

The Czech Pirate Party: an environmental champion in Czech politics?*

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Abstract

In 2021, the Czech Pirate Party won seats in a general election for the second time in a row and became the first Pirate party anywhere to be involved in government. Formerly, they ceased to be a single-issue party. The aim of this paper is to investigate the party's changing position on the environment via the movement-party concept, methodologically by qualitative conventional content analysis of its election manifestos and political positions. Pro-internet Pirates followed movement-party characteristic of enlarging their manifesto scope even before national-wide political success. Going hand in hand with this development they flexibly increased emphasis on environmental and green policies in recent years. This, together with their emphases on digitalisation and transparency, became integral to their profile and the party's overall post-materialist focus, representing mostly young, liberally-oriented voters. Compared to other Czech parties, they present themselves as a real environmental alternative with similar positions those of pragmatic non-orthodox European Greens with an effort to preserve original grassroots and protest-based ethos. After one term in opposition, the Pirates face their biggest challenge yet, as they set out to promote their values in executive.

Keywords

Pirate Party, Czechia, green policy, environment, programme change, movement party

Die tschechische Piratenpartei: ein Umweltschützer in der tschechischen Politik?

Zusammenfassung

Im Jahr 2021 gewann die tschechische Piratenpartei zum zweiten Mal in Folge Sitze bei den Parlamentswahlen und wurde die erste Piratenpartei überhaupt, die an der Regierung beteiligt war. Zuvor war sie keine Ein-Themen-Partei mehr. Ziel dieses Beitrags ist es, die sich verändernde Position der Partei zum Thema Umwelt anhand des Konzepts der Bewegungspartei zu untersuchen, und zwar methodisch durch eine qualitative konventionelle Inhaltsanalyse ihrer Wahlprogramme und politischen Positionen. Die Pro-Internet-Piraten folgten dem Charakteristikum der Bewegungspartei, ihre Wahlprogramme noch vor einem bundesweiten politischen Erfolg zu erweitern. Hand in Hand mit dieser Entwicklung haben sie in den letzten Jahren die Betonung auf Umwelt- und Grünpolitik flexibel erhöht. Zusammen mit ihrer Betonung von Digitalisierung und Transparenz wurde dies zu einem integralen Bestandteil ihres Profils und der allgemeinen postmaterialistischen Ausrichtung der Partei, die hauptsächlich junge, liberal orientierte Wähler vertritt. Im Vergleich zu anderen tschechischen Parteien präsentieren sie sich als echte Umweltalternative mit ähnlichen Positionen wie die pragmatischen, nicht-orthodoxen europäischen Grünen und bemühen sich, das ursprüngliche basis- und protestorientierte Ethos zu bewahren. Nach einer Legislaturperiode in der Opposition stehen die Piraten vor ihrer bisher größten Herausforderung, denn sie wollen ihre Werte in der Exekutive zu vertreten.

Schlüsselwörter

Piratenpartei, Tschechische Republik, grüne Politik, Umwelt, Programmänderung, Bewegungspartei

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Introduction

A huge amount of attention has been devoted to the establishment and first electoral successes of “pirate” parties, first in Sweden and more recently in other countries, particularly Germany. However, initial expectations of their rise were mostly not fulfilled, and clearly, most of them were falling in popularity by 2012, when won theirs’ last seats in German state parliaments. Nevertheless, the Czech Pirate Party (CPP or Pirates for short) represents an exception to this trend, despite being politically marginalised for a long time. But, their recent post-material shift, subsequent success at national level, and the reasons for these are barely reflected.

When the Pirates were founded in 2009, party competition in Czechia was largely one-dimensional – socio-economic – in character; this was partially complemented by the state vs. church cleavage and, to a limited extent, by the materialism vs. post-materialism cleavage. But environmental policies have not traditionally been the key issues – neither in political competition, nor in the electorate’s decision-making, nor in the profiles of political parties in Czechia (Hanley/Vachudova 2018; Hloušek/Kopeček 2008). In its first years, the CPP had very limited opportunity to influence politics, as it had no experience, lacked structures, had few members, and had little public awareness. It was short of saliency in its policy areas of less-restricted copyright and freedom on the internet for the majority of Czech society. The party’s profile was low and its orientation unattractive to voters in the middle ground, as its supporters included apparently radical groupings.

