

## ARTICLE

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# Quality of Life and Women's Descriptive Representation: Female Emergence and Success in the 2018 Czech Local Elections<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse the effect of quality of life, together with other factors, on female candidates' willingness to run for office and women's descriptive representation in the 2018 Czech local elections. We found that the effect of some variables was different in the case of women's emergence and success. While the share of female candidates was higher in larger cities with lower quality of life and less nationalized local party systems, women were much more successful in smaller cities with lower quality of life, less nationalized local party systems and a more strongly gendered context in the sense of previous female representation, both in city councils and on corporate boards of firms owned by the city. While the positive effect of size on women's emergence can be explained with the larger city's context which generates more access points for emergence of women candidates, the negative effect of size on women's success was due to the desirability of office effect. Furthermore, the very small effect of previous female representation on the share of female candidates can be explained by the existence of an incumbency effect, which may also underlie the different influence of the representation of women in municipally-owned firms' management. Finally, the negative effect of quality of life (at the level of both candidacy and representation) can also be linked with the desirability hypothesis. The drive to win representation and make decisions about the life of the community can be expected to be much stronger in municipalities with higher quality of life.

### Keywords

Quality of life, women's descriptive representation, local politics, quality of democracy, Czech Republic

DOI: [https://doi.org/10.24132/cejop\\_2020\\_2](https://doi.org/10.24132/cejop_2020_2)

**How to cite:** Maškarinec, P. 2020. "Quality of Life and Women's Descriptive Representation: Female Emergence and Success in the 2018 Czech Local Elections." *Central European Journal of Politics* 6 (2): 23–43. DOI: 10.24132/cejop\_2020\_2

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<sup>1</sup> The paper was prepared under a project supported by the Czech Science Foundation, Grant No. 16-01019S, "Determinants of women's political representation at the local level in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, 1994–2014".

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## 1. Introduction

Quality of life (QoL) and women's representation in politics are two of the most studied issues in many areas of social sciences and beyond. However, research that aspires to connect the issue of quality of life with the level of female participation in political decision-making processes (as one of the dimensions of quality of democracy [Lijphart 2012; Gwiazda 2016]) is still largely missing, primarily at subnational levels of government both regional and especially local, which are seen by many as places where (men's as well as women's) political careers begin. Similarly, there is also almost no research on quality of life in general political science literature on the effect of quality of life on many areas of politics at all levels of government. However, as some previous studies in the Czech Republic confirmed the effect of quality of life on, for instance, electoral behaviour in presidential elections (Murgaš 2019), or on voter turnout in local elections (Haman and Školník 2020),<sup>3</sup> we will try to expand the quality of life research to cover the area of women's representation as well.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the effect of quality of life, as well as other determinants, on both female candidates' willingness to run for office and women's descriptive representation in the 2018 local elections in Czech cities, or more specifically municipalities with extended powers. The paper is organised as follows. First, we briefly review the existing literature on quality of life and determinants of women's representation. In the second part, the data and methods of analysis are introduced. In the third part, a regression analysis of women's emergence and success in Czech cities is presented. Finally, the concluding section formulates some implications of the results for further research.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. Quality of life

Most authors argue that quality of life is a complex, multidimensional and amorphous concept without a generally valid definition, as well as without a uniform methodology of measurement (Phillips 2006; Ira and Andráško 2007; Rišová and Pouš 2018; Murgaš 2016; Murgaš and Drápela 2020; Faka 2020). At the same time, it has been argued that the conceptualization of quality of life is based on two dimensions: subjective (personal) and objective (spatial) (Murgaš and Petrovič 2020). While the subjective dimension of quality of life is referred to as subjective well-being, the objective one is referred to as

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<sup>3</sup> In the presidential elections of 2013 and 2018, better quality of life in a district meant worse outcome for Miloš Zeman – the winning candidate of both presidential races (see Murgaš 2019). In Czech local elections, higher quality of life increases voter turnout in a given municipality (see Haman and Školník 2020).

quality of place (cf. Phillips 2006: 15–36). Similarly, quality of life has been defined both in micro (individual, subjective) terms, including overall perceptions of quality of life, individual experiences and values (measured through such indicators as well-being, happiness, satisfaction with individual's own life or the environment where she/he lives and so on), and in macro (societal, objective) terms, including indicators of income, employment, housing, education, or other living conditions and environmental circumstances (Bowling and Windsor 2001).

