



**PhD Program in
Political Science**

Ph.D. THESIS

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Mayor or MP?

The practice of dual-mandate holding in the Hungarian National Assembly

Abstract

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Institute for Political Science

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1. The premises of the research and the choice of topic

The relationship between local and national politics is a critical question within the Hungarian political system. It is generally accepted that the national politics is superior to local politics and that the local political level is not an autonomous unit in itself but rather a secondary level of politics (Ágh, 2002:270-300; Bóhm, 2006:14-15). Moreover local politics cannot be considered as independent politics (Bóhm, 2003) as national politics aims at controlling all affairs from the centre. The weakest point of the well-criticized Hungarian local politics is the lack of capacity to self-govern, the lack of autonomy and the great dependence upon the centre that is mainly manifested in financial dependence (Pálné Kovács, 2011:23-25). The interconnection of national and local politics is represented by those politicians who take active part in both national and local politics. The most visible group among them are those politicians who hold a parliamentary mandate along with a position of mayor. Due their increased visibility most of the criticism is directed towards them stating popular (they should not get double payment) and professional reasons (the personal network inhibits transparency) as well. What do mayors do at the National Assembly? This puzzle concerns all voters and thus the practice of holding dual-mandate at the local and national level became one of the most debated phenomenon of the Hungarian political life. In the debates about necessary reforms the idea of narrowing the possibilities for holding multiple mandates has been arisen several times and it is one of the most important points of the actual reform as well. In spite of the controversies the number of politicians holding multiple mandates has been on the rise in the Parliament since 1994 and by now not only the Socialist politicians exercise the practice of dual mandates but also the Conservatives. Despite the increasing presence and attention the range and scope of scientific works on the dual mandate are limited. The presence of mayors in the Hungarian National Assembly is documented in different papers (Zongor, 2006a,b,c,d), but the phenomenon of dual mandate is more complex: While mayors are in focus of public attention in the Parliament we can also find members of local councils and county committee members. Some of them have arrived to national politics from the local level, while others have acquired a political capital on the national level before entering local politics. It is indisputable that holding a local position is advantageous for politicians as it offers more resources, more visibility and political capital. Although most of the voters disapprove of the practice of holding dual mandate (and getting a double payment) the opportunity to represent local interest at the political centre makes their own mayor attractive at elections. Thus the phenomenon of being a mayor and Member of the Parliament (MP) at the same time became

a well-spread phenomenon in Hungarian political life and influences its functioning in multiple dimensions. The cohabitation of local and national politics is on one hand a *question of recruitment* that defines the career path of political elites (Várnagy, 2008a), on the other hand *it is a question of representation* that implies a conflict between local and national interests, and finally it is also *a question of democracy* that influences the autonomy of local government, the transparency of politics and the closeness of the political elite. Thus it is important to document and analyze the phenomenon of dual mandate on a scientific basis, its recruitment background and its consequences on representation.

2. Methodology

In the dissertation the recruitment dimension of the practice of holding dual mandate is treated separately from its content. The relation between local and national politics is a question of recruitment as the different levels can be understood as different stations on the career path of politicians. The local political position can fulfil two different functions: on one hand it can act as an entering gate to the political arena, while on the other hand it can function as a springboard to career-advancement (Schlesinger, 1966:70-88). However previous researches as well as international experiences indicate that the local ties of political elites go beyond the starting phase of careers and many MPs try to keep their local positions after entering the parliament (Knapp, 1991; Borchert, 2003; Navarro, 2009). Thus local and national level politics do not strictly follow each other during a political career but rather exist simultaneously and interconnectedly. Supposedly in the Hungarian Parliament we can also identify a group of politicians who arrived from the local level and had taken a seat in the local or regional government. The type of the local mandate (whether it is the a position of mayor or a seat in local council) is of interest in itself as it indicates the content of local political activity since a very different set of financial and political resources and opportunities are available for mayors of big cities and for members of the local councils at a medium-size settlement.

