes among three corresponding types of local elites: (1) 'predominantly elitistic,' (2) 'democratic elitist,' and (3) 'predominantly democratic,' following two types of explanation accounting for the differences among the four cases: the legacy of the defunct regime and the degree of administrative decentralization.

**Keywords:** local elites, East-Central Europe, values, decentralization, *ancien régime*, fivefold model

## I. Theoretical Assessments. On the Study of Local Political Elites and Their Values

An analysis of the opinions and attitudes adopted by the local political elite is instrumental and paramount in the description of this group. In reference to the

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views, perceptions, opinions and attitudes of the local political elite, and starting from the very simple, blunt and plausible assumption that the preferences, the orientations and the values of the leaders matter more than those of the masses, Robert Putnam (1976, 80) identifies four major orientations in the attitudes of this type of elite: 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); 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 in the process of socialization (*i.e.* the type of education, the episodes of primary socialization, etc.).

The literature dedicated to the study of local political elites is impressively reduced: the bulk of this literature derives from the broad study of political elites and consequently dates from the 1970s, once with the climax reached by the elitist empirical studies. In this respect, the most frequently quoted, the renowned *oeuvre* pertains to Robert Dahl who constructed its poliarchic model on the study of the municipality of New Haven. Among the most prominent studies on the slippery and feeble soil of local political elites, the mentionable titles are the pioneering works authored by Robert Staughton and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown* (1929) and *Middletown in Transition* (1937), undertaken in Muncie (Indiana). Despite the anthropological overload of their volumes, it is important to bear in mind that the two American scholars were among the first to endeavor in such an inductively-driven urban inquiry, and the first to consider the impact of economic changes and development strategies on various segments of the town’s population, including the leading *strata* of the community, on these segments’ values and behaviors. Lynds’ work is equally significant for it paves the way for Dahl’s future observations, stressing on the relevance of power – even in the very confined, narrow space of a small town – and on the place of economic notables in Muncie, the ‘businessmen,’ on their conspicuous influence upon the political leadership of the town and on the entire activity and life of the urban community. From the prism of these conclusions, when discussing the “Middletown Studies,” Nelson Polsby (1963, 14) labels them as ‘Marxist’ (for they contend that property among the means of production provides for absolute power within a municipality) and the representatives of the ‘stratification theory’ in elitist studies, for they ultimately reach the conclusion that the local elite is the one that possess political power – usually springing from other form of power exerted at the local level, *e.g.* economical –, as an instrument for governing the community in accordance to its own

vernacular interests. Illustrative for the cases selected here (particularly for the Romanian case), although they stress on the 'net separation' between the economical institutions and the political ones, even at the local level, the Lynds do acknowledge the immanent interdependence between the two institutions and leadership, since

those who dominate from an economic standpoint the community exert their control on the political problems, as well, only to avoid the too accentuated increase in taxation or a too strong involvement in their own affairs [by the political leadership]. Otherwise, they are totally disinterested in the political life. (Lynds 1937, 129)

This assessment might appear yet too hazardous, taking into consideration the frequency and the intensity of interactions and network formation between the political and the economic elites; a series of tentative evaluations somehow antagonizing with Lynds' conclusion are drawn from the present study, but, while the American study is focused on Muncie in the 1920s and 1930s, the present study is extremely contingent on four towns in East-Central Europe in 2010-2013, making hence opposite views and results virtually irreconcilable for the simple fact that the two studies are circumscribed to particular instances, settings and time frames, with no pretence to exhaustive generalizations. As a matter of fact, the Lynds' studies on 'Middletown' and their feeble conclusions in respect to the connections between economic and political elite at the local level (dominantly in urban areas) opened the way for similar, more mature and more meaningful empirical endeavors oriented towards the analysis of the said connections and of their impact on the developmental strategies and the general profile of the urban communities; notable in this sense is William Lloyd Warner's study on 'Yankee City' (Newburyport, Massachusetts) (Warner & Lunt 1941; Warner & Lunt 1942; Warner & Strole 1945; Warner & Low 1947; Warner 1959; Warner 1963), the hypothetical urban center dominated by entrepreneurs, businessmen, freelancers and liberal professionals, who managed to forge a sort of 'class consciousness' and who virtually ousted any trace of autonomy from the political institutions. Surely, such a stance is too vehement and radical, since it implies the blunt reality that, at the local level, the economic elite is the one that ultimately governs in town. Notwithstanding his categorical positions, Warner and his work on 'Yankee City' are to be kept in mind when endeavoring in the thin and narrow field of local political leadership at least from two perspectives: firstly, his observations are heavily utilized and partly confirmed – albeit in a nuanced form – by the present research, which point to the pertinence and contemporaneity thereof; secondly, he employs a singular method, that of an 'index of evaluated participation' (*i.e.* the construction of a scale comprising the expertise's evaluation of the 'prestige' enjoyed by key-individuals within the community, and their placing on the social hierarchy), quite similar to Hunter's method (presented below and further utilized, as well, in this study), which

stresses and manages somehow to operationalize the concept of elite 'prestige.'<sup>2</sup> Soon after Warner's 'Yankee City' studies had known scholarly recognition, Floyd Hunter advanced a resembling work, conducted in 'Regional City' (different researches in Atlanta, Georgia) among the members of the local upper class (Hunter, Schaffer & Sheps 1956). Hunter's findings are strikingly similar to Warner's: as in 'Yankee City,' in 'Regional City,'

the businessmen are the leaders of the community [...], as they actually are in any town. The wealth, the social prestige and the political machinery are functional to the wielding of power by these leaders. (Hunter 1953, 81)