However, Murgaš and Drápela (2020: 326) emphasized that it is not correct to connect quality of life research with subjective well-being or happiness, because quality of life does not equal subjective well-being (measured and evaluated by subjective satisfaction with individual's life). More importantly, with regard to spatial (or geographical) aspects of quality of life, Murgaš and Klobučník (2016) preferred the objective dimension of community (conceptualized as quality of place) as more important for quality of life research. The main reason is that quality of life always has a geographic dimension with both a spatial and a personal dimension, and the priority is to identify places (at different hierarchical levels) where quality of life is high, medium, or low (Murgaš 2016).

More importantly, although there is no generally valid method of measuring quality of life, many authors (Rinner 2007; Mizgajski, Walaszek and Kaczmarek 2014; Peach and Petach 2015; Weziak-Białowolska 2016; Bougouffa and Permana 2018; Kazemzadeh-Zow et al. 2018; Faka 2020; Murgaš and Petrovič 2020) have presented their own conceptualizations of quality of life, together with sets of indicators aimed at capturing various (spatial as well as non-spatial) aspects of quality of life. For instance, Murgaš and Klobučník (2016) calculated their index of quality of life at the level of all Czech municipalities using ten indicators: (1) suicides; (2) male life expectancy at birth; (3) female life expectancy at birth; (4) mortality; (5) birth rate; (6) divorce rate; (7) college-educated population; (8) unemployment; (9) emission balance; and (10) generativity (cf. Murgaš and Klobučník 2016: 556–558).

This paper uses the complex *Quality of Life Index* developed by Obce v datech (2020) to evaluate the effect of quality of life on female participation in local political decision making. The index combines several indicators of the happiness and welfare of people's lives in three basic dimensions: (1) health and environment; (2) work, education and standard of living; (3) community and services – and each of these dimensions is composed of several indicators.

## **2.2. Determinants of women's representation**

With regard to determinants of women's representation, it is possible to define three groups of variables which explain cross-national variation in the number of women

elected to national parliaments, namely: (1) socioeconomic factors; (2) cultural factors; and (3) political and institutional factors (Norris 1987; Siaroff 2000; Krook 2010). However, other authors demonstrate that women's representation at the local level is a complex phenomenon that can be shaped by both local political context and institutional variables (Smith, Reingold and Owens 2012), previous officeholder's experience (Trounstine 2011), strategic context (Crowder-Meyer and Smith 2015), as well as by candidates' personal characteristics that may express their political ambitions to run for (and win) a representative post.

The theoretical framework of the present paper builds on the assumption that women's representation in Czech cities is differentially shaped by quality of life, which influences social and political behaviour, but at the same time, women's prospects further depend on the context, i.e., exogenous factors that may strengthen or weaken their chances of running in elections or to run in elections or of getting elected.

Even though the significance and direction of the relationship between quality of life and the level of women's representation in local politics is not clear (given the lack of pertinent research), we follow the assumptions of modernization theory (Inglehart 1997; Inglehart and Norris 2003; Inglehart, Norris and Welzel 2002; Inglehart and Welzel 2005) that economic development is the driving force of value change in society, culture and politics, and cities with higher quality of life (indicating higher standards of living and human development) are more likely to have both more female candidates in local elections and more female councillors in their local councils. It may therefore be expected that:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** The proportion of female candidates will be higher in cities with higher quality of life.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** The proportion of female councillors will be higher in cities with higher quality of life.

In addition to quality of life, we focus on four factors that may give rise to a strategic environment fostering women's chances of getting involved in decision making in local political affairs. Those factors include municipality size and local party system's nationalisation as indicators of external environment (an institutional, exogenous factor), complemented by contextual variables that identify whether the local environment is more open to women's representation given the previous level of women's representation at the local level both in local councils as well as on corporate boards of firms which are owned by Czech cities.