In the meantime, party competition in Czechia tended to assume the character of ‘issue competition’: besides fighting corruption and promoting direct democracy, topics linked with post-materialism – e.g. transparency, digitalisation, and also the environment – notably came to the fore (Hanley 2014).

In the political tradition in Czechia, there is a heterogeneous group of mostly centrist parties, liberal in orientation, that appeals to similar electorates (urban voters, intellectuals, usually younger people). Over time this ‘quasi-movement’ has become a firm part of party politics, and has included the Freedom Union–Democratic Union (US–DEU), Green Party, and Tradition Responsibility Prosperity 09 (TOP 09).

The Green Party arose shortly after communism was abandoned. Its entry into parliament in 1992 as part of the Liberal–Social Union just crossed the electoral threshold marked the peak of its success for a long time (Jehlička/Kostecký 1992). It was not until 2006 that the party scored a more substantial success, winning 6.29 percent. In government, it was noted more for its intra-party disputes – including its contribution to the collapse of Mirek Topolánek’s government in the spring of 2009

– than for success in implementing its manifesto. This rift within the party made it marginal; it never again won more than 3.5 percent of the vote (polling only 0.99 percent in 2021) (Jehlička et al. 2011).

Environmental issues were not a crucial priority for the other parties. As Carter (2013) shows, salience stayed low even among social democrats. Lately, the Greens’ political marginalisation and diminished prospects of promoting the environmental agenda have not improved, despite the recent revival of interest in sustainability, as the climate has become a topic discussed worldwide.¹ This situation has contributed to the emergence of an accommodative ‘*alternative environmental champion*’ to fill the gap (Carter 2013).

This paper aims to analyse the specific case of CPP’s post-materialist shift: from the promotion of internet issues as the policy tool by which to achieve their original vision to a developed party-political profile concentrating on environmental issues. The paper aims to answer the research question: how did the approach of the Czech Pirate Party to environmental issues change between 2009 and 2021? The objective is to assess the party’s shifts on environmental protection in the longer term and to evaluate whether the party can be seen as a credible fully-fledged pro-environmental political alternative for the voters in the Czech party system.

Theoretical and methodological background

Scholars regularly examine how parties’ manifestos change over time. According to Janda et al. (1995) ideas and highlighted topics tend to be amended when the leader(ship) is replaced, or as a result of external influences, such as an election result. Budge’s (1994) ‘past election hypothesis’ – success/defeat in previous elections influences the likelihood of changes before another election as parties try to maximise votes – confirms this. Dalton/McAllister (2015) debate the role of ideological polarisation (they argue that high polarisation tends to decrease the occurrence of major shifts in party programs) and a variable of new democracies, having higher volatility with more party variation. They also highlight the importance of manifesto changes that may be connected with the party strategy. Braun/Popa/Schmitt (2019) underline the influence of crisis to change parties’ stances and opinions on the EU in a more negative way. ‘General support or disapproval of the EU’ in the country also influences their manifesto. Green–Peders-

¹ Rabušic/Manea (2018:262,267) indicate growing interest in the environment within Czech society as 39 percent of people would be willing to sacrifice a part of their salary for environmental protection and 61 percent stated that environmental protection should be given priority even if the cost is slower economic growth. Other indicators (e.g. like rising justifiability of homosexuality or euthanasia) suggest the growth of post-material values in society too.

en (2019) speaks about “issue competition” affecting the party position in different manifesto aspects more than their general position on the left-right axis. Besides, Abou-Chadi/Green-Pedersen/Mortensen (2019) discuss the importance of party size – larger parties tend to change position in salient issues towards a more electorally popular stance. Simultaneously, they do not confirm the precondition of automatic manifesto changes for electoral losers. Alternatively, Kitschelt (2006) addresses the process of manifesto enlargement in his concept of movement parties. For protest-based, fluid, and unstable actors, he assumes ambiguous programmatic profiles and a relatively narrow thematic focus, as attention is devoted to a small set of issues, while many others are neglected because parties emerge under very specific circumstances or with a limited number of salient aspects, helping them to distinguish themselves from other political actors. The emergent movements are not able to calculate in terms of electoral competition.