The importance of local political background goes well beyond the start of a political career and beyond being a constant resource for many as it can also offer a security path for those whose national career got terminated or for those who decide to quit national politics for some reason. In my dissertation I analyze local government positions from this aspect as well to see what type of MPs can hold on to their local positions after being deselected from the House. Böhmer suggests a different way of thinking about local positions: for him local positions are allocated centrally to the loyal party politicians as means of compensation thus it is the centre

of the party who decide upon delegating MPs to the local level with the political aim of securing a safe local background or strengthening ties to voters in the given region. It means that the direction of getting multiple mandates can be top down as well as bottom up. To sum up we can assume that multiple mandate holding does not only characterizes a few random politicians but emerges as a possible pattern in the career path of Hungarian MPs and thus worth being investigated further.

The data on the career path of Hungarian MPs comes from the MP Database collected by the Elite Research Centre at the Corvinus University of Budapest (Ilonszki, 2008) which I complemented by further data collection. The database contains information on Hungarian MPs since 1990 along 31 variables from which the most important for this research are the following: *the local experience variable* which indicates whether the MP had been elected to local government position as mayor, member of the local council or the regional council before being elected to parliament; *the mayor variable* that indicates whether an MP holds a mayor mandate and if yes in what type of settlement (city, town or village); *the regional committee member variable* which indicates whether an MP holds a mandate in a local council; *the regional council variable* which indicates whether an MP holds a mandate in a regional committee and finally the so called *cumul variable* which taken from the French word indicates whether the MP holds any of the above mentioned elected local position at the time of being an MP. By analyzing the database with statistical methods, I aim at discovering the place and role of local politics in the career path of MPs and the analyzing the emerging recruitment patterns.

The interconnection of national and local politics is a question of representation as well: who are represented by politicians holding a dual mandate? From the representational dimension there is an innate conflict between the local and the national level since local and national interests are often in contradiction. International literature on representation suggests that the territorial focus is on the rise which means that MPs pay more attention to the local and regional level and especially to their own constituency (Norton-Wood, 1990; Searing, 1994; Norris, 1997). These findings resonate with Hungarian findings which also suggest a growing constituency-orientation among MPs (Papp, 2011; Ilonszki, 2011). The question is to what extent these attitudes define the actual activity of MPs, especially how strong is the local focus of their parliamentary work? I investigated the parliamentary activities of MPs in three dimensions: the quantitative aspect of parliamentary work (number of bills and questions introduced to the floor), their parliamentary role and finally the content of representation reflected in the written questions introduced. In the quantitative analysis of parliamentary

work I included both the legislative and the control aspect and collected data from two parliamentary cycles (2006-2010, 2010-). The sample from the two cycles includes one year from each, 2009 and 2011 which are neither years right after nor right before election time. For both years I categorized the bills and questions introduced along the dimension of multiplemandate holding. Parliamentary roles were analyzed following Searing's (1994) theory of parliamentary roles: according to his thesis MPs can fulfill backbencher and frontbencher roles in parliament which are distinguished based on an institutional approach. Those MPs who are Speakers, deputy-Speakers, notaries, PGG leaders, or committee chairs are considered as frontbenchers while those who do not hold any of the above mentioned positions are considered as backbenchers. The data is derived from the MPs Database. The quantitative analysis of parliamentary work and the research on parliamentary roles do not answer the question on the content of representation: who are represented by MPs with multiplemandates? It is especially puzzling in the case of mayors who are supposed to be the most important actors in local politics thus the most important channels of local representation. A critical aspect of their political activity is the representation of local interests in the parliament (Pálné Kovács, 2008). While the legislative work is strictly controlled by party whips and thus leaves little space to manoeuvre, the tools of control offer an opportunity to represent local interests. Following Shane's framework (2011) I complemented the empirical data on parliamentary work with the content-analysis of all written questions (N=791) introduced to the floor in 2009 and 2011.

Concerning local political activity the representational question is a bit different: What kind of mayors are those who hold dual mandates? Can they fulfill their duties under the pressure of holding two political positions on two different levels? Being present is one of the main challenges mayors with parliamentary mandate meet, thus first I analyze local presence. Local presence was operationalized in terms of council meeting attendance on which I collected data based on the lists of attendance published for each council meeting of any given local council. While from an institutional perspective local council meetings are the most important forums of local decision-making, local political activity clearly goes beyond attending meetings, so second I analyzed the time devoted to local activities as a proxy for overall local presence. A special aspect of local politics concerns the availability of electors so third I also looked at the ways dual mandate holders interact and communicate with voters. Data concerning the time devoted to local activities and communication with voters was derived from the PARTIREP database (Participation and Representation project, Interuniversity Attraction Pole, coordinator: Kris Deschouwer, Vrije Universiteit Brussel). Fourth we have to take into

consideration that mayors are not only the head of the local council but also the head of local government with strong executive functions. The characteristics of the executive dimensions were analyzed based on the survey completed within the TÁMOP-4.2.1/B-09/01/KMR-2010-0005 support scheme assuming that in local governments where MPs have the mayor's seat we can find a different pattern of decision-making.