Population size is considered as one of the key variables affecting the form of local politics.<sup>4</sup> However, although population size is primarily a demographic factor, it is also

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<sup>4</sup> In the Czech case, see, e.g., Ryšavý and Šaradín (2010), Ryšavý and Bernard (2013), Balík, Gongala and Gregor (2015), Kruntorádová (2015), Maškarinec (2015), Lysek (2016), Vogt (2017), Spáč et al. (2018),

often used as one of the factors affecting the desirability hypothesis. The latter applies to the Czech Republic, where the district magnitude is derived precisely from municipality size.<sup>5</sup> However, while studies of state legislatures (Carroll 1994) show that men should be more likely to run for and win offices that are seen as more prestigious and whose members have more decision-making powers, most studies at the local level which examined the association between women's political representation and different measures of desirability show only limited or at best mixed support for this hypothesis (Karnig and Walter 1976; Welch and Karnig 1976; Bullock and MacManus 1991; Alozie and Manganaro 1993; Smith, Reingold and Owens 2012; Crowder-Meyer and Smith 2015; Crowder-Meyer, Kushner Gadarian and Trounstein 2015).

More importantly, in the Czech case, too, there is a considerable effect of size on female representation. That effect, though, was not constant in our findings. We were unable to confirm the assumed negative effect of municipality size on women's representation in the smallest municipalities (population under 150) or in municipalities of 1,001–2,000 inhabitants, but also in medium-sized towns with 15,001–40,000 inhabitants (cf. Maškarinec 2019b: 145–156). These divergent effects of municipality size may provide a partial explanation for the fact that the finding from traditional democracies that women are more successful in larger municipalities does not apply in the Czech Republic. This is another manifestation of the effect of the country's extremely fragmented settlement structure, which may have divergent influence on women's political representation as well. At the same time, this conclusion is consistent with the findings of other authors (Balík, Gongala and Gregor 2015), who talk about “three worlds” of local elections in the Czech Republic with regard to the electoral system's effects in municipalities of different sizes: the largest cities experience considerably weaker effects of preferential voting on party list reordering, which translates into higher importance of the nomination process and a stronger role of party leadership in the composition of local councils (cf. Balík, Gongala and Gregor 2015: 64–68). Keeping these conclusions in mind we suggest that:

**H<sub>3</sub>:** The proportion of female candidates will be higher in larger cities.

**H<sub>4</sub>:** The proportion of female councillors will be lower in larger cities.

According to some authors, voting for women for the first time is “innovative political behaviour, but successful innovations become routinised and diffused.” (Ondercin and

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Čopík, Kopřiva and Čmejrek (2019), Šaradín et al. (2019), Hájek and Balík (2020), Potluka, Svecova and Zarubova (2020), Voda and Svačinová (2020).

<sup>5</sup> Czech local councillors are elected under free-list proportional representation, and the number of seats on local councils varies between 5–15 seats in the smallest municipalities (population under 500), 35–55 seats in the largest cities (above 150,000 inhabitants) and 55–70 seats in the capital city of Prague.

Welch 2009: 599) The fact that the existing share of women officeholders can have a positive impact on future representation of women was confirmed at the national level in an analysis of US congressional elections between 1992 and 2000 (Ondercin and Welch 2009), but also at the local level (Trounstine 2011; Smith, Reingold and Owens 2012; for an example of Czech cities between 1994–2014, see e.g. Maškarinec, Klimovský and Bláha 2019, or for regional cities in 2018, see Bláha and Maškarinec 2020).

Furthermore, the percentage of women in a city council was a positive predictor of the descriptive representation of women as mayors in subsequent years in US municipalities with a population of 100,000 or more (Smith, Reingold and Owens 2012), and similarly, there exists an effect in the opposite direction, i.e., a high correlation between the presence of a woman mayor and the proportion of female councillors (Regulska, Fried and Tiefenbacher 1991). On the other hand, only a weak effect of previous women's representation on subsequent election of female mayors has been indicated for Czech municipalities with extended powers and Slovak district towns (Maškarinec, Klimovský and Danišová 2018).

Most studies also confirm a very strong positive effect of incumbency (advantage over rival candidates of existing officeholders running for re-election) on candidates' success in local elections (Martinussen 2004; Trounstine 2011; Sloboda 2014; for contrary results on the incumbency effect on women's willingness to run or their success in local elections, see Spicer, McGregor and Alcantara 2017), which has been confirmed by some previous studies in the case of Czech municipalities (Bernard 2012). A role is played by experience, where women's success in lower positions may serve as a means to their subsequent success as mayoral nominees (Crowder-Meyer, Kushner Gadarian and Trounstine 2015). It may therefore be assumed that:

**H<sub>5</sub>:** The proportion of female candidates will be higher in cities that have experienced more women in their local councils in recent years.