In confronting dilemmas of 'prestige' and 'reputation' of local notables, Hunter contends that "their visual influence [and virtual recognition] is transformed into power" (Hunter 1953, 81). Yet again, the study is diverged towards the economic portions of the ruling class, while the local political elite is completely overshadowed by the magnitude of the reputation the businessmen possess. The emphasis on the predominance and preeminence of the economic elite on local decision-making and on its 'caste' behavior are furthered in Delbert Miller's inquiry into 'Pacific City,' although this time the scholar minds about the political decision-makers, as well, mentioning their role as mere 'counterbalance' for the interests of local big business (Miller 1985, 9-15, esp. 13-15). If C. Wright Mills is central for the 'positional method,' Warner and Hunter are exemplary for the 'reputational method,' Robert Dahl's *Poliarchy* and *Who Governs?* (1961) are the referential works for the 'decisional method:' the research in New Haven (Connecticut) revealed that those who hold the political power are essentially that quite exclusive group of individuals who take a decision, *i.e.* who initiates a proposition and who subsequently validates or opposes it. Definitely, the scope of Dahl's study is laudable, as his primary intention was to provide a rejoinder to both Marxist and elitist interpretations on local politics and to somehow 'rehabilitate' the traditional image and model of the American democracy – even at the local level – as veritably democratic and integral, hence refuting Mills's, Warner's and Hunter's 'invitations' to perceiving national and local elites as some sort of complotistic and clandestine caste. Dahl's elites are factionalist, fragmentary, placed in a continuous fight for the control over society (similar to the struggle between 'lions' and 'foxes' in Pareto's accounts); it is their meeting and their subsequent negotiations in the decision-making process that actually matters in describing elites. Surely, these factional leaders and groups do agree on the very basis of the 'rules of the democratic game' and on the accountability of the citizens, making 'poliarchy' probably the best 'approximation' of democracy. On the other hand, the observations drawn from the small town of New Haven conclude: the central position of the Mayor, who participates to decision-making in all spheres of competence; the extreme specialization of the

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<sup>2</sup> Actually, Warner's scale and Hunter's method of accounting for elite 'prestige' lie at the fundament of the 'reputational method.'

elite group; the absence of economic elites in the process of decision-making at the local level (with the partial exception of decisions taken in the sphere of urban development), etc. Notwithstanding the importance of and the central role played by these works in the general scholarly evolution of the local elite studies, quite unfortunately, few of them concentrated their attention and interest on the composition of the Municipal Council as legislative center of power at the local level, particularly within small-to-medium sized communities. The two major scholarly pieces that majorly influenced the present study are Samuel Eldersveld's *Political Elites in Modern Societies* (1989) and Virgil Stoica's *Cine conduce Iaşul?* (2004). The former constitutes a series of three lectures sprung out of the empirical inquiries conducted in the late 1970s in Ann Arbor (Michigan) among the political activists of the town. The latter is a remarkably compelling and extremely close to exhaustiveness study of the local elite in Iaşi (Romania) after 1989; the research is focused on the mayors succeeding in the leadership of the city, on the municipality's functionaries and on the members of the Local Council, without actually discriminating among these three clusters.

For the purpose of this paper, a value is defined as an image of objects, events, moods, processes, perceived as right, moral, desirable. A value is generally born at the clash between the social reality and the behavioral predispositions. In this respect, one distinction appears particularly important: the literature differentiates between (a) 'completely articulated' values (*i.e.* those of which the individual is fully aware), that are, as a consequence, manipulable, and (b) 'not completely articulated' values (*i.e.* those of which the individual is more often than not not fully aware), which are, as a result, impossible to manipulate, for they appear as trends. As such, the fundamental values embraced by the political elites are instrumental for further assessing their attitudes, behavior, priorities, preferences. Zeger van der Wal discusses the importance of values adopted by the political elites:

Government elites prioritize and balance public values on a daily basis. How and why they do so is largely concealed from us, except for when memoirs or journalistic uncoverings allow us to listen in on the monologue *intérieur* of statesmen amidst major moral dilemmas. (van der Wal 2014, 1031).

Clearly, the range of the values embraced can determine corresponding behaviors concerning strategy prioritization of the local political elites for their constituencies, the nature of their interactions with other groups or institutions, the very patterns of recruitment, etc.

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

The present research is concerned with the issue of local leadership in the countries of 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 of East-Central Europe, Romania, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Bulgaria, and the elites' impact on the evolution of the local communities in the developing region of former Sovietized Europe. Basing the case selection on the logic of the most similar design systems, focal case studies for the study are four small towns, **Tecuci**, **Česká Lípa**, **Olešnica**, and **Targovishte**, 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.).<sup>3</sup> Hence, the scope of the research was initially rather descriptive, exploratory; an inductive, observatory process – an inquiry into a range of aspects worth pointing out when dealing with and discussing on the study of political elites. Surely, after the gathering of the *data* and confronted with the stark differences among the four towns (in terms of the elites' socio-demographical profile, of value-orientations), the question about the factors, the independent variables that might account for both these differences and similarities, was inevitably raised. This paper favors two such explanatory trajectories, using as independent variables the level of decentralization for each case and the 'legacy of the *ancien régime*' (*i.e.* the communist experience) for each of the communities.

Therefore, the principal research questions of interest here are:

(1) Which are the main socio-demographical features the local political elites of Tecuci, Česká Lípa, Olešnica, and Targovishte display?

and

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

For pinpointing the elite groups at the level of the four communities, the paper employs the *positional method* of identifying and analyzing the local political elites, by operationalizing the phrase 'local political elites' through the following definition: The local political elite is 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 thusly represented by the members of the Local/ Municipal Councils in Tecuci (19 persons), Česká Lípa (25 persons), Olešnica (22 persons), and Targovishte (31 persons) as they were in 2011-2013. The methods of gathering

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<sup>3</sup> 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).