3. Main research findings

3.1. The function of local political experience in the career path of MPs

The analysis of recruitment paths of MPs revealed that among Hungarian parliamentarians we can identify a group whose members arrived to the National Assembly from local politics: in 2002 and 2006 almost half of MPs had held a local elected seat before entering the parliament while by 2010 their proportion has reached 63%. More and more MPs have gained local political experience as mayors, local political activity thus seems to be an important factor in building a successful political career which can be used as a springboard to national politics. The springboard function of local politics is further emphasized in the *first hypothesis stating that among newcomer MPs the proportion of those having had local political experience is on the rise (H1)* which can be verified based on the empirical data.

Local politics should still not be regarded as a necessary step in climbing the political ladder as a significant group of MPs do not have local experiences. Although if we accept the dominance of party politics in the political arena and take into consideration the local party positions as well (such as local party branch founder, president of local party branch or local campaign communication officer) we can register local political activity among the majority of MPs. The widespread nature of some type of local experience (even if it is not acquired in elected position) might explain why in terms of socio-demographical characteristics dual mandate holders do not differ significantly from other MPs and in terms of political characteristics (type of mandate, place of running in elections) only weak differences emerge. While the springboard function of local politics can be documented among MPs it can lead to the false conclusion that holding a local mandate means a straight and easy road to parliament. First, local political positions form a pyramid where the opportunities of climbing higher are limited in terms of available and accessible mandates, thus not all local representatives can arrive to the highest level of elected positions, the parliamentary seat. Second, not everybody is motivated by the idea of sitting in the parliament, many politicians have what Schlesinger (1991) calls static ambition meaning that they have no intention to

move up further. Third, the analysis of local mandates indicate that not all type of seats have the capacity of acting as a springboard: the heterogeneity of local functions is critical, those settlements with more financial and political resources such as a city with county rights or a district of Budapest enjoys comparative advantages in terms of promoting political careers.

3.2. The place and function of holding multiple mandates in the recruitment process

While local politics can act as a springboard to national politics, the relation of local and national cannot be understood in the context of traditional career model as many MPs hold onto their local mandate after getting elected to the parliament. In 1994 there were 68 dualmandate holders among the parliamentarians and their number kept growing up to 132 then to 214 and to 216 in 1998, 2002 and 2006 respectively. While their number fall back to 166 in 2010 the phenomenon of holding dual mandate is still typical in the Hungarian Parliament. The financial and political resources available at the local level are attractive to politicians which is why most of them try to keep local positions as well. Along with politicians committing to local politics early in their career, a growing number of MPs decide to parachute to local politics after a successful parliamentary career. The growing presence of opposition MPs parachuting to the local level (up until 2006) indicate that the local political arena can act as a complementary space to gain visibility and to give proof of one's political and leadership skills. Their appearance also suggest that parties recognised the importance of the local level and started to treat local elections (which every four year takes place a few months after national elections) as a national concern and dominate candidacy as well as the election itself. The importance of parties is underlined by the fact that the field of dual mandate holding is dominated by the two most important parties. Smaller parties simply cannot compete against their big rivals on both levels at the same time. Although *the hypothesis that local positions function as a compensation or premium thus the time spent in parliament and/or the office held in the party contribute to dual-mandate holding (H2)* was not confirmed, the critical role of parties can be accepted since available party resources act as an explanatory factor in dual mandate holding. The strong "branding" effect of parties was illustrated at the 2010 elections when most Socialist incumbents were not able follow their local political career despite their incumbent advantage and the resources available at the local level. On the other side of the story, Fidesz with its overwhelming national popularity could introduce new, unknown faces to local politics by relying on the party brand. The 2010 elections also contributed to our understanding of the safety net function of local positions. While in the previous parliamentary cycles the local arena acted as a safety option for those

leaving national level politics behind or getting deselected from it, the 2010 elections proved the priority of party politics since none of the Socialist dual mandate holders could win local mandates after losing their parliamentary seats.