**H<sub>6</sub>:** The proportion of female councillors will be higher in cities that have experienced more women in their local councils in recent years.

Similarly, a more friendly gendered context should be created not only by higher share of previous female councillors but also higher presence of women in other public posts. As we focus on the local level, a varying degree of women's representation on the boards of municipally-owned companies may result in differences in women's access to decision-making positions as one of the indicators of quality of democracy. In the Czech case, previous studies have found that women's representation in management positions decreases with growing decision-making level, which is corroborated by a comparative study of the corporate environment, where the number of women decreases with every single move up the management ladder (cf. Víšek, Dohnalová and Král'ová 2012: 20–22; Janský, Krottil and Pavlas 2015: 15–23).

More importantly, research on the level of 26 largest Czech cities (statutory cities) showed that women (as members of supervisory boards and boards of directors of companies in which shares are owned by statutory cities) are significantly advantaged in cities whose political environment (culture) is characterised with more “openness” to women (i.e. those with more women in their city councils/city boards or especially those with female mayors).<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, while municipality size had a negative effect on women’s descriptive representation on supervisory boards, it increased their representation on boards of directors (see Maškarinec 2019a: 970–975). Keeping these conclusions in mind we suggest that:

**H7:** The proportion of female candidates will be higher in cities that have experienced more women on the corporate boards of firms owned by them.

**H8:** The proportion of female councillors will be higher in cities that have experienced more women on the corporate boards of firms owned by them.

Finally, another possible differentiating factor of women’s representation is the shape of local party competition (in terms of the form of political competition between nationwide political parties, local parties or independent candidates), which choice is based on several arguments. On one hand, Czech local elections in smaller (and partly in medium-sized) municipalities are dominated by the phenomenon of independent candidates, and the role of political parties increases proportionally with increasing municipal size, which manifests itself most clearly in the case of statutory towns (cities with more than 40,000 inhabitants) where political parties dominate the electoral contest (Balík 2008).

Furthermore, there was a positive correlation between the proportion of seats received by independent candidates and women’s descriptive representation on Czech local councils. This suggests that women prefer rather non-institutionalised (nonpartisan) forms of participation, or institutionalised independent local lists, respectively, which bring them much more success in their effort to engage in local politics (Ryšavý and Šaradín 2010; Maškarinec and Klimovský 2016). It may therefore be assumed that:

**H9:** The proportion of female candidates will be lower in cities with more nationalised local party systems.

**H10:** The proportion of female councillors will be lower in cities with more nationalised local party systems.

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<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the positive effect of women’s higher success rate as local councillors on descriptive representation of women on city boards existed only after some elections, while the share of female local councillors in previous elections had a negative effect on the number of women on city boards in the following elections (see Maškarinec 2016: 123–126).

### 3. Data and methods

This paper works with the election outcomes in 205 Czech municipalities with extended powers and the capital city of Prague. The choice of such municipalities as basic units of analysis takes into account the peculiar settlement structure of the Czech Republic. It is characterised by a large number of small unintegrated municipalities, resulting in an extreme fragmentation of settlement system, reproduced in the equally fragmented structure of the local system of government (Illner 2003).<sup>7</sup> This may also translate into significantly different levels of quality of life or quality of democracy across municipalities.

The outcomes of earlier studies demonstrated that the possibilities of direct application of some theories of political science (derived primarily from the practice of higher-level politics) on the reality of Czech local politics are significantly limited by the size of the local political systems analysed. According to most authors, it is the very size of municipalities which determines a functional model of local politics. For this reason, it is meaningless to work with the smallest categories of municipalities as they lack some aspects of classic political systems, and traditional theories of political partisanship and political race are not applicable there (Jüptner 2008).

By contrast, municipalities with extended powers represent natural centres of microregions, to a certain extent serving as local “models” in their districts (Balík 2008). Furthermore, municipalities with extended powers (including Prague) include only 3.3% of all Czech municipalities, on one hand, but on the other hand, they contain nearly all the cities of more than 10,000 inhabitants in the Czech Republic and almost three-fifths (56.56%) of the country's population, and it is unthinkable to select a more homogenous group of municipalities with so many members.

Our dependent variables measure the share of women among candidates for and winners of local legislative offices in a given city and election year. The variable *percent of female candidates* indicates the percentage of all candidates running for a given local legislature in an election year who are women while *percent of female winners* measures the percentage of all winners in a local legislature and election year who are women.