Particularly after political success, such movements abandon this narrow approach, as each aspect can become salient and a party has to have some position to embrace broader programmatic frameworks with an established profile. This is reflected in their increasingly sophisticated and generalised manifestos, which can serve as a sort of guideline for voters, making movement parties more predictable on several socio-political issues. Movement parties thus at least in part adopt the characteristics of more stable political parties with a shift towards well-established principles such as moderation and internal coordination (Kitschelt 2006: 283–285).²

The incorporation of issues is reactive, as it ensues after the party’s success – the emphasis is placed on enlarging the manifesto with entirely new issues, and a gradual establishment of a political profile.

That it is appropriate to compare parties and observe their shifts over time follows also from the concept of a ‘party family’ where ‘individual parties are classified and then grouped (particularly) based on the policy positions they enunciate in their regular election programs’ (Mair/Mudde 1998: 218). From this perspective, a programme (together with ideology) serves as an important aspect of identifying the goals (Beyme 1985).

This paper will not investigate the complexity of issues around the Czech Pirates as a movement party, as some of its typical characteristics have already been studied, including the role of grass-roots membership (Voda/Vodová 2020), the alternative instruments of mo-

bilisation (Karger/Jansová 2021), the role of the internet, and ad hoc structures (Jääsaari/Šárovec 2021). However, insufficient attention has been paid to the development of the party’s manifesto.

This paper’s attention is turned to the manifesto and the party’s policy profile in the environmental area. This aspect has been chosen because of the post-material character of the party, evident since its inception (originally focused on internet freedom, rather than environmental issues), as well as this topic’s potential to distinguish the CPP from other Czech parties.

It allows the issue of programmatic expansion to be grasped as one of the identitarian aspects of the development of political movements and parties over time. Rapley (2007) advises examining manifestos cyclically for comparative purposes, as it enables to reflect trajectories and discourses over time as one of the most valuable sources. Party programmes provide one of the common ways in which political parties communicate their interpretation of the world and proposed policies (Dolezal et al. 2012). Moreover, ‘election programs are used by parties to signal policy changes to the electorate’ (Franzmann/Kaiser 2006: 183).

In terms of method, the paper uses a deductive qualitative ‘conventional’ content analysis of Czech Pirate Party election manifestos in 2009–2021.³ That is ‘employed in exploratory studies, where existing theories or data in the subject area are limited’ (Wesley 2014: 148). A relatively small sample of documents (overall six party’s manifestos) is chosen and in-depth reviewed. The relevant parts of the manifesto texts are then put into broader categories, allowing the data to be analysed and simplified so that they reflect the subject of the study, they are compared over time, and put into the context of the overall evolution of the party’s programme. The third phase includes systematic reflection and revision of the text and settled categories, with identification of the themes on the basis of evidence from the documents (Wesley 2014; Elo/Kyngäs 2008; Hsiu-Fang/Shannon 2005). In line with Hájek’s (2014) statement, the paper assesses and underlines the substantial points of the manifestos and defines the party’s most important programmatic characteristics.

This part is accompanied in the paper also by the analyses of the Pirate Party’s actions in opposition at the national level, where they functionally developed many of their environmental concerns and tried to present a proposal based on their manifesto, at least in the environmental area which is the main interest of this

2 Similarly, scholars have paid attention to the changing programmes of many extremist right-wing parties in Europe, which initially were almost exclusively focused on the migration question. Later (following their frequent failures), they broadened the scope of their programmes (cf. Mudde 1999). Burchell (2002) points out fluctuations and shifts in the German Greens’ manifestos which can be regularly experienced regarding policies’ prioritisation from social (e.g., unemployment in 1998) to environmental issues.