*data* favored by this paper include: the 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

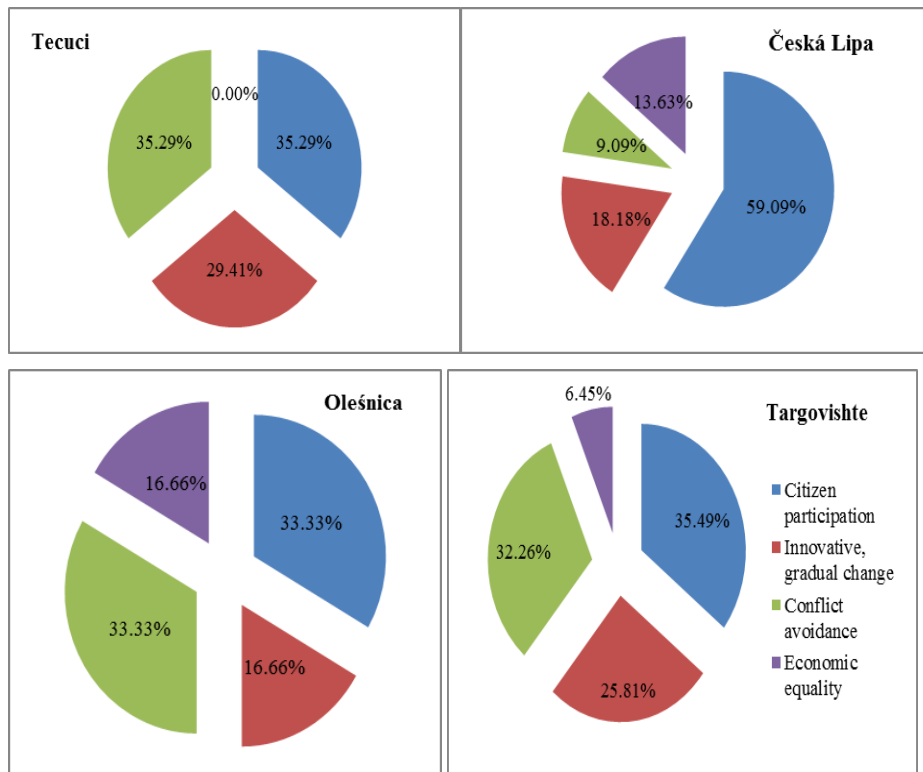
#### 1. The attitudes and orientations of the local councilors in Tecuci, Česká Lípa, Olešnica, and Targovishte concerning democracy

The present research evaluates the attitudes of the local political elite towards four values referring to the fundamentals of the democratic construct and quantified by question no. 9 in the administered questionnaire: citizen participation; gradual, innovative change; the importance of the political conflict; economic equality. The attitudes of the members of the Local Councils towards the state intervention in 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 through 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 40.8%), and gradual change (an average level of acceptance of 22.515%). 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 and Targovishte, which can be translated by a syndrome of total detachment, expressed rhetorically, from the *ancien régime*. Secondly, for the local councilors of Tecuci, Targovishte, and Olešnica, conflict avoidance is significant, which would hint to a monolithic behavior inside the Council.

From the analysis of two values – citizen participation and conflict avoidance –, it results that the members of the Local Councils in Tecuci, Targovishte, and Olešnica could be characterized as 'populists' (accepting citizen participation as a mark of democracy, but avoiding political conflict); the members of the Municipal Council in Česká Lípa are largely 'democrats' (accepting both citizen participation and political conflict as features of democracy) (*See Table 2*).

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



**Table 1.** 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 2.** 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

2. The attitudes and orientations of the local councilors in Tecuci, Česká Lípa, Olešnica, and Targovishte towards decentralization and state intervention in economy

Measuring the perceptions of the local elite towards larger local autonomy and decentralization is instrumental because it provides an insight into the acknowledgement of various levels of authority in the leadership of the community. The largest *palette* of attributions belongs to the Municipal Council which undertakes the regulation tasks in most of the spheres of the community life, including social services, public improvements, education, healthcare, cultural and recreation activities. Inversely, there is a side effect to a more comprehensive and extended decentralization: larger local autonomy and decentralization means primarily an effective say of the municipality on the local budget; as a consequence, it lies in the capacity of the local municipality to properly collect taxes and to efficiently administer the budgetary revenues thusly collected in order to actually effect changes in the various domains of competence under its direct supervision. With greater decentralization come greater authority and the ability to have a tremendous say in the conduct of the community's affairs, but, conversely, it also comes a great deal of responsibility in handling the ever-increasing problems the community confronts with. Balancing the advantages with the drawbacks of decentralization and autonomy at the local level, the members of the Municipal Council of Olešnica position themselves somewhere in between the enthusiasm of the local elite in Tecuci (100% approval of greater decentralization, with a core of 64.7% approving and another 11.76% strongly approving decentralization) and in Targovishte (93.53% general approval), and the rather cautious pragmatism of the local elite in Česká Lípa (experienced in both the good points and the disadvantages decentralization presupposes, with 77.26% approving or partially approving and another 22.72% disagreeing with larger local autonomy and decentralization). The Polish local political elite displays a sense of realism, properly understanding the mechanisms encapsulated by decentralizing a greater range of responsibilities in the local authority's sphere of competence, as 43.75% of the