We use various independent variables to explain the varying levels of female emergence and success in Czech local elections. First, we include the *Quality of Life Index* developed by Obce v datech, a consulting company for local government. The Quality of Life Index consists of three dimensions: (1) health and environment; (2) work, education and standard of living; (3) community and services, and each of these dimensions is

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<sup>7</sup> The structure of settlements in the Czech Republic is extremely fragmented. For example, municipalities with a population under 1,000 account for more than 77% of the country's 6,253 municipalities but only approximately 17% of the country's total population. For a full account of local authorities in the Czech Republic and the basic features of their autonomy, see Illner (2003).

composed of several indicators.<sup>8</sup> The Quality of Life Index calculations are based on OECD and UN approaches to benchmarking quality of life. The values of the indices range from 0 to 10, where a municipality with the worst results is given the value of 0 and one with the best result is given the value of 10. Generally, the Quality of Life Index does not interpret the quality of individual objects as subjectively sufficient or insufficient, but it focuses on their relative number or availability compared to the municipality with the best number or availability (Obce v datech 2020).

In the case of the effect of strategic (or gendered) electoral context, we use two indicators. With regard to previous studies, we expect a positive impact of previous share of women officeholders on future female representation. However, as the *previous female councillors* variable (share of female councillors in previous term) could be an endogenous predictor of the percentage of female winners in following elections (i.e. the dependent variable), we control for the effect of this independent variable including its lagged version, too (see below). Furthermore, as a more gendered electoral context (or context indicating more openness to women representation) might also indicate the presence of women in other public offices, we pay additional attention to the extent of female representation on corporate boards of firms which are owned by Czech cities, or more precisely on boards of directors and on supervisory boards. We expect that women will be significantly advantaged in cities whose political environment (culture) is characterised with more “openness” to women (i.e., those with more women in their city councils). To measure women’s representation on the boards of companies in which the cities own shares, we used the so-called *Gender Index*, which indicates the number of women on supervisory boards and boards of directors as a proportion of the total number of positions in both these bodies, as adopted from the “gender map” database (Otevřená společnost 2020; see Janský, Krottil and Pavlas 2015).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The first dimension (health and environment) includes the following variables: index of practitioners; index of paediatricians; index of driving time to a hospital; index of pharmacies; index of life expectancy; index of air pollution; index of presence of polluters; index of protected natural areas. The second dimension (work, education and standard of living) includes: index of unemployment; index of available job offers published on job portals; index of available job offers published by the Labour Office; index of affordable housing; index of material insufficiency; index of financial distress; index of kindergarten capacity; index of elementary school capacity; index of quality high schools. And finally, the third dimension (community and services) includes: index of supermarkets; index of ATMs; index of restaurants; index of cinemas; index of road network; index of railway transportation; index of citizen engagement; index of participation in regional and municipal elections; index of traffic accidents; index of gambling; index of migrating young people; index of population increase. For more on the construction of the Quality of Life Index, see Obce v datech (2020).

<sup>9</sup> Czech business corporations are managed under the two-tier (so-called German) board system where authority is delegated to two bodies: boards of directors and supervisory boards. However, in the reality of Czech municipalities, the influence of boards of directors on corporate management strongly prevails.

Furthermore, we include the *municipality size* variable (logarithm of the number of inhabitants) as a measure of both social diversity and desirability of local legislative offices. Finally, to capture the political nature of local elections (in terms of the shape of political competition between national parties, local parties and independents), we measure the degree of local party system nationalisation, employing Kjaer and Elklit's (2010) index of local party system nationalisation.<sup>10</sup> This approach is an extension of previous research of party system nationalisation, which accentuated the significance of spatial aspects for overall institutionalisation of party systems almost exclusively at the level of party strength in national elections (Jones and Mainwaring 2003; Caramani 2004; Chhibber and Kollman 2004; Bochsler 2006, 2010; Kasuya and Moenius 2008; Harbers 2010, 2017; de Miguel 2017; in the Czech context Strmiska et al. 2009; Lyons and Linek 2010; Stauber 2017).

