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TO THE DEFINITION, STRUCTURING AND SYSTEMATIZATION OF THE ESSENCE, TYPES AND MANIFESTATIONS OF THE RELEVANCE OF "SMALL" PARTIES: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONTEXTS

The study is dedicated to analyzing, structuring and systematizing different approaches to understanding the essence of the phenomenon and types of "small" parties and based on this to theorizing and characterizing the meaning and manifestations of their relevance or irrelevance. Thus, the article is actualized by a theoretical and methodological attempt to answer the question of whether "small" parties can be interpreted as relevant ones or, conversely, should be defined and understood exclusively as marginal ones, in particular as unable to regulate various forms of inter-party competition. It is argued that Political Science has not yet developed a holistic position on the definition, structuring and systematization of the essence, types, manifestations and framework of the relevance of "small" parties. On one hand, some "small" parties are able to structure party systems and inter-party competition, and some are not. On the other hand, the characteristic of relevance is the basis for the separation or non-separation of "small" parties as such. At the same time, the article as a whole demonstrates that the relevance or irrelevance of "small" parties is not only an attribute of party system and inter-party competition, but also a characteristic of separate parties at different stages of their operation. Therefore, it was proven that "small" parties can be both relevant or irrelevant, although the latter ones, in addition, may be endowed with a unique potential for relevance, even though the manifestations of this potential are also quite different.

Keywords: *political party, "small" party, party system, inter-party competition, elections, relevance, irrelevance.*

Do definicji, strukturyzacji i systematyzacji istoty, typów i ustalenia właściwości „małych" partii: kontekst teoretyczny i metodologiczny

W badaniach przeanalizowano, uporządkowano i usystematyzowano podejścia do rozumienia istoty zjawiska i rodzajów „małych" partii i już na tej podstawie teoretyzowano i scharakteryzowano znaczenie i przejawy ich właściwości lub nieistotności. W związku z tym artykuł jest aktualizowany teoretyczno-metodologiczną próbą odpowiedzi na pytanie, czy „małe" partie mogą być interpretowane jako istotne, czy też przeciwnie, powinny być oznaczane i rozumiane

wyłącznie jako marginalne, w szczególności jako niezdolne do uregulowania różnych form konkurencji międzypartyjnej. Twierdzi się, że politologia wciąż nie wypracowała spójnego stanowiska w zakresie definicji, strukturyzacji i systematyzacji istoty, rodzajów, przejawów i ram relewancji „małych" partii. Z jednej strony, niektóre „małe" partie są w stanie ustrukturyzować systemy partyjne i konkurencję międzypartyjną, a inne nie. Z drugiej strony oznaka relewancji jest podstawą do wyróżnienia lub niewyróżnienia „małych" partii jako takich. Jednocześnie artykuł jako całość pokazuje, że istotność lub nieistotność „małych" partii jest nie tylko atrybutem systemu partyjnego i konkurencyjności międzypartyjnej, ale także cechą poszczególnych partii na różnych etapach ich funkcjonowania. Udowodniono, że „małe" partie mogą być zarówno istotne, jak i nieistotne, chociaż te ostatnie dodatkowo mogą być obdarzone szczególnym potencjałem trafności, chociaż przejawy tego potencjału są również zupełnie inne.

Słowa kluczowe: *partia polityczna, „mała partia". System partyjny, rywalizacja międzypartyjna, wybory, właściwość, nieistotność.*

ДО ОЗНАЧЕННЯ, СТРУКТУРИЗАЦІЇ ТА СИСТЕМАТИЗАЦІЇ СУТНОСТІ, ТИПІВ І ВИЯВІВ РЕЛЕВАНТНОСТІ "МАЛИХ" ПАРТІЙ: ТЕОРЕТИКО-МЕТОДОЛОГІЧНИЙ КОНТЕКСТ

У дослідженні проаналізовано, структуризовано і систематизовано підходи з приводу розуміння сутності феномена і типів "малих" партій, а вже на цій підставі теоретизовано та схарактеризовано значення та вияви їхньої релевантності або нерелевантності. Відтак стаття актуалізована теоретико-методологічною спробою відповісти на питання про те, чи "малі" партії можуть бути потрактовані як релевантні або ж, на противагу, повинні означуватись і розумітись винятково як маргінальні, зокрема як нездатні впорядковувати різноманітні форми міжпартійної змагальності. Аргументовано, що політична наука й досі не виробила цілісної позиції стосовно означення, структуризації та систематизації сутності, типів, виявів і рамок релевантності "малих" партій. З одного боку, деякі "малі" партії спроможні структуризувати партійні системи і міжпартійну змагальність, а деякі – ні. З іншого ж боку, ознака релевантності є підставою для виділення або невиділення "малих" партій як таких. Водночас у статті в цілому продемонстровано, що релевантність чи нерелевантність "малих" партій – це не тільки атрибут партійної системи і міжпартійної змагальності, але й характеристика окремих партій на різних етапах їхнього функціонування. Тому доведено, що "малі" партії можуть бути і релевантними, і нерелевантними, хоча останні, у доповнення, можуть бути наділені своєрідним потенціалом релевантності, навіть попри те, що вияви цього потенціалу теж є доволі різними.