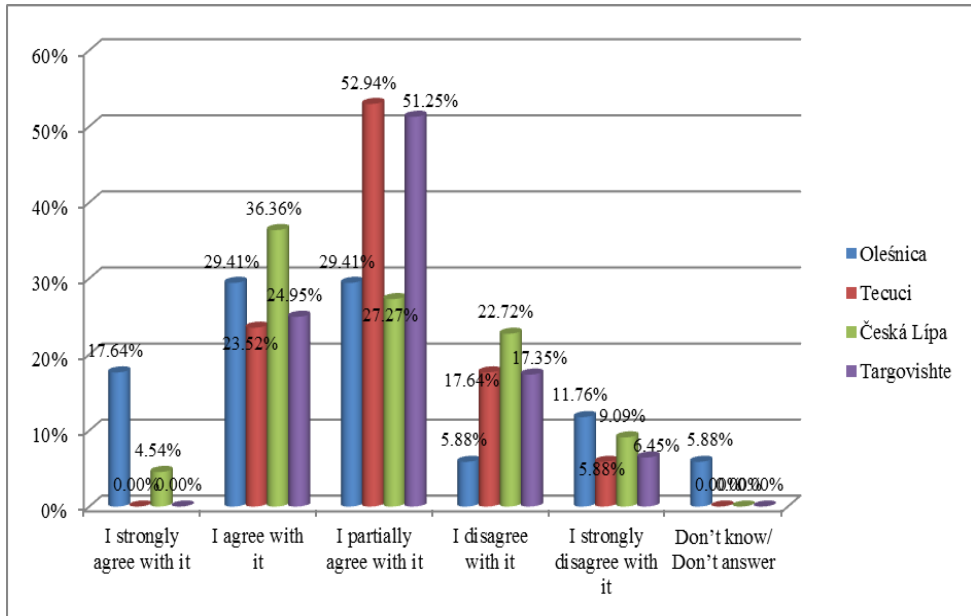
municipal councilors generally agree with decentralization. The acceptance of the Polish elites towards decentralization is significantly less than the cases of Tecuci (64.70%) and Targovishte (58.06%), but slightly higher than the Czech case (40.9%). Relevant, as well, in Olešnica, the municipal councilors display the highest proportion of strong acceptance of decentralization and the perspective of autonomous entities in the Polish administrative arrangement: 25% of the respondents, as opposed to none in the case of Česká Lípa, 16.12% for Targovishte, and only 11.76% in the case of Tecuci. Decentralization worked its charms in Poland, while being partially contested in the Czech Republic and unaccomplished and highly problematic in Romania and Bulgaria. In Olešnica, decentralization produced positive effects and a more suitable management at the local level; consequently, the attitudes of the local elite towards it mirror generally the experience this elite has had with the reality of increased devolution and growing array of authority and responsibility.

The answers provided in the questionnaire by the members of the Municipal Councils in Tecuci, Česká Lípa, Olešnica, and Targovishte, in respect to the state intervention in economy and to the prospects of further decentralization and local autonomy, sketch: (a) local leaderships in Tecuci and Targovishte who are very enthusiastic about decentralization (sometimes, without actually being aware of the whole *palette* of responsibilities that increased decentralization generates), but quite undecided to the idea of the interventionist state (partly because the political elites coincide with the economic elite, and locally, they become easier to act as private entrepreneurs, though enjoying the state subsidies); (b) 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; (c) 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); and (d) overall, a local leadership 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.

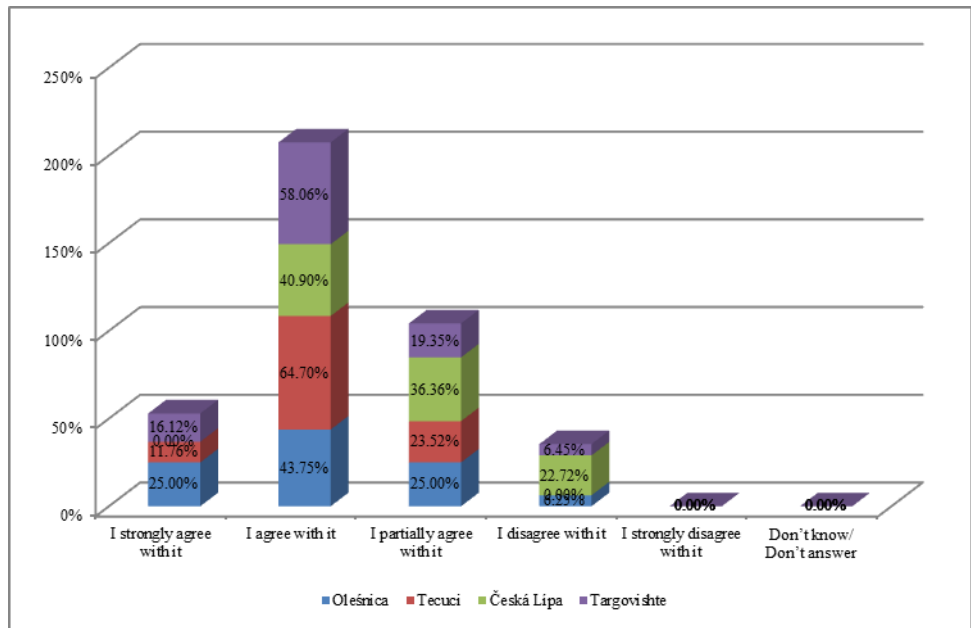
From the analysis of the two value orientations – state intervention in economy and economic equality –, it results that: the members of the Local Councils in Tecuci and Targovishte could be coined ‘statists-anti-egalitarianists’ (largely accepting the state intervention in economy, particularly in times of crisis, but rejecting economic equality as a mark of a working democracy); the members of the Municipal Councils in Česká Lípa and 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 1).

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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?")