3 In 2021, the Pirates stood for election together with the Mayors and Independents (STAN) movement in an election coalition and their manifesto must therefore be seen as their joint coalition manifesto. This might present certain biases, but the Pirates were the major partner in the coalition and this would have influenced the final shape of the manifesto.

paper. This section is based on an analysis of secondary sources.

Reflecting the aim of the paper, focused on one party in one country with delimited data corpus, the author preferred qualitative in-depth content analysis over different methods, as it creates more possibilities to include also surrounding context. It is an important part of the problem as the paper includes other topics and contextual references connected with the manifesto statements.

Thus, the analysis includes the manifestos for 2010, 2013, 2017, and 2021 parliamentary elections, as well as the 2012 and 2016 manifestos for regional elections. The main discourse of studied manifestos appeared around the fundamental programmatic change over the years. From the complete absence of 'non-pirate' topics to the substantial growth of emphasis on environmental issues. It is evident that the environment represents one of the cores of the current Pirates' manifesto and political approach. During the read-through, several broad categories were identified: single initiatives, general statements, acceptance of environmental issues, and environment protection reflecting actual demands and challenges of climate change. Then, manifestos were analysed according to these categories. The text was complemented with several quotations from manifestos, it represents raw data in the qualitative study and enables the reader to understand evidence and assurance about findings (Wozniak 2020; Wesley 2014).

Party establishment

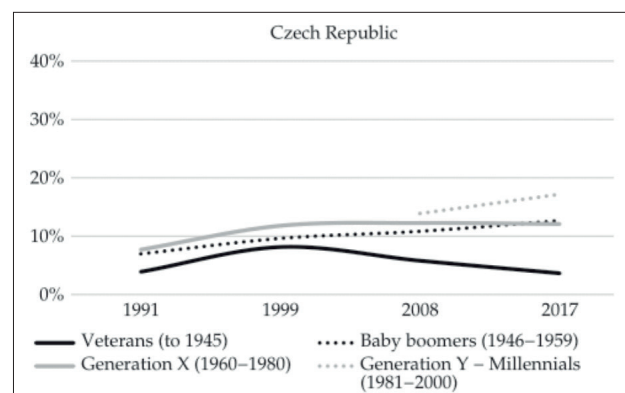
In 2009, the CPP was founded, marking the establishment of another party with a post-material focus. This was the Czech climax of a process of establishing pirate parties, unfolding internationally in response to the trial in Sweden of the leaders of a file-sharing website, The Pirate Bay, who were given multi-year sentences. The Czech Pirates were established as a pro-internet party, featuring only minimal structures at the regional or lower levels. The dominant element that helped to rally the party's identity was its online discussion forum, which associated members and supporters and for a long time *de facto* replaced the absent party secretariat and traditional party structures. It also afforded the members substantial opportunities to influence the party's operations and profile.

The establishment of the CPP was not followed by a membership boom and a surge in popularity as seen in Sweden, for example (where the Pirates quickly attracted substantial membership and subsequently won two seats in the European Parliament). By contrast, the Czech party won its political positions gradually. Though it contested parliamentary elections in 2010, its main focus was on

various protests, culminating in several demonstrations against the ACTA treaty in 2012, fully in line with the movement party characteristics and its pro-internet orientation. Party's success was based on gaining seats in local and subsequently regional politics. This was largely thanks to its success in elections in Prague (2014), and in elections to regional assemblies (2016).⁴