Ключові слова: *політична партія, "мала" партія, партійна система, міжпартійна змагальність, вибори, релевантність, нерелевантність.*

Since the 70s of the twentieth century, but with further intensification and enlargement, political scientists began to put on the agenda and articulate their interest in the so-called "small" parties, their essence, types, grounds for separation from other parties and within particular party systems in general, and so on. However, no holistic view has yet been developed on how to understand the so-called "small" parties over the half a century of political science researches. Since there is still no answer to the question of whether "small" parties can be relevant or significant ones (in terms of party systems) and in general of how important they are in various forms of inter-party competition and different designs of party systems at both national and subnational (local, regional, etc.) levels of elections, politics and governance. Accordingly, it still or further raises the question of how the phenomenon and possible varieties of "small" parties can be and should be understood, as well as whether they have the ability to position themselves as relevant ones or, instead, as those being forced to be perceived exclusively as marginal and irrelevant ones. The posed question and the task of answering it are complex, because the issues of relevance or irrelevance of "small" parties are at least ambiguous in the theoretical and methodological contexts. On one hand, these issues concern the substantive and essential content of the phenomenon and possible varieties of "small" parties as such, including at different levels of politics and governance. On the other hand, these questions address the notion and conceptual definition of the attribute of relevance of both parties in general and "small" parties in particular. Therefore, it is necessary to answer the questions and to solve the tasks that determine them consistently.

In this context, it should be noted that "small" parties on the example of different countries, but especially in Europe, somehow force entire cohorts and groups of scientists to rethink and transform the theory of parties and party systems as well as the outlines of real party systems in some of these countries. In particular, scholars often review the subject and matter of the relevance of parties as well as fragmentation/fractionalization, polarization, electoral volatility, nationalization/denationalization and structuring of party systems in general, and so on[1]. It is noteworthy that what has happened and is still happening in the progress of Political Science is demonstrated in several stages or "waves", which reveal the relative heterogeneity and non-consolidation of the topic of "small" parties at different stages of its development. Thus, the first "wave" of researches (from the moment of their initiation to the beginning of the XXI century) on the phenomenon of "small" parties is represented by such scholars as (not in chronological order) P. Abramson, J. Aldrich, P. Paolino and D. Rohde[2], T. Baskaran and M.

[1] Weeks L., Minor Parties in Irish Political Life: An Introduction, *"Irish Political Studies"* 2010, vol. 25, nr 4, s. 473-479.

[2] Abramson P., Aldrich J., Paolino P., Rohde D., Third-party and independent candidates in American politics: Wallace, Anderson, and Perot, *"Political Science Quarterly"* 1995, vol. 110, nr 3, s. 349-367.

L. da Fonseca[3], A. Blais[4], J. Coakley[5], K. Deschouwer[6], M. Duverger[7], S. Fisher[8], H. Gold[9], W. Grant[10], J. Hammond[11], H. Herzog[12], R. Katz and P. Mair[13], V. Key[14], K. Lawson and P. Merkl[15], P. Lucardi[16], H. Mayer[17], F. Müller-Rommel and G. Pridham[18], M. Novak and R. Cassling[19], M. Pedersen[20], M. Pinard[21], P. Reynolds[22], K. Richmond[23], G. Sartori[24], G. Smith[25], S. Wolinetz[26] and many others. They mostly began to think about the phenomenon and synonymizing regarding the separation, denotation and positioning of the so-called "small" parties and even their diverse or multidirectional types, but almost did not structure them and did not reduce them to systematic or comprehensive comparisons[27].

[3] Baskaran T., da Fonseca M. L., Electoral thresholds and the success of minor parties, *"Center for European Governance and Economic Development Research Discussion Papers"* 2013, nr 177.

[4] Blais A., Third parties in Canadian provincial politics, *"Canadian Journal of Political Science"* 1973, vol. 6, nr 3, s. 422-438.

[5] Coakley J., Minor parties in Irish political life, 1922-1989, *"Economic and Social Review"* 1990, vol. 21, nr 3, s. 269-297.

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Instead, the second "wave" of researches on "small" parties (from the beginning of the XXI century until now) is represented by such scholars as (also not in chronological order) J. Adams, M. Clark, L. Ezrow, G. Glasgow and D. Leiter[28], J.-E. Bartels and M. L. Remke[29], E. Bélanger[30], C. Boix[31], N. Bolleyer[32], H. Bochel and D. Denver[33], J. Coakley[34], C. Copus, A. Clark, K. Bottom, H. Reynaert and K. Steyvers[35], K. Deschouwer[36], L. Diamond and R. Gunther[37], J. Font[38], J. Gerring[39], S. Gherghina, G. Jiglau and A. Fagan[40], S. Hug[41], G. Kefford[42], S. McDaid and K. Rekawek[43], E. O'Malley[44], L. Sloan[45], J.-J. Spoon[46], B. Tamas[47], M. Tavits[48],

[28] Adams J., Clark M., Ezrow L., Glasgow G., Are Niche Parties Fundamentally Different from Mainstream Parties? The Causes and Electoral Consequences of Western European Parties' Policy Shifts, 1976-1998, *"American Journal of Political Science"* 2006, vol. 50, nr 3, s. 513-529.; Adams J., Ezrow L., Leiter D., Partisan Sorting and Niche Parties in Europe, *"West European Politics"* 2012, vol. 35, nr 6, s. 1272-1294.