A series of observations are worth pointing out:

- The local political elites in Tecuci and Targovishte are rather statist-anti-egalitarian, which appears rather as a paradox in respect to the outlook of the defunct communist regime, a 'modernizing-nationalizing' dictatorship (Petrescu 2010), a 'patrimonial' one (Kitschelt *et al.* 1999): the image of the state as prominent in socio-economical realm is preserved, while a rejection of economic equality is strongly affirmed, exactly in opposition to the aspirations of the former leadership.
- In the Czech Republic (as former Czechoslovakia) until 1989, the 'theme' of the regime was the same, but the 'variation' was a 'bureaucratic-authoritarian' (Linz & Stepan 1996), 'welfare' communist dictatorship. Conversely, in Česká Lípa, the elites tend to be more inclined to a 'welfare-state' approach in conducting local policies, somehow admitting the social benefits of the former regime, without holding a nostalgic stance: this is probably the reason why they fit into the category of 'statist-egalitarians,' since a significant proportion of them are concerned with the social problems of the community they represent (especially unemployment) and they still cherish economic equality as an indispensable value in democracy.
- The local councilors in Oleśnica display an inclination towards the protectionist state, although paradoxically the Polish variant of state socialism, 'national-accommodative' (Kitschelt *et al.* 1999) communist dictatorship, was the least restrictive in socio-economic and political terms and the most market-oriented one; the statist-egalitarian perspective among the political elite in Oleśnica is to denote a reminder of the more permissive type of communist regime Poland experienced.
- All in all, it is notorious that the four countries whose local elites are here under scrutiny suffered a regime change in their recent history, which marked a somewhat consistent process of 'elite circulation,' for the Czech and the Polish cases, and a persistent 'elite reproduction,' for the Romanian and the Bulgarian cases.

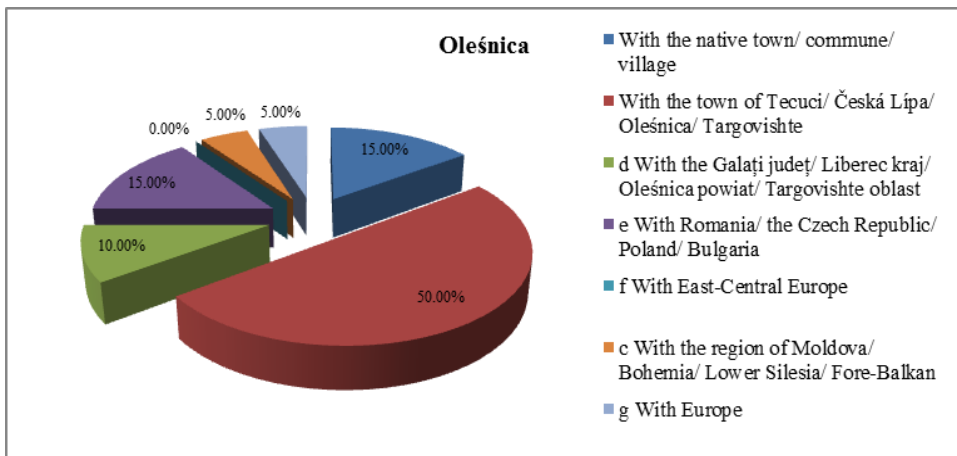
### 3. The geographical identification of the local councilors in Tecuci, Česká Lípa, Oleśnica, and Targovishte (the local political elites' degree of isolation)

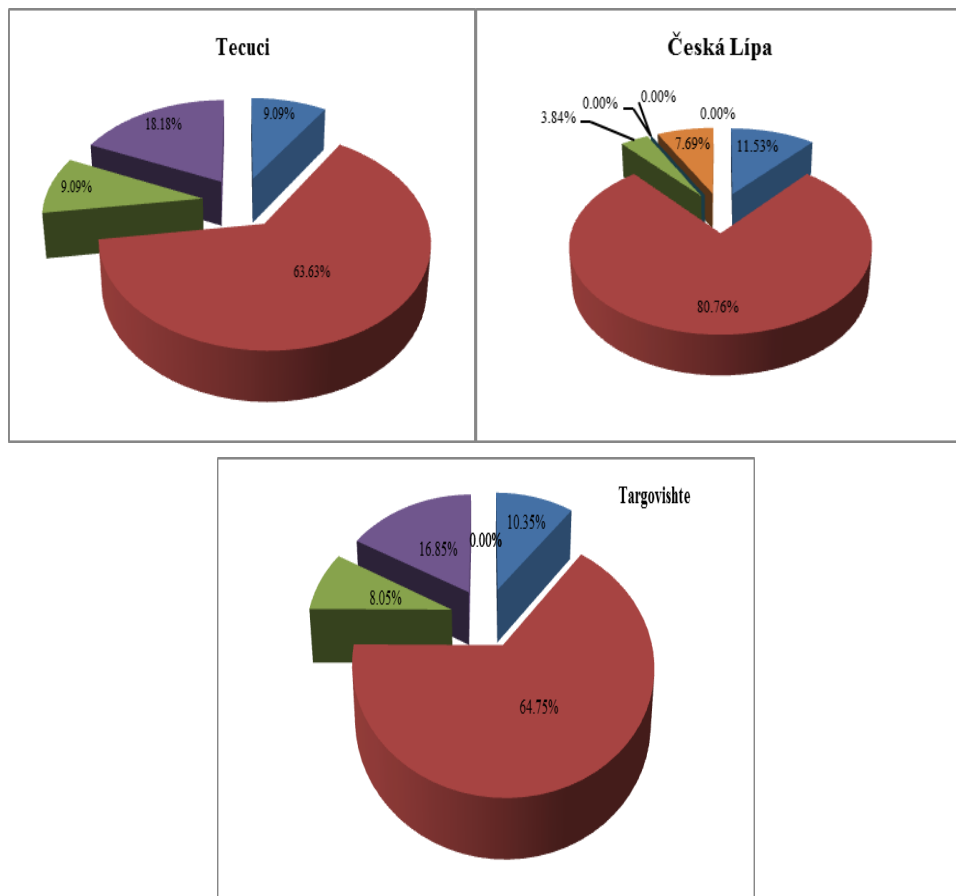
The geographical identification of the local political elite was considered in order to correlate it with the level of localism and isolation of the ruling groups of small-to-medium communities. Stronger links and power networks formed and maintained at the local level suggest localism and, subsequently, a more pronounced focus on the local priorities and, conversely, an isolation with respect to the national concerns. Similarly, it might be hypothesized that a