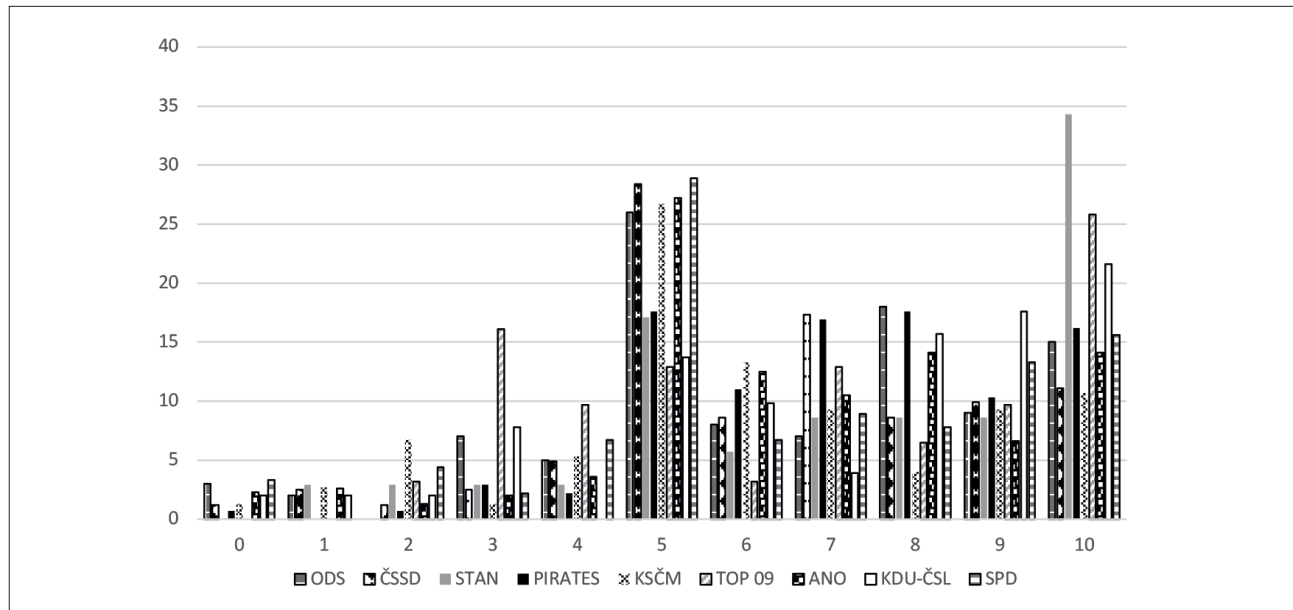
Therefore, its good performance in parliamentary elections in 2017, when it won 10.79 percent of the vote, was based on several years worth of work at lower levels of politics. Thus, it gradually entered into voters' awareness and had an excellent campaign focused not only on anti-establishment but also on post-material aspects such as digitalisation, environmental protection, and transparency. The party matured over eight years as it gradually became less radical. After 2016, pragmatism prevailed in the Pirates' leadership with full concentration on the electoral campaign, becoming a relevant political force in the country, no longer organising street protests. They capitalised not only on societal dissatisfaction with established parties and being the newcomer without a problematic history, but also on the (socio) liberal-center political space left vacant by the Greens' failure and deteriorating support for the urban-based TOP 09. Disputes within the Social Democrats, who neglected most modern issues, and were unable to pursue a policy attractive to a young electorate, also did them a favour. A group of young politicians with modern communication skills persuaded many first-time voters (more attached to post-materialism in line with Figure 1) and metropolitan liberals (Burkart 2014, Pink/Folvarčný 2020, Šárvec 2019). Seventy-two percent of Pirate voters said they

Figure 1. Post-materialists by generation 1991-2017 (source: Manea/Rabušic 2020)



⁴ The increasing importance that the Pirate Party gradually attached to environmental issues was also reflected by the fact that in some regions it proposed joint candidate lists with the Green Party, for which both parties nominated their candidates, and created a joint manifesto for the region in question (strongly stressing environmental issues), though they kept the two parties as separate entities. This was a pragmatic alliance in some regions only. Some Green party figures later moved to the Pirates (e.g., Andrea Hoffmanová).