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W. Van der Brug, M. Fennema and J. Tillie[49], L. Weeks[50] and many others. They develop the achievements of the previous "wave" of scholars and even relatively systematize them, but do not resolve all the identified problems of structuring the phenomenon and varieties of "small" parties by consensus[51], and often even deny the appropriateness and validity of their separation as such.

Despite such a wide range of available scientific researches, the topic of "small" parties is not unified, unilateral and fully organized and systematized, but rather dispersed and heterogeneous in theoretical and practical contexts. This can be well understood from at least a partial list of general and basic tasks/problems of the researches of "small" parties in Political Science, among which, in particular, there are such questions as: the essence and reasons for defining and parameters/effects of positioning parties as "small" ones at different (both national and subnational) levels of politics, governance and electoral process; organizational structure, strategy, tactics, ideology and membership in "small" parties; the ability of "small" parties to perform alternative functions and tasks and to solve problems that are inherent in other parties at national and subnational levels of politics, governance and electoral process; relevance or irrelevance (significance or insignificance) of "small" parties within different types of party systems; the possibility of "small" parties' transforming into strong, large, major or mainstream parties or, conversely, their possibility to decline, marginalization and collapse. Moreover, all this is at the background of the lack of regional (not to mention universal) comparisons in Political Science, but instead within the focus on the study of separate cases, which is why there is currently no consolidated theory of "small" parties[52].

The difficulty of defining "small" parties is due to the fact that they are distinguished on the basis of various factors and criteria, including not only electoral and national, but also functional, geographical, territorial, subnational, etc., that is as parties at both national and subnational levels of politics and governance and parties with different goals of formation and functioning. We are convinced that this can serve as a basis for distinguishing several theoretical and methodological approaches to defining and outlining the phenomenon of "small" parties, including power-electoral (based on differences of success of parties in elections, governance and political process in general, in particular concerning the status in power and relevance), territorial (on the basis of taking into account different levels of politics and governance and different roles

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of parties within them, in particular and mainly at levels below the national one (subnational, regional, local, etc.)), functional (on the basis of taking into account the fact that parties perform or fail to perform their main functions and tasks), historical-organizational (on the basis of taking into account the origin, causes and methods of formation, organizational structure and features of financing of parties), ideological (due to the diversity of ideas, doctrines, policies and activities of parties), strategic (based on an assessment of the styles and formats of party behavior within electoral market, in the course of and in connection with governance and in political system in general) and so on. In addition, the problem is intensified by the fact that these theoretical and methodological approaches can be applied both separately or alternatively as well as being paired or combined, but they certainly and unconditionally blur the nature and scope of "small" parties as such[53]. Even the fact that different approaches have their most common definitions and understandings of "small" parties does not help in this context.

As a result, different scholars understand "small" parties in very diverse ways, including as: all "extra" parties within certain types of party systems (i.e., "third" parties in two-party systems, "fourth" parties in two-and-a-half-party systems, "fifth" parties in four-party systems, etc.)[54]; all or new parties that are not represented in the legislatures and/or do not structure inter-party competition and party systems[55]; parties without political influence that do not form cabinets and their policies, but also do not form a political/parliamentary opposition[56]; ideologically diverse parties with very low national electoral support, small number of members and weak organizational structure, support and/or funding[57]; parties functioning and active exclusively at subnational (regional, local, etc.), but not at national levels of politics and governance[58]; opportunistic, marginal or pariah/peripheral parties that "play" outside the framework and rules of the

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[57] Coakley J., The rise and fall of minor parties in Ireland, *"Irish Political Studies"* 2010, vol. 25, nr 4, s. 503-538.; Mair P., *The electoral universe of small parties in postwar Western Europe*, [w:] Müller-Rommel F., Pridham G. (eds.), *Small Parties in Western Europe: Comparative and National Perspectives*, Wyd. Newbury Park, London + Sage, New Delhi 1991, s. 41-70.