More specifically, we use Kjaer and Elklit's *effective index of local party system nationalisation* (LPSN), which can be expressed as the share of seats in the municipal council gained by national parties divided by the share of seats in the national parliament carried by the parties with no representation in the municipality + 1 (for more on the construction of the index, see Kjaer and Elklit 2010: 431–436; for possibilities of using the index in the Czech context, see Maškarinec 2015: 631–638).<sup>11</sup>

The effects of the above-mentioned indicators (Table 1) are analysed using the classic ordinary least squares method (multiple linear regression). We estimate two separate models. Model 1 includes the non-lagged version of the *previous female councillors* variable, while Model 2 includes its versions lagged by one election cycle; one election cycle spans 4 years. With the exception of the Quality of Life Index and the Gender Index, the remaining independent variables, as well as the dependent variables, are sourced from the Czech Statistical Office's server (CZSO 2020).

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<sup>10</sup> Kjaer and Elklit's (2010) approach, which the authors used in the context of Danish local elections, was later replicated in research of local party system nationalisation in other European countries: Austria (Ennsner-Jedenastik and Hansen 2013), the Czech Republic (Maškarinec 2015) or Belgium (Dodeigne, Close and Teuber 2020). A partly different approach to research of nationalisation of local party systems was taken by Steyvers and Heyerick (2017) in Belgium.

<sup>11</sup> The underlying idea of the equation for calculating the effective index of local party system nationalisation is identical with the way the equation for calculating its non-effective version was constructed. The index equals the number of municipal council seats acquired by national parties as a share of the "potential size" of the council if unrepresented national parties obtained the same share of seats in the council as in the national parliament. Therefore, the denominator in the equation equals one plus the share of seats in the national parliament held by the parties without representation in a given municipality (Kjaer and Elklit 2010: 442). In its formalised version, the formula for calculating the effective index of local party system nationalisation would be as follows:  $LPSN = (x / y) + 1$ , where  $x$  represents the share of seats in the council obtained by national parties and  $y$  indicates the share of seats in the national parliament maintained by the parties which failed to acquire representation in the municipality.

**Table 1.** List of variables and descriptive statistics

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Mean (standard dev.)</b>
<b>Dependent variable</b>	Share of female candidates	22.99 (8.62)
<b>Dependent variable</b>	Share of female councillors	32.76 (4.26)
<b>Quality of Life Index</b>	Quality of life index	4.36 (1.23)
<b>Municipality size (log)</b>	Logarithm of the number of inhabitants	4.17 (0.40)
<b>Previous female councillors</b>	Share of female councillors in previous term	22.52 (8.76)
<b>Gender Index</b>	Share of women on supervisory boards and boards of directors of companies in which cities own shares	0.19 (0.16)
<b>LPSN</b>	Effective index of local party system nationalisation	0.58 (0.18)

Source: Author.

## 4. Results

The results of our models of women candidates and winners in the 2018 Czech local elections are presented in Table 2 (below). The empirical results show that the variables chosen explained women’s emergence as candidates relatively consistently across both separate models, as well as the models for local councillors, but at the same time, some independent variables did not work in the same direction across the models. More importantly, with the exception of the non-lagged model for female winners (32%), the remaining models explained only a small part of the dependent variable’s variance and especially the use of lagged variables decreased the explanatory capacity of the models to only 8% (female candidates) or even 3% (female winners).

To start with the models which predict the proportion of female candidates for Czech city councils, our analysis demonstrates that the number of women who run for office slightly increases with local population (H2), but at the same time, it decreases in cities with more nationalised local party systems (H9). The contrasting effects of both variables can be somewhat explained by the fact that local party system nationalisation only slightly increases with municipality size (see Maškarinec 2015) – similarly to Belgium (Dodeigne, Close and Teuber 2020) or Austria (Ennsner-Jedenastik and Hansen 2013) but in contrast to a much stronger relationship in Denmark (Kjaer and Elklit 2010) – and as a result, larger municipalities may not necessarily have more nationalised local party systems (for more on the gains of parliamentary and non-parliamentary parties in the largest Czech cities, see Šaradín 2004).

Similarly, we confirmed the expected positive effect of openness of local environment to women, in terms of women’s previous representation. However, this applies only to the share of previous female officeholders in the same city (H5). On the

contrary, the effect of the Gender Index (i.e., presence of women on supervisory boards and boards of directors of companies owned by the city) as well as the effect of quality of life countered our theoretical assumptions. As increasing values of both variables were associated with decreasing women's emergence in Czech local elections, we have to refuse H7 and H1.