Figure 2. Agreement with increased economic performance [0] or protection of environment [10] in % (own calculation based on Institute of Sociology, 2017)



preferred environmental protection to economic growth, as Figure 2 shows.

For the 2021 elections, the Pirates formed a nationwide coalition with the Mayors and Independents (STAN) party. Despite some programmatic differences (e.g., support for same-sex marriages), the grouping was seen as liberal, close to the political centre, also placing a clear emphasis on environmental issues.

In mid-2021, opinion polls indicated that the group would win around 27 percent of the vote (Median 2021). The chair and leader of the Pirates, Ivan Bartoš, became the coalition's joint prime ministerial candidate. Ultimately, the coalition won 15.62 percent of the vote – not an overwhelming result – and subsequently started to negotiate its entry into government alongside the election's winner, another opposition coalition called SPOLU (comprising three centre-right parties).

Programmatic development

In the first couple of years, the Pirates could almost be described as a single-issue party. They concentrated mainly on cyberspace and its key topics (the right to privacy, a review of the copyright law, and freedom on the internet). Due to its narrow focus, the party did not address other issues in its manifesto, including environmental protection, climate, and so on (Pirate party 2010).

In practice, however, the party's representatives always had a close relationship with environmental issues. Unlike other parties, the Pirates, with their leader

Ivan Bartoš, showed great interest in the problem of expanding the mining of hard coal into a built-up area in the east of the country back in 2012. Similarly, the local party branch in Mladá Boleslav established itself on environmental issues (Klusová 2021; Kopřiva 2021). Thus, in the beginning, the interest in environmental issues was mainly linked with the personal attitude of individual members and did not have a clear party-wide framework.

An environmental emphasis first appears in the party's manifesto for the 2012 regional elections. This mainly entailed generic statements about the need to separate and recycle waste and develop environmentally friendlier public transport, and a criticism of the narrow focus on fossil fuels as an energy source. However, the party still seemed mostly reactionary, in that it expected it would base its policy on experts' recommendations, rather than bring new issues to the table (Pirate party 2012).

In practice, the Pirates espoused anti-ACTA rhetoric, organising demonstrations and petitions to promote an unregulated internet without censorship. Thus, this shift could hardly be translated into the following manifesto for the parliamentary elections, where the party merely declared that it would seek to protect the 'common living space' (Pirate party 2013). Its proclamation that 'the entitlement to a constant quality of life' is seen as a fundamental human right was important in terms of its perception of environmental significance (Pirate party 2013).

In the next regional elections in 2016, the Pirates essentially repeated the main points of the earlier

regional election manifesto. One thing was made clear: if the party were to be successful at the lower levels of politics, it could hardly be so with issues such as internet freedom or the liberalisation of copyright law. It needed to look for issues that worried people in their communities. Regionally, in collaboration with the Green Party, the Pirates proved able to focus on new, local, environmental issues; for example, they opposed the construction of new incinerator plants and shale gas extraction and promoted the creation of new biking single tracks.

A crucial shift occurred in connection with the 2017 parliamentary elections, when the Pirates for the first time offered a comprehensively developed manifesto, with a fully-fledged environmental policy. The topic received more attention in the party in mid-2013 thanks to ecological activist Jan Nezhyba, who initiated the crucial discussion with well-drafted arguments, was appointed the party's first environmental officer, and dedicated himself to ecological issues in the long term, including outside politics. The leadership tended to stay passive during this period, mostly accepting the grass-root initiatives (IPF 2013; Nezhyba 2023). The Pirates moved to concrete proposals, emphasising the greening of cities, the development of cycling infrastructure, support not just for sorting waste but for environmentally-friendly packaging and biowaste recycling in households by composting, encouraging water retention in the landscape by revitalising ponds and wetlands and preventing water wastage. The party also opposed 'obsolete coal power plants' without, however, offering a practical alternative. Despite this, the proposal to expand the register of polluters and to increase oversight of industrial polluters, fit well with the strategy of a party that defined itself in opposition to the establishment (Pirate party 2017).