[58] Copus C., Clark A., Bottom K., *Multi-party politics in England? Small parties, independents and political associations in English local politics*, [w:] Reiser M., Holtmann E. (eds.), *Farewell to the Party Model? Independent Local Lists in Eastern and Western European Countries*, Wyd. VS Verlag, Wiesbaden 2008, s. 253-276.; Kefford G., Rethinking small political parties: from micro to peripheral, *"Australian Journal of Political Science"* 2016, vol. 52, nr 1, s. 1-15.; Müller-Rommel F., Pridham G., *Small Parties in Western Europe: Comparative and National Perspectives*, Wyd. Sage, London 1991, ss. 240.

political and party systems and governance[59]; parties that represent an extreme/radical or "niche" ideological position[60]; parties that are positioned exclusively as representatives of different types of minorities[61]. Even more, because modern Political Science uses many "adjectives" and synonyms to denote the essence, types and functionality of "small" parties at different levels of politics, governance and electoral process, including in different contexts, frameworks and countries[62], in particular "small" parties themselves, "minor" parties, "micro-parties", "third" parties, "independent" parties, "peripheral" parties, "pariah" parties, "protest" parties, "niche" parties, "local" parties, "alternative" parties or organizations, "personal" parties, "electoralist" parties, etc.

However, such diversity in the definition of "small" parties is internally contradictory in terms of their likely effects on inter-party interaction and structuring of party systems, since it leads to mixed and ambiguous conclusions. The reason is that some "small" parties (within one group of approaches) may be able to structure party systems of entire countries (i.e., at different levels of governance and politics), while other "small" parties (within the same or different approaches) may not do this[63], since they are not permanently represented in the legislatures[64] or remain on the margins, initially forming, but soon disappearing under the influence of strong, large, major, mainstream or systemic parties[65]. This, in turn, raises the question of the relevance or irrelevance of "small" parties and, in general, of their ability to transform the theory of parties and party systems and the shape of real party systems at different levels of politics and governance[66]. Especially given that different theoretical and methodological approaches to explaining the essence of "small" parties outline the phenomenon of relevance of such parties very differently and depending on the context of understanding "small" parties. It follows that the relevance or irrelevance of "small" parties should be interpreted and verified both in general and within the theory of party systems, as well as on the basis of various theoretical and methodological approaches to the definition of "small" parties discussed above. This is the logical sequence we would like to further follow in our study.

[59] Kefford G., Rethinking small political parties: from micro to peripheral, *"Australian Journal of Political Science"* 2016, vol. 52, nr 1, s. 1-15.

[60] Adams J., Clark M., Ezrow L., Glasgow G., Are Niche Parties Fundamentally Different from Mainstream Parties? The Causes and Electoral Consequences of Western European Parties' Policy Shifts, 1976-1998, *"American Journal of Political Science"* 2006, vol. 50, nr 3, s. 513.; Adams J., Ezrow L., Leiter D., Partisan Sorting and Niche Parties in Europe, *"West European Politics"* 2012, vol. 35, nr 6, s. 1272-1294.

[61] Chandra K., What is an ethnic party?, *"Party Politics"* 2011, vol. 17, nr 2, s. 151-169.; Ishiyama J., Breuning M., What's in a name? Ethnic party identity and democratic development in post-communist politics, *"Party Politics"* 2011, vol. 17, nr 2, s. 223-241.

[62] Müller-Rommel F., Pridham G., *Small Parties in Western Europe: Comparative and National Perspectives*, Wyd. Sage, London 1991, ss. 240.; Sloan L., *Measuring Minor Parties in English Local Government: Presence vs. Vote Share*, Wyd. Local Politics Specialist Group 2011, ss. 19.

[63] Herzog H., Minor Parties: The Relevancy Perspective, *"Comparative Politics"* 1987, vol. 19, nr 3, s. 317-329.; Kefford G., Rethinking small political parties: from micro to peripheral, *"Australian Journal of Political Science"* 2016, vol. 52, nr 1, s. 1-15.; Müller-Rommel F., Pridham G., *Small Parties in Western Europe: Comparative and National Perspectives*, Wyd. Sage, London 1991, ss. 240.; Sartori G., *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*, Wyd. Cambridge University Press, London: 1976, ss. 383.

[64] Orr G., Ballot order: Donkey voting in Australia, *"Election Law Journal"* 2002, vol. 1, nr 4, s. 576.

[65] Mayer H., *Big party chauvinism and minor party romanticism*, [w:] Mayer H., Nelson H. (eds), *Australian politics: A fifth reader*, Wyd. Longman Cheshire, Melbourne 1980, s. 345.

[66] Weeks L., Minor Parties in Irish Political Life: An Introduction, *"Irish Political Studies"* 2010, vol. 25, nr 4, s. 473-479.

It is generally known that the relevance of parties can be considered both functionally as well as quantitatively and dimensionally (i.e., given the number and size of parties). An example of a functional understanding of the relevance of parties when they have to be taken into account is a scientific position by G. Sartori[67], according to which the relevance is determined by coalition potential and/or blackmail potential of parties in legislatures (no party can be identified as relevant one if it is not represented in the legislature), in particular on the formation and/or support or non-support of the executives at various levels of governance. The coalition potential depends on whether a party has enough seats in the legislature to become governmental/executive (even within coalition) one, i.e. whether a party (which is therefore relevant one) is directly involved in coalition cabinet formation or at least provides it support. In turn, the blackmail potential outlines a party's ability (only if it is relevant one) to block the formation of cabinet/executive at a particular level of politics and governance (in particular, by changing the essence of political competition from centrifugal to centrifugal one, etc.). It follows that a party (regardless of its size) is considered relevant if it is able to change the direction of party competition and the essence of the party system, endowed with the coalition and/or blackmail potential[68]. In contrast, the quantitative and dimensional (i.e., given the number and size of parties) interpretation of party relevance is based on the success or failure of parties in the election or on the overcoming or failure to overcome by parties the barrier of representation in the legislature at a particular level of politics and governance. Thus, some scholars consider relevant those parties that receive at least 2,5–5 (but most often 3) percent of seats in the legislature[69], while other scholars – those parties that receive at least 1 percent of the vote, but also any representation in the legislature[70].