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geographical identification inclined towards localism (*i.e.* the cases in which the local councilors identify primarily with their native municipalities, with the town they presently represent or with the region which they inhabit) is prone to generate an emphasis on local problems, perceived as taking precedence over the 'national interests.' Considering these observations, the Municipal Council in Olešnica expectedly exposes a high degree of localism, as 50% of the members of the Council identify first and foremost with the municipality they politically represent and govern, the town of Olešnica; another 15% of the councilors bear a particular attachment towards the native town/ village, thus making localism in geographical identification a characteristic pertaining to 65% of the Council. Part of the discrepancies among the four cases in respect to the cultural-geographical identification springs from the very administrative arrangements of each country under scrutiny. But the differences lie also in the degree of openness each elite group inquired here actually displays. Indeed, the high level of localism is dominant for all cases, though quite dissimilar as numerical value: 65% in Olešnica, 72.72% in Tecuci, 86.1% in Targovishte, 92.29% in Česká Lípa; it results that, as a matter of fact, the local elite in Olešnica is the least isolated, which would, to a certain extent, stand against the isolation of the same group when considering their overwhelmingly local connections and networks of power. All in all, the average level of localism among the three cases is 76.67%, that of regionalism mounts to 11.87% of the entire population comprised in the four Municipal Councils, while that of nationalism is 11.06%.

Graphs 7, 8, 9, 10. Q13: Which of the cultural and territorial entities do you identify yourself with firstly?





#### 4. The ideal portrait of the local/ municipal councilor (quality-based profile)

Procedural openness and transparency are not necessarily functional. Of course, outcomes need to be clear as well as division of responsibilities and accountability, but a certain degree of secrecy is not an absolute necessity. At the moment, I am involved in a major governance process: I cannot tell you what kind of process because it is highly secretive. And please, no transparency at this stage because it will inevitably lead to immediate failure! It is also a matter of (...), secrecy – or perhaps exclusiveness of information is a better term – is not such a big issue as such as long as you do not lie to people. And even that is not really a crime as long as you’re acting in the public interest, right? (van der Wal 2014, 1030, citing a British elected official)

Apart from the value-based profile of the local political elites in the four towns selected (constructed here on the general attitudes of the local leadership towards values of democracy, the state intervention in economy, the furthering of decentralization process, and the cultural-geographical self-identification), the value attainment and orientations could be equally scrutinized with the

assistance of the projections the local/ municipal councilors build about their public posture. Hence, the quality-based profile, regarding the (self-constructed) ideal portrait of the local/ municipal councilor, was formed after the gathering of the responses of the members of the four Municipal Councils to the question: "What are the first five most important qualities a municipal councilor should possess?" The answers received have been collected under five clusters of qualities – referred here as 'models' –, founded on Prewitt's fivefold quality model of political elites (1970). The quality-based profile is instrumental for both the value attainment of the elite and for such distant matters, such as the patterns of recruitment, degree of interaction with other groups and institutions, level of isolation towards the constituency or in respect to the central elite, the degree of accountability, responsiveness and the mechanisms of strategy prioritization, etc. As a consequence, after the collection of the answers, the following distribution was formed:

- The ethical model (22.65%, for Tecuci; 28.68%, for Česká Lípa; 18.91%, for Olešnica; 32.23%, for Targovishte);
- The political model (23.98%; 12.93%; 4.05%; 32.23%);
- The technocratic model (9.33%; 21.28%; 18.90%; 10.52%);
- The pragmatic model (21.32%; 37%; 45.9%; 25%);
- The gender model (0% for all cases).

For identifying the qualities that ideally a local councilor should possess, qualities that could constitute eligibility *criteria* for both the parties and the electorate and that could represent the degree of value attainment and would provide a hint as to the value orientations of the local leadership under scrutiny, the questionnaire included an open question addressing the issue. After comprehensively scrutinizing the ones in power, the recent scholarly generally agreed on five models (Prewitt 1970) that might account for specific 'qualities' in defining and identifying elites. The assemblage of these models pledges to the fact that a normative-descriptive reconciliation was intended, although in an overwhelmingly descriptive fashion.<sup>4</sup> The 'ethical model' of political elite refers to such qualities as: correctness, honesty, fairness, altruism, modesty, high moral standards, verticality and seriousness, courage and bravery, punctuality. The 'technocratic model' of political elite takes into consideration such attributes as: political experience, political will, expertise and training, intelligence, patience/ rapid reaction, enthusiasm and imagination. The 'pragmatic model' of political elite is respective to such features as: dedication to the constituency's (state's)

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<sup>4</sup> This is particularly the reason why this paper coins the recent (*i.e.* post-Wright-Mills) empirical drive in studying and defining political elites as 'neo-descriptive', since it admits the necessity of introducing the 'ethical model,' in spite of the fact that the inquiries are in themselves largely descriptive, exploratory.