However, as women's descriptive representation in the previous term would be an endogenous predictor of the percentage of female candidates in the following elections, Model 2 controlled for the effect of this independent variable, including its lagged version. However, inclusion of the lagged variable also had minor influence and resulted mostly in a somewhat weakening effect of the independent variables, without changing the direction of their effects on the dependent variable. The most significant change thus was the considerably weaker effect of local party system nationalisation index. The variable even changed the direction of its effect: the number of women candidates now grew with local party system nationalisation, although with a very minor effect. Similarly, there were weaker effect of the previous female councillors variable on the share of female candidates, which is in stark contrast to the strong effect of this variable on future representation of women found in previous Czech local elections between 1994 and 2014 (see Maškarinec, Klimovský and Bláha 2019: 63–73).

**Table 2.** Determinants of women's emergence and success in elections to Czech city councils, 2018 (OLS models)

	Model 1		Model 2	
	% female candidates	% female winners	% female candidates	% female winners
<b>Quality of Life Index</b>	-0.873 (0.277)**	-0.309 (0.465)	-0.967 (0.278)***	-0.809 (0.551)
<b>Municipality size (log)</b>	0.243 (0.888)	-0.987 (1.493)	0.220 (0.902)	-0.800 (1.787)
<b>Previous female councillors</b>	0.111 (0.039)**	0.544 (0.065)***	0.086 (0.042)*	0.217 (0.083)**
<b>Gender Index</b>	-2.084 (2.124)	1.171 (3.570)	-1.707 (2.150)	2.960 (4.259)
<b>LPSN</b>	-0.445 (2.163)	-2.817 (3.635)	0.066 (2.201)	-1.213 (4.359)
<b>Constant</b>	33.718 (3.824)***	17.459 (6.428)**	34.443 (3.873)***	24.940 (7.671)***
<b>N</b>	206	206	206	206
<b>Adj. R<sup>2</sup></b>	0.105	0.323	0.080	0.034

Source: Author.

Note: The table presents coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. Statistical significance level: \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$ . Model 1 includes the non-lagged version of the previous female councillors variable, while Model 2 includes its versions lagged by one election cycle; one election cycle spans 4 years.

To sum up, in contrast to our expectations, the cities with higher quality of life were not among those where women were willing to run in higher numbers than in municipalities with worse levels of quality of life, as measured in the domains of health and environment, work, education and standard of living, or community and services. Similarly, also the effect of gendered electoral context on women's candidacy was only small or even negative, which suggests that different levels and places of political decision making occupied by women do not necessarily interact to the same extent, as indeed testified by the weak effect of previous women's representation on subsequent election of female mayors (Maškarinec, Klimovský and Danišová 2018). Overall, the share of female candidates was higher in larger cities with lower quality of life and less nationalised local party systems.

Moving on to models which assess the effects of our independent variables on women's success in Czech city councils in 2018 local elections, our analysis demonstrates, in contrast to most findings from traditional Western democracies but in line with H4 (the desirability of office argument), that women's descriptive representation on Czech councils is much lower in cities with larger populations. Similarly to municipality size, also the character of local party competition proved to be a very strong determinant of female success, as increasing nationalisation of local party systems had a considerable (expected) negative effect on the number of women in local councils (H10). The considerably different effects of both variables at the level of representation versus the level of candidacy suggest once again that there may not be a direct relationship between both levels analysed.

As well as in the case of candidacy, also on the level of representation, we have to refuse the assumption that higher quality of life will foster the opportunities of women to successfully get involved in making decisions about politics in their community (H2). Thus, higher quality of life in Czech municipalities is not associated with higher political participation of women. On the contrary, both indicators of gendered context (or openness of local environment to women, respectively) worked in the expected direction. Thus, not only the share of previous female councillors in a given city (H6), but also women's representation on corporate boards of firms owned by the same city (H8) strongly increased the size of women's representation in city councils.

Finally, looking at Model 2, which included the lagged version of the previous female councillors variable, the dependent variable was affected by all independent variables in the same way. Not only did the direction of their effects remain unchanged, but at the same time, the inclusion of the lagged variable also had a minor effect on the strength of most independent variables. So, most of them kept their strong effects on female representation in Czech city councils, including the previous female councillors variable, whose positive effect declined the most but was still much stronger than at the candidacy level.