Various scholars often use one or the other approaches to understanding the relevance of parties, including for their classification and even delimitation of the so-called "small" parties (as well as independent/non-party politicians)[71]. This is complemented by the fact that researchers sometimes use the concepts of party relevance to distinguish divergent upper limits of the size of representation of "small" parties in the legislatures, including from 1,5 to 15 percent depending

[67] Sartori G., *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*, Wyd. Cambridge University Press, London: 1976, s. 122-123.

[68] Wolinetz S., *Classifying Party Systems: Where Have All the Typologies Gone?*, The Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, Winnipeg (Manitoba) 2004.; Wolinetz S., *Party Systems and Party System Types*, [w:] Katz R., Crotty W. (eds), *Handbook of Party Politics*, Wyd. Sage, London 2006, s. 51-62.

[69] De Swaan A., *Coalition theories and cabinet formations: A study of formal theories of coalition formation applied to nine European parliaments after 1918*, Wyd. Elsevier, New York 1973, ss. 347.; Janda K., *Political Parties: A Cross-National Survey*, Wyd. The Free Press, New York 1980, ss. 7.; Janda K., *Retrieving information for a comparative study of political parties*, [w:] Crotty W. (ed.), *Approaches to the study of party organization*, Wyd. Allyn & Bacon, Boston 1967, s. 159-215.; Rose R., Urwin D., Persistence and change in Western party systems since 1945, *"Political Studies"* 1970, vol. 18, nr 3, s. 287-319.; Siaroff A., *Comparative European Party systems: An Analysis of Parliamentary Elections Since 1945*, Wyd. Garland Publishing 2000, ss. 484.; Ware A., *Political Parties and Party Systems*, Wyd. Oxford University Press, Oxford 1996, s. 148-149.

[70] Doring H., Mapping established democracies: integrated data on parties, elections and cabinets, *"Electoral Studies"* 2016, vol. *44*, s. 538; Doring H., Regel S., Party Facts: A database of political parties worldwide, *"Party Politics"* 2019, vol. 25, nr 2, s. 97-109.

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on national specifics and types of party and electoral systems[72]. This provides an attempt to define, grade or classify "small" parties and separate them from mainstream and systemic parties in the legislatures at different levels of politics and governance, and so on[73]. However, the basic understanding is traditionally that "small" parties are political parties that are not positioned and perceived as governmental or executive ones at one or another – national or subnational – levels of politics, even though they may aspire to it and may or may not be electorally successful or represented in the legislatures[74]. In other words, this means that "small" parties (at any level of politics and governance) may or may not be relevant electorally and in their representation in the legislatures, but they may not be relevant at the governmental level or at the level of obtaining and exercising the executive.

However, researchers ambiguously interpret the essence and hypotheses of the relevance of "small" parties given that there are different theoretical and methodological approaches to their understanding. For example, "small" (necessarily subnational) parties are traditionally marginalized at the national level of politics and governance within a territorial approach, and therefore they are certainly not relevant ones in the context of national party systems[75]. Instead, such parties are or may be influential, relevant and even dominant ones at any subnational level of politics, thus displacing and sometimes rendering national-level parties to be irrelevant, in particular because of their inability to recognize and respond to subnational circumstances and their incapacity to function on the line of "center-periphery" conflict[76]. Similarly, "small" parties cannot be interpreted as relevant ones when they are understood as parties representing exclusively different types of minorities. However, with the exception of subnational entities, where such parties are basic ones and provided for by the relevant electoral legislation or are or may be popular, etc.

The situation is more difficult if "small" parties are understood as having no real influence on the political agenda, political process and governance (at any level), even if they are relatively electorally successful and represented in the legislatures. The fact is that such "small" parties are only provisionally relevant ones, in particular electorally, but not functionally, because they do not meet or support the established and customary political/institutional design[77]. In addition, it is

[72] Clark A., Breaking the mould or fiddling at the edges? Ireland's minor parties in comparative and systemic perspective, *"Irish Political Studies"* 2010, vol. 25, nr 4, s. 661-680.; Mair P., *The electoral universe of small parties in postwar Western Europe*, [w:] Müller-Rommel F., Pridham G. (eds.), *Small Parties in Western Europe: Comparative and National Perspectives*, Wyd. Newbury Park, London + Sage, New Delhi 1991, s. 41-70.; Weeks L., Minor Parties in Irish Political Life: An Introduction, *"Irish Political Studies"* 2010, vol. 25, nr 4, s. 473-479.