3.3. the territorial hierarchy of dual-mandate holding

The heterogeneous nature of local politics needs to be revisited to understand multiple office holding in depth. Regarding the springboard function of local politics, the analysis revealed that only positions rich in local resources can serve as a good base for starting a national career. Based on this finding, *the third hypothesis (H3) predicts that MPs holding dual mandate are also oriented towards settlements that offer more financial and political resources which means that in a territorial hierarchy dual mandate holding is more frequent at the top of the scale than at the bottom.* The data confirms the hypothesis since dual mandate holders are more likely to be found in bigger cities and in the districts of Budapest. The finding resonates with the fact that the higher we look at the territorial hierarchy the more local elections and local politics are dominated by parties. The data also indicates that dual mandate holders are well-embedded in local politics and can profit from the available resources since they are more likely to get elected in single member district constituencies than their peers who do not hold a dual-mandate.

3.4. The parliamentary activities of dual mandate holders

The majority of MPs sitting in the Hungarian Parliament are tied to the local level as well as to the national level through elected mandates and thus are entitled to represent voters at the local as well as at the national level. The task of dual-representation is not only a theoretical issue but a pragmatic one which implies possible conflicts of representation as well as practical problems of time-management. Local politics is a time-consuming activity that often requires personal attendance thus *my fourth hypothesis implies that dual mandate holders spent less time on parliamentary work than their non-cumulating peers (H4).* While the cumulative data for 2009 and 2011 confirms the hypothesis with dual-mandate holders introducing less bills and questions to the parliamentary floor, if we look at the two parliamentary cycles separately, we find contradictory data: while in 2009 dual mandate holders asked more questions than their peers in 2011 they asked far less. A possible explanation is offered by the government-opposition dichotomy: questions are the standard tool of control used mainly by the opposition thus when dual mandate holders are rare in the opposition ranks, the number of questions asked by them is also significantly lower.

Moreover, the high coefficient of variation suggest that MPs are far from behaving similarly: while some of them do not ask questions at all, others can ask up to 259 per cycle.

Holding a dual mandate and the number of questions asked do not correlate thus we can conclude that holding multiple mandates has no explanatory power over the number of questions. However if we look at MPs who hold a mayor mandate at the local level we get a much clearer picture: they introduce significantly less bills and questions in both cycles and the coefficient of variation is also smaller. The lack of resources especially the lack of time affects the parliamentary work in general thus *the fifth hypothesis presuming that dual mandate holders are more like to hold backbencher positions* was confirmed.

3.5. The content of representation: local interests represented at the national level

The analysis of the parliamentary activity of dual mandate holders does not inform us about the content of their work: what do mayors do in the parliament? Local and national politics cannot only be considered as running simultaneously since a parliamentary mandate offers the possibility to represent local affairs at the national level. Although the territorial focus is on the rise among MPs most of them indicate influencing government politics as their most important task followed by the representation of constituency interest¹. The priorities are different for those who are mayors and MPs at the same time, as they consider “the fulfilment of economic and social needs of local communities” their most important task which is followed by “the task of communicating between the PPG and the party leadership and manage parliamentary affairs”. This finding let us believe that local interests will also manifest themselves in the content of parliamentary activities thus *the sixth hypothesis implies that dual mandate holders (who are mayors and MPs at the same time) include more local affairs and represent more local interest than their peers in the written questions they introduce to the floor (H6)*. In order to test the hypothesis the data about the parliamentary activity of MPs in 2009 and 2011 was complemented by the content-analysis of written questions as well. In order to define the “localism” of parliamentary questions, I followed on Shane’s framework based on the Comparative Policy Agendas Project (Shane, 2011a:264). The results do not confirm the hypothesis fully since while in 2009 mayors do introduce more questions treating local issues than other MPs this relation is not confirmed in 2011. In order to understand this paradox we have to remember that opposition MPs tend to introduce more questions than others and in 2011 87% of all mayors belong to the governing party group,

¹ Based on the PARTIREP 2008 survey

Fidesz thus in 2011 mayors tend ask less questions in overall. Second there is a strong statistical correlation between the number of question introduced by an MP and the number of local questions introduced by him/her which means that those who ask more questions also ask more local questions. Third, it is possible that asking questions representing local issues or constituency interests are motivated by factors other than holding a dual mandate, for example according to Papp the type of mandate is related to constituency orientation in the Hungarian Parliament with a stronger constituency focus among MPs elected in single member districts than those elected on party lists (Papp, 2011:303-304).