improvement plans, devotion and respect for the community/ country, desire to change, the capacity to identify development opportunities for the community/ country, vision, perspective, initiative, persuasion skills, capacity to compromise and negotiate, dialog-oriented, intuition, social sensitivity, care for the citizen, economic independence, leadership skills. The 'political model' subscribes to the following qualities: oratorical skills, rhetoric, political loyalty, incorruptibility, interest detachment (objectivity), collegiality and team spirit. The 'gender model' refers to the gender quality. The results largely coincide to an ethical model, with features such as honesty (justness, correctness, fairness) (14.66% of the answers for Tecuci, 12.03% of the answers for Česká Lípa, 12.16% of the responses for Olešnica, and 13.81% of the responses for Targovishte), moral verticality (5.33% for Tecuci, 2.7% for Olešnica, and some impressive and telling 10.18% for Česká Lípa and 10.52% for Targovishte), altruism (1.33% of the answers for Tecuci, 4.05% for Olešnica, 3.28% for Targovishte) and modesty (1.33% of the responses for Tecuci, 1.85% of the responses for Česká Lípa, 3.94% for Targovishte), courage (3.7% for Česká Lípa, and 0.65% for Targovishte) among the most important qualities a local councilor should have. The technocratic model is equally valued by the local councilors: a significant number pointed out such characteristics as training and expertise (4% of the answers for Tecuci, 4.62% for Česká Lípa, 2.7% for Olešnica, and 2.63% for Targovishte) and political experience (5.33% for Tecuci, 6.48% for Česká Lípa, 4.6% for Targovishte), effectiveness (2.7% for Olešnica, and 1.97% for Targovishte), intelligence (6.48% of the answers for Česká Lípa, 4.05% for Olešnica, and 1.31% for Targovishte) as the hallmark of the technocratic model. Those local councilors mentioning the dedication to the town's improvement plans, desire to change and respect for the community (12% for Tecuci, 10.52% for Targovishte, a falling 8.33% for Česká Lípa, 0% for Olešnica), the capacity to identify development opportunities for the town (1.35% for Olešnica, 6.66% for Tecuci, 7.23% for Targovishte, 10.18% for Česká Lípa), the initiative (1.33% for Tecuci and some similar 1.85% for Česká Lípa and 1.97% for Targovishte), the persuasion skills, the capacity to compromise and negotiated, dialogue-orientation (1.31% for Targovishte, 1.33% for Tecuci and, more significantly, 7.4% for Česká Lípa and 8.1% for Olešnica), social sensitivity and care for the citizen (3.7% for Česká Lípa, and 9.45% for Olešnica), etc. favored the pragmatic model. Finally, the political model was constructed through the following qualities: party loyalty (7.23% of the responses for Targovishte, 2.66% of the answers for Tecuci and 1.85% of the answers for Česká Lípa), oratorical skills (1.97% for Targovishte, 1.33% for Tecuci, and 0.92% for Česká Lípa), incorruptibility and interest detachment (8% for Tecuci, and some similar 7.39% for Česká Lípa and 6.56% for Targovishte, only 2.7% for Olešnica), but, most importantly, team spirit and collegiality (16.44% of the answers in the case of Targovishte, 12% of the responses in the case of Tecuci, as opposed to 2.77% of the responses in the case of Česká Lípa). The gender model was not used by the



present study, as no local councilor perceived the gender differences as being important in sketching the ideal profile of a member of the Local Council. Quite importantly, the case of the members of the Municipal Council in Oleśnica (and, most probably, in Poland) appears as an outlier for the 'political model,' for this set of qualities is profoundly overlooked by the local leadership here. This rejection of the necessity of the 'political' qualities for a municipal councilor is explainable by the patterns of recruitment in Poland, where the municipal councilors are elected through extramural procedures and, thusly, they do not need the backing of a political party to get elected; generally, these persons bear and preserve strong ties with the civil society organizations, with the civic and reform groups, with the neighbourhood groups (including friends and supporters), and the support of a political party becomes, in this context, futile. Consequently, such virtues as political loyalty (0%), collegiality and team spirit (0%), oratorical skills (0%) are surpassed by political independence (1.35%), incorruptibility (1.35%) and interest detachment (1.35%). Overall, the political model is compatible with 4.05% of the responses in Oleśnica, three times lower than the next lowest value on the 'political model' (that of Česká Lípa) and eight times lower than the highest value on the 'political model' (the case of Targovishte). Nevertheless, the case of the local leadership of Oleśnica remains typical for the 'ethical model,' robustly present in the sketch of each of the four groups.

It is significant to mention that the distribution of the qualities along the five models in each of the four cases is determined largely of various endogenous and exogenous factors, including, but not limited to: the socio-demographical background of the respondents, the patterns of recruitment according to which they are (s)elected, the interactions and contacts they establish and entertain, the degree of political-administrative decentralization, the 'legacy of the former regime' and its nature, etc.

#### **IV. Tentative explanations**

The present study advances a threefold classification of local political leadership, constructed employing mainly two explanatory trajectories, one of them being discussed at some length here: (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, although the paper 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), it favors a rather reductionist approach on fiscal, expenditure-based decentralization. For this purpose, it employs the average indexes of decentralization currently utilized by the World

**Table no. 3.** The features of the local leadership, according to the quality-based profile constructed by the local political elites themselves (Q16: "What are the first five most important qualities a municipal councilor should possess ?")