[73] Clark A., Breaking the mould or fiddling at the edges? Ireland's minor parties in comparative and systemic perspective, *"Irish Political Studies"* 2010, vol. 25, nr 4, s. 661-680.; McDaid S., Rekawek K., From mainstream to minor and back: the Irish Labour Party, 1987-1992, *"Irish Political Studies"* 2010, vol. 25, nr 4, s. 625-642.

[74] Fisher S., *The "Decline of Parties" Thesis*, [w:] Merkl P. (ed.), *Western European Party Systems*, Wyd. The Free Press, New York 1980, s. 609-610.; Herzog H., Minor Parties: The Relevancy Perspective, *"Comparative Politics"* 1987, vol. 19, nr 3, s. 317-329.

[75] Fisher S., *The minor parties of the Federal Republic of Germany*, Wyd. Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague 1974, s. 6-8.; Müller-Rommel F., Pridham G., *Small Parties in Western Europe: Comparative and National Perspectives*, Wyd. Sage, London 1991, ss. 240.

[76] Coakley J., Centres, peripheries, and party systems: nested secession processes in Great Britain and Ireland, *"Political Geography"* 2008, vol. 27, nr 7, s. 740-760.

[77] Maghraoui D., On the relevance or irrelevance of political parties in Morocco, *"The Journal of North African Studies"* 2019, vol. 26, nr 6, s. 939-959.; Völkel J., The "chicken and egg" problem of relevance: Political parties and parliaments in North Africa, *"The Journal of North African Studies"* 2020, vol. 26, nr 6, s. 865-880.

quite common for parties, especially in autocratic political regimes, to be positioned as "small" and irrelevant ones when they are the symptoms or consequences of the complete or almost complete insignificance or absence of party systems as a whole. Since nominally or formally such parties do exist and even structure party systems, at least partially, but they are "under control" and are not independent functionally. Accordingly, this means that those "small" parties that are unable to determine the voting agenda in the political process and are subordinated to political regimes are systemically irrelevant a priori and gradually lose their functionality and significance[78].

Instead, the situation is much simpler when "small" parties are those parties that are new and have no representation according to the election results. Since both functionally and quantitatively such "small" parties are not relevant ones, because they are not able to change and structure inter-party competition and party systems in general at a particular level of politics and governance, including or especially by participating in the possible formation of cabinets/executives and setting the political agenda[79]. Accordingly, the main indication of the irrelevance of such "small" parties is that they are an "ephemeral" minority and are incapable of gaining electoral success and representation, not only wanting it, but also having relatively developed membership bases, organizational structures and funding[80]. Although, in contrast, it sometimes happens that the potential relevance of such "small" parties is used "for rent" or is automatically acquired by mainstream or systemic parties, which further mobilize, strengthen or at least test new forms and models of political behavior, responding to the risks of modifying political competition and the existing party systems[81].

Nevertheless, the preliminary (following the theorizations proposed above) conclusion about the complete or almost complete irrelevance of "small" parties is not universal and absolute one. Since the analyzed parties are often interpreted as new or established political actors, which may be insignificantly and at a low level represented in the legislatures according to the elections results both at national and/or subnational levels of politics and governance. Accordingly, it is obvious that "small" parties can be both relevant or irrelevant electorally and by their representation in the legislatures (but necessarily with a low level of representation in the legislatures and other elected institutions), i.e. functionally and/or quantitatively, although these parties may not be relevant at the level of involvement and status in the executive. This is evident mainly in the framework of the power-electoral approach to the understanding of "small" parties,

[78] Fisher S., *The minor parties of the Federal Republic of Germany*, Wyd. Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague 1974, s. 6-8; Herzog H., Minor Parties: The Relevancy Perspective, *"Comparative Politics"* 1987, vol. 19, nr 3, s. 317-329.; Reynolds P., *The Role of the Minor Parties*, [w:] Penniman H. (ed.), *Australia at the Polls*, Wyd. American Enterprise Institute, Washington 1975, s. 159-169.

[79] Emanuele V., Chiaramonte A., Explaining the impact of new parties in the Western European party systems, *"Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties"* 2019, vol. 29, nr 4, s. 490-510.

[80] Coakley J., Minor parties in Irish political life, 1922-1989, *"Economic and Social Review"* 1990, vol. 21, nr 3, s. 269-297.

[81] Clark A., Breaking the mould or fiddling at the edges? Ireland's minor parties in comparative and systemic perspective, *"Irish Political Studies"* 2010, vol. 25, nr 4, s. 661-680.; Herzog H., Minor Parties: The Relevancy Perspective, *"Comparative Politics"* 1987, vol. 19, nr 3, s. 317-329.; Maghraoui D., On the relevance or irrelevance of political parties in Morocco, *"The Journal of North African Studies"* 2019, vol. 26, nr 6, s. 939-959.; Völkel J., The "chicken and egg" problem of relevance: Political parties and parliaments in North Africa, *"The Journal of North African Studies"* 2020, vol. 26, nr 6, s. 865-880.

which takes into account the differences in the level of success of parties in elections, in governance and in the political process in general.