3.6. The local political activity of dual mandate holders

The analysis of the parliamentary work of MPs signalled that local politics do not necessarily ranks as second behind national politics so it needs to be studied in more detail. Mayors are in the focus of our attention here since they are the most important and most visible actors in the local political game, so the following data only concerns those who are mayors and MPs at the same time. The most important forum of local decision-making is the local council meeting so I collected data concerning the presence of dual mandate holders at council meetings. Results indicate that being present is indeed important as the rate of presence for dual mandate holders is higher than 85% and even higher in cities with county rights (over 94%).

The mayor's political task goes beyond attending council meetings, as it also includes managing local affairs and running the local government. While Hungarian local governments are considered to be led by a single leader, the mayor, his/her work is supported by the notary on one hand and by the vice-mayor(s) on the other. Despite of the same institutional setting the division of labour and even the division of decision-making power can be differently structured in order to adapt to special circumstances or local differences (Várnagy-Dobos, 2011). *The seventh hypothesis that mayors who also hold a parliamentary mandate delegate more tasks and competences to other actors especially to the vice-mayor(s) was confirmed.*

When we look at local politics it is inevitable to look into social networks and to investigate the embeddedness of local politicians. The average time devoted to local affairs serves as a proxy to see how much resources a dual mandate holder MP can spend at the local level. Not surprisingly the time devoted to local affairs is more in case of mayors than in case of other MPs which again signals that dual mandate holders do not only focus on parliamentary work. The availability of voter is one of the most important advantage a local position can offer . Mayors aim at profiting from this direct connection which is reflected in the fact that *the eight*

*hypothesis, which stipulates that dual mandate holders use local community events and the local media to communicate with voters is confirmed*². The survey conducted within the TÁMOP support scheme also suggests that mayors find it important to connect with local society on several levels as many are members of local NGOs or sports clubs or other community groups.

3.7. The relationship between the quality of democracy and the practice of holding multiple mandates

How can we assess the practice of holding multiple mandate from a democratic perspective? On one hand the most important critic against the practice concerns the transparency of politics: the personal connections implied by holding multiple mandates emphasizes the importance of informal, personal connections and thus endangers the transparency of politics as well as the fair allocation of resources. On the other hand the democratic advantage of holding multiple mandate is that the politician him/herself can serve as a channel from local politics to national politics and as a result a more complex set of interests is represented in the Parliament that enables consensus-oriented politics and better decision-making. While in Hungary most politicians who hold multiple mandates are tied to the local level through various modes: they are likely to be elected in SMDs and most of them had local political experiences before getting elected to the Parliament, they still cannot be considered as the representatives of local interest in the Parliament where party unity prevails.

Party politics is dominating the Hungarian political arena including the practice of holding multiple mandates. Parties have supported this institution since it contributed to the party-building process: it allowed parties to establish ties with the electorate and offered important resources in terms of visibility and finances that are indispensable for campaign and served as an alternative political arena for opposition parties. However in the last few years the leaders of the two biggest Hungarian parties proposed to abolish the practice. Why? While on the individual level multiple mandate holders represent an asset to the party as they bring in votes, money and visibility, as a group they can form an important inter-party opposition to the leader. Navarro (2009) points out that by abolishing the practice of holding multiple mandates the centralization of party politics is further strengthened.

To sum up the practice of holding multiple mandates is neither good, or bad in itself. Goldsmith's (1992) evaluation stands true for Hungary: in local systems with low levels of

² Based on the PARTIREP 2008 survey

autonomy, patronage and personal connections are the definitive mode of interest representation. Thus transparency can only be assured if decentralization takes place or if other more formal channels of representation are institutionalized. However, the Hungarian case does not seem to move in that direction, the trends of the last twenty years rather suggest further centralization, the growing importance of informal relations and personal connections. In my view even if the practice of being mayor and MP at the same time will be forbidden, the hidden interconnections will not fade away.

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