	Tecuci	Česká Lípa	Olešnica	Targovishte
<b><i>Ethical model</i></b>				
Correctness, honesty, fairness, truthfulness	14.66%	12.03%	12.16%	13.81%
Altruism, selflessness	1.33%		4.05%	3.28%
Modesty	1.33%	1.85%		3.94%
High moral standards, verticality and seriousness, sobriety, personal discipline	5.33%	10.18%	2.7%	10.52%
Courage, bravery		3.7%		0.65%
Punctuality		0.92%		
<b><i>Technocratic model</i></b>				
Political experience, political will	5.33%	6.48%		4.60%
Expertise and training	4%	4.62%	2.7%	2.63%
Reliability			5.4%	
Effectiveness, competence			2.7%	1.97%
Intelligence, wisdom		6.48%	4.05%	1.31%
Patience or rapid reaction		1.85%		
Enthusiasm, imagination, creativity, innovation		1.85%	4.05%	
<b><i>Pragmatic model</i></b>				
Dedication to the town's improvement plans, devotion, respect for the community, desire to change	12%	8.33%		10.52%
Involvement, diligence, commitment, assertiveness, industry			9.45%	
Determent, consistency, consequence			4.05%	
Thoroughness			1.35%	
The capacity to identify development opportunities for the town (vision, perspective)	6.66%	10.18%	1.35%	7.23%
Initiative	1.33%	1.85%		1.97%
Persuasion skills, capacity to compromise, cooperate and negotiate, dialog-oriented, non-conflict	1.33%	7.4%	8.1%	1.31%
Intuition		0.92%		
Openness with others, tolerance, broadmindedness			9.45%	
Social sensitivity, social activity, care for the citizen		3.7%	9.45%	
Economic independence		1.85%		1.31%
Leadership skills		2.77%		2.63%
Accountability, responsiveness			2.7%	
<b><i>Political model</i></b>				
Oratorical skills	1.33%	0.92%		1.97%
Political loyalty	2.66%	1.85%		7.23%
Incorruptibility	5.33%	4.62%	1.35%	3.28%
Interest detachment (objectivity)	2.66%	2.77%	1.35%	3.28%
Collegiality, team spirit	12%	2.77%		16.44%
Political independence			1.35%	
<b><i>Gender model</i></b>				
	0%	0%	0%	0%

Value Attainment, Orientations, and Quality-Based Profile of the Local Political Elites

Bank and the IMF in the issuing of their annual reports,<sup>5</sup> 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, thusly: (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 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%.

**Table no. 4.** 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%
BULGARIA	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.)

<sup>5</sup> 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.

Conclusively, (a) for the significant level of fiscal-administrative decentralization, the Polish case is exponential; (b) the standard level of decentralization fits the Czech and the Bulgarian 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, Miraftab, & Silver 2008; Smoke, Gómez, & Peterson 2006; Burki, Perry, & Dillinger 1999; Escobar-Lemmon 2003; Bardhan 2002; Garman, Haggard, & 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’ approaches –, 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’ outlook, value orientation and strategy prioritization actually modifies 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 Bulgaria.

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 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 trajectory 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 (Jarausch 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,'<sup>6</sup> 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 collocation 'elite political culture'<sup>7</sup> (1992,

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<sup>6</sup> 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 Targovishte 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 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the famous works of the Italian 'elitists,' the trio Pareto – Mosca – Michels.

<sup>7</sup> '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

51-52, and 54-56) to refer to those attitudinal and 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. 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.

One of the most immediate elements inherited from the defunct regime in the Romanian and the Bulgarian cases and so facily transmitted at the local level, where it found a fertile soil to further develop and be perpetuated: the insistence and perseverance of the political elite to aspirate the leadership positions in other societal spheres as well, especially the economic and social ones, less the cultural facets of the community. Not only does the local political elite in Tecuci bear the monopoly on economic activities, but it also leads the social life of the town, through its position on the hierarchical scheme of the community (leading physicians, directors of schools, chiefs of administrative committees, administrators of public spots, etc.).

Transiting the Councils from Tecuci, Targovishte, Česká Lípa to Olešnica and back, one can observe two *monolithic-like elites, highly homogeneous* in terms of bio-demographical features, values, priorities and patterns of recruitment, cherishing party loyalty, political experience and collegiality (team spirit) especially, opposing *a more heterogeneous elite group*, demographically more diverse, with different values and cultural standards, with *an in-between case* (Olešnica), where a monolithic type of elite in terms of education, family background and occupational *status* is pondered and counterbalanced by a constant concern with the problems of the immediate constituency and by meaningful involvement in civic and reform groups.

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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."

Monolithism and the predominance of a 'political model' might be reminiscent of the elites of the former regime, while a 'pragmatic model' and a fragmented elite group would coincide to a tradition of circulating elites and technocratic '*petite bourgeoisie*' during the period of state socialism. Instead, nowadays, it is the 'pragmatic model' of 'organizational and personal commitments,' of efficiency and effective management, that surpasses the importance of the 'political model' of party and ideological loyalty: though the influence of party affiliations and ideological affinities become crucial and even indispensable, they lose their importance in the face of the localized problems the small community confronts with; problem-solving, respect for the community, competence and the capacity to pinpoint development opportunities for the town are those features that take precedence when a group establishes itself as a local political elite. Together, all assets listed render the local councilor for political leadership more commendable than his peers who may lack them. With these differences in mind, if one is to conclude if a certain form of 'democratic elitism' and an 'elite consciousness' are at work in the four cases discussed, inductive reasoning seems to have fallen down to a certain extent. Indeed, one may reason that, largely, the members of the four Municipal Councils bear the incipient features of perceiving themselves as a quite distinct group of notables within their respective communities. However, the 'elitist exercise' is far from being a constant in the leadership outlook of the four small communities, the local elites displaying a rather 'popular' image of the leading ones.

## V. Concluding remarks and a tentative taxonomy

If we know how the participants [to 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)

The present study advances a threefold classification of local political leadership, constructed employing mainly two explanatory trajectories, one of the being discussed at some length here: (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). Thusly, 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 and Targovishte), 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), 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.

'Predominantly elitistic' 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.

'Democratic elitist' 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' groups overlap on 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' 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 are 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 passive representation, for it may 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 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.

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