Overall, Czech women were much more successful in smaller cities with lower quality of life which had less nationalised local party systems but at the same time were characterised by more strongly gendered contexts in the sense of previous female representation, both in city councils and on corporate boards of firms owned by these cities.

**Table 3.** Evaluation of the hypotheses – determinants of women's emergence and success in elections to Czech city councils, 2018

	Expected influence	Model 1	Model 2
		Real influence	
<b>Female candidates</b>			
<i>H1: Quality of Life Index</i>	+	NO	NO
<i>H3: Municipality size (log)</i>	+	YES	YES
<i>H5: Previous female councillors</i>	+	YES	YES
<i>H7: Gender Index</i>	+	NO	YES
<i>H9: LPSN</i>	-	YES	NO
<b>Female winners</b>			
<i>H2: Quality of Life Index</i>	+	NO	NO
<i>H4: Municipality size (log)</i>	-	YES	YES
<i>H6: Previous female councillors</i>	+	YES	YES
<i>H8: Gender Index</i>	+	NO	YES
<i>H10: LPSN</i>	-	YES	YES

Source: Author.

Note: Expected influence: positive (+), negative (-); real influence: YES – results consistent with hypothesis, NO – results inconsistent with hypothesis.

## Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to analyse the effect of quality of life, together with other factors, on both female candidates' willingness to run for office and women's descriptive representation in the 2018 local elections in Czech cities, or more specifically municipalities with extended powers. Our results are, in some respects, unexpected and ambiguous, especially in comparison with studies analysing the determinants of women's representation in traditional democracies of Western Europe. First, we found that the effect of some variables was different in the case of women's emergence and women's success in local elections. In the case of municipality size, the positive effect of size on women's emergence can be explained by fact that larger cities represent contexts which

generate more access points for the emergence of women candidates (whether due to their larger electoral districts or due to the existence of more legislative parties making it more likely for one of them to nominate more women – with this strategy subsequently modelled by other parties as well). However, in contrast to the negative effect of size on women's success due to the desirability of office argument, the explanation is more difficult in the case of the Gender Index.

On the other hand, the positive effects of the size of women's previous representation in local politics apply especially on future women's representation. In the case of the number of women candidates, those effects are still positive but much weaker (similarly as there is only a weak effect of previous women's representation on subsequent election of female mayors). In light of these findings, we can suggest some existence of the incumbency effect (i.e. advantage of female incumbents over their female challengers). As a result, then, experience with women in the political process may not generally play an important role in facilitating a gradual growth of women's success along with their gradual mobility from lower to higher positions.

On the contrary, as the level of women's descriptive representation attained in a municipality in a specific election reproduces at a similar or growing level in the following election (given the overall linear growth of women's representation since 1990) in the same municipality, rather than shifting (spreading) to surrounding municipalities in the form of a contagion effect (see Maškarinec 2020), an important question for future research is whether women who win a council seat assume, in the following election term, a role similar to male party gatekeepers, effectively limiting further growth of the number of women both running and elected.

If confirmed, this hypothesis could eventually explain the different effect of the Gender Index on the share of female candidates (negative) versus the share of female winners (positive). Indeed, as business management positions come with not only prestige but also influence and considerable salaries, they can be expected to be gained primarily by councillors (women as well as men) with more years of experience and better positions in the party hierarchy. Overall, the question whether women's representation at different levels of governance is interrelated in any way, and whether different levels of representation have different influence on other levels, represents an under-researched field that warrants more attention in future.

Similarly, the issue of local party system nationalisation with its considerably variable effects, albeit mostly in the expected negative direction, warrants further research. Indeed, as evidenced by its ambiguous relationship with municipality size, local party system nationalisation may be one of the factors influencing women's representation, which tends to be higher in municipalities with more successful independents or local parties.

Finally, the failure to confirm the expected positive effect of quality of life on women's political representation, at the level of both candidacy and representation,

invites the question of why women are more successful in municipalities with lower quality of life. Our working hypothesis is again linked with the desirability hypothesis. The drive to win representation and make decisions about the life of the community can be expected to be much stronger in municipalities with higher quality of life (where the electoral competition in terms of number of candidates per seat will also be stronger). This will affect precisely women, as men should be more likely to seek offices in cities which are more prestigious and whose councillors have more decision-making powers (i.e., larger cities), as well as in cities which are not affected by development problems. In contrast, communities with lower quality of life will see much fewer men take interest in local government, with a much larger political opportunity structure opening before women.

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