In addition, the problem is exacerbated by the fact that the phenomenon and the attribute of relevance can serve as a barrier and a probable basis for the separation or non-separation of "small" parties as such. The reason is that the barrier or problem of relevance of "small" parties traditionally concerns the acquisition and demonstration of a certain influence of such parties on the political process, in particular on political and governmental decisions, as well as in general for defining and conducting policy at various levels of governance, in particular at national or subnational (local or regional) levels. Therefore, it is in this context that the answer to the question of whether "small" parties can have a role and status of relevant ones in certain party systems at different levels of politics and governance or whether they should be treated exclusively as irrelevant ones is of paramount importance[82].

This problem is also developing due to the fact that "small" parties do not fully and not always fit into the theory of party systems, in particular due to the lack of a unified definition of "small" parties. Therefore, different scholars give the phenomenon of relevance of "small" parties quite different and even specific options. Clear evidence of this is the fact that "small" parties usually or often appear as irrelevant ones at one or another level of politics and governance within the classical theories and typologies of party systems. In contrast, "small" parties are often tried to be positioned and presented as relevant ones in the categories of the so-called "mobilization potential". The latter is based on the ability of "small" parties to attract attention and challenge the party status quo in a given case, as well as to act within new socio-political cleavages and express new political identities in certain conditions[83]. It follows that many scholars shift the emphasis on the essence and content of the relevance of parties, because they explain the relevance of "small" parties not only functionally and quantitatively, but also ideologically, behaviorally and so on[84]. There are good and sufficient reasons for this, since the relevance of parties can be outlined in relation to different dimensions of political and party systems and at each stage of the life-cycle of parties[85]. Although, in contrast, if a party fails to achieve its relevance or becomes irrelevant one, then its chances of "survival" are greatly reduced[86]. This is reflected in the fact that a "small" party should be considered irrelevant one in its life-cycle when it eventually remains or is considered as "superfluous" one in the sense that this party is

[82] Sloan L., *Measuring Minor Parties in English Local Government: Presence vs. Vote Share*, Wyd. Local Politics Specialist Group 2011, ss. 19.

[83] Herzog H., Minor Parties: The Relevancy Perspective, *"Comparative Politics"* 1987, vol. 19, nr 3, s. 317-329.; Lucardi P., *Fragments from the pillars: small parties in the Netherlands*, [w:] Müller-Rommel F., Pridham G. (eds.), *Small Parties in Western Europe: Comparative and National Perspectives*, Wyd. Newbury Park, London + Sage, New Delhi 1991, s. 123.

[84] Müller-Rommel F., Pridham G., *Small Parties in Western Europe: Comparative and National Perspectives*, Wyd. Sage, London 1991, s. 7-13.

[85] Herzog H., Minor Parties: The Relevancy Perspective, *"Comparative Politics"* 1987, vol. 19, nr 3, s. 317-329.

[86] Bianco W., Kam C., Sened I., Smyth R., Party relevance and party survival in new democracies, *"International Area Studies Review"* 2014, vol. 17, nr 3, s. 251-261.; Coakley J., The rise and fall of minor parties in Ireland, *"Irish Political Studies"* 2010, vol. 25, nr 4, s. 503-538.; O'Malley E., Punch bags for heavyweights? Minor parties in Irish government, *"Irish Political Studies"* 2010, vol. 25, nr 4, s. 539-561.; Pedersen M., Towards a new typology of party lifespans and minor parties, *"Scandinavian Political Studies"* 1982, vol. 5, nr 1, s. 1-16.

not needed and will not be used for any possible coalition majority. But on the contrary, even a "small" party is or may be relevant one when its existence or appearance affect the tactics and direction of inter-party competition and the party system in general[87].

This is often due to the fact that "small" parties, at least indicate the emerging drifts, processes and factors on the "boundaries" of certain party systems in certain periods of their development, if the formers do not structure the party systems themselves thus automatically being relevant ones. This, in turn, means that "small" parties may not be directly positioned as relevant ones – neither functionally nor quantitatively, – but may have an indirect potential for relevance. Even when such parties do not overcome the barrier of representation in the legislatures and other elected institutions, but determine, shape and manifest certain political, ideological, mobilizing, but generally deviant alternatives for inter-party competition and party systems, and so on. It is sometimes even believed that the potential for relevance of "small" parties is due to the very fact of their announcement or emergence, since this fact may force established/mainstream parties to change their behavior, tactics and strategy[88].

In addition, the potential for relevance is inherent in "small" parties even when they affect the forced preservation of the status quo in party systems, in particular about certain ideological boundaries and rules of the "game" in the latter[89]. Since it is "small" parties, even if they are not represented in the legislatures, that sometimes appear as "benchmarks" of the content and framework of political culture, which are taken into account or not taken into account in the programmatic and ideological positioning of parties structuring party systems. Accordingly, "small" parties may have the potential for relevance due to the fact that they already exist or may become a kind of initiators, interpreters or promoters of political norms and rules of the "game", which are do not fully generated and adopted by systemic, major and mainstream parties in party systems. This is due to the fact that "small" parties often operate as a "testing grounds" or "halfway" for testing new ideas, which are eventually picked up, adopted or transformed by major, mainstream and systemic parties[90], which again confirms the potential for relevance of the former[91].

Another specific manifestation of the potential for relevance of "small" parties is that they are seen as "safety valves" for dissatisfied voters[92], thus significantly regulating the external needs and frameworks of party systems. Since it is thanks to "small" parties that it is possible to expand the electoral framework of inter-party and political competition in general. The reason is that party systems are not always and not fully formed by involving all voters who vote for

[87] Sartori G., *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*, Wyd. Cambridge University Press, London: 1976, s. 22-23.

[88] Herzog H., Minor Parties: The Relevancy Perspective, *"Comparative Politics"* 1987, vol. 19, nr 3, s. 317-329.

[89] Herzog H., Minor Parties: The Relevancy Perspective, *"Comparative Politics"* 1987, vol. 19, nr 3, s. 317-329.

[90] Fisher S., *The minor parties of the Federal Republic of Germany*, Wyd. Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague 1974, s. 31-32.; Hammond J., Minor Parties and Electoral Realignments, *"American Politics Quarterly"* 1976, vol. 4, s. 63-85.; Key V., *Politics, Parties and Pressure Groups*, Wyd. Thomas Crowell, New York 1964, s. 286.

[91] Herzog H., Minor Parties: The Relevancy Perspective, *"Comparative Politics"* 1987, vol. 19, nr 3, s. 317-329.

[92] Fisher S., *The minor parties of the Federal Republic of Germany*, Wyd. Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague 1974, s. 32.

certain parties. Accordingly, "small" parties often appeal to voters who are not involved in the formation of the existing party systems or to political ideas and slogans, which are largely ignored by mainstream and major parties[93]. Thus, the potential for relevance of "small" parties is manifested in the fact that such political actors expand and update the electoral arenas and ideological/programmatic framework of party systems. However, this means that the relevance of parties varies depending on whose point of view is taken into account as the basis one both at the "center" (at national level of politics) and at the "periphery" (at subnational level of politics) of the political system. As a result, the size and functionality of parties are not always directly proportional to their strength (although the ideal option is when differences in party size also express differences in substance[94]). Since "small" parties can play a disproportionately large role[95] even without being functionally and/or quantitatively relevant ones, but instead having only ideological, political, electoral or mobilizing potential for relevance. However, by contrast, the status of a relevant party does not automatically mean that it is a "big" party, and the status of a "small" party does not automatically mean that it cannot be relevant one, and so on[96].

As a result, we can conclude that the phenomenon of "small" parties and the parameters, features and scope of their relevance or irrelevance are still not consistently structured in Political Science, since there is no consolidated position on this issue. On one hand, scholars point out that some "small" parties may be able to structure party systems of entire countries or party systems at individual levels of their politics and governance, while other "small" parties may not. It all depends on the context and approach used to define and identify "small" parties (power-electoral, territorial, functional, ideological, historical-organizational, strategic one) and to understand the relevance of parties in general and the relevance of "small" parties in particular (functional, quantitative, ideological, behavioral, etc.), as well as on the electoral success of such parties. On the other hand, scholars argue that the attribute of relevance may be a barrier and a probable basis for the separation or non-separation of "small" parties as such, although "small" parties do not fully and not always fit into party systems theory. That is why we are inclined to state that in case of the so-called "small" parties (regardless of the approach to their definition) their relevance or irrelevance should be defined not just as an attribute of a party system type, but as a characteristic of party or even political system and individual parties at different levels and stages of their life-cycle. Accordingly, "small" parties can be both relevant or irrelevant, but irrelevant "small" parties may still be endowed (though not necessarily) with the potential for relevance. Especially when the latter are able to mobilize the electorate for new socio-political cleavages and political identities, etc., and thus to adjust the behavior and ideological/political positioning

[93] Herzog H., Minor Parties: The Relevancy Perspective, *"Comparative Politics"* 1987, vol. 19, nr 3, s. 317-329.

[94] Duverger M., *Les partis politiques,* Wyd. A. Colin, Paris 1951, s. 383.

[95] Novak M., Cassling R., The relevance of small parties: From a general framework to the Czech "opposition agreement", *"Czech Sociological Review"* 2000, vol. 8, s. 27-47.

[96] Bolleyer N., Small parties: From party pledges to government policy, *"West European Politics"* 2007, vol. 30, nr 1, s. 121-147.; Laurent A., Villalba B., *Les petits partis. De la petitesse en politique*, Wyd. L'Harmattan, Paris 1998, s. 25.; Siaroff A., Two-And-A-Half-Party Systems and the Comparative Role of the "Half", *"Party Politics"* 2003, vol. 9, nr 3, s. 267-290.

of all other parties, especially systemic and mainstream ones, i.e. the tactics and direction of inter-party competition in party system.

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