What the CPP never opposed was nuclear power, which it agreed was necessary for the overall Czech energy mix. Similarly, they reflected the need to modernise transport infrastructure and supported crucial construction projects in the country, including the completion of the motorway network and high-speed railway construction. In terms of agriculture and efficient, considerate management of land, specific proposals were lacking. The encouragement of more frequent crop rotation and a proposed fee for areas of land taken out of agricultural use did not seem sufficient (Pirate party 2017).

In 2021, the electoral coalition of the Pirates and STAN proposed a joint manifesto that focused on nearly all major aspects of life and social issues. The programmatic areas had their concrete, responsible administrators. The wording of the main points of the manifesto is a compromise between the two parties forming the coalition. However, the distinctive Pirate emphasis on the

environment and climate, reflecting current issues – e.g., by explicitly endorsing the obligations and objectives stemming from the Paris Agreement – remains. The manifesto pledges to stop using coal by 2033 (five years earlier than planned by the government at the time) and acknowledges the need to transform regions, including 'the transition to a low-emission heating industry' – i.e., ensure the availability of environmentally-friendly electricity and heat-generating capacity (Pirate party 2021). In the manifesto, the coalition also endorses support for non-motorised and shared mobility and developing the railway as an alternative to the growing road transport sector. The proposal to prepare a plan that would ensure the carbon neutrality of all state institutions seems very ambitious. Specific measures that would achieve this goal are lacking, however. Recycled products should be advantaged in the marketplace by attracting a lower VAT rate, and there is also support for other aspects of the circular economy.

There is a discernible effort to decentralise the issue, to the society at large and further institutions, which in their decision-making ought to reflect the climate crisis, e.g., in town and country planning, which in the Czech Republic is chiefly the responsibility of regions and municipalities, and potentially to introduce new limitations in the building regulations. Concerning agriculture, the Pirates are positive about limiting the amounts of fertilisers and pesticides used, and propose to enlarge the area of organically farmed land up to 25 percent of the total by 2030. Thus, on agricultural issues, there has been a noticeable move forward, compared to the previous manifesto (Pirate party 2021).

Seeing how the party's manifesto develops over time allows the framework of the changes to be defined and indicates a possible separation from narrow-profile piracy-based politics and issues. The party's positions and environmental policy proposals are positively appreciated in the reports by environmental NGOs organisations Duha [Rainbow] (which previously collaborated with the Green Party) and Zelený kruh [Green Circle] (2021). Of relevant parliamentary parties, the Pirates achieve the best score in these ratings. Subsequently, the stances will be verified in another complementary dimension – their political measures.

Opposition role, 2017-2021

Following the 2017 elections, the Pirate Party ended up on the opposition benches, having ruled out even before the election any government participation with Andrej Babiš, who was being prosecuted at the time, won the election and subsequently became the prime minister in a minority, technocratic government together with the Social Democrats.

In the allocation of offices in the Chamber of Deputies, the Pirates were able to gain important environment-related positions.⁵

In terms of environment and landscape protection, the party has long severely criticised and opposed the monstrous project of the Danube-Oder-Elbe Canal, championed by President Miloš Zeman, whom the government sought to accommodate at least partially. The Pirates opposed the proposal in both their 2017 and 2021 manifestos, and described it as 'a major environmental risk on the Oder River ... a threat to its meanders and potentially polluting the river' (Pirátské listy 2020).

Party leaders also repeatedly pointed out the insufficiency in the government plans for the retention of water in the landscape, to be achieved by the construction of several dams across the country. The Pirates believe that more widespread support is needed for local polders and wetlands that will facilitate local biodiversity expansion and help to maintain the character of the landscape. Their earlier proposal to terminate coal use for electricity generation before 2038 failed to win the support of MPs.

Similarly, in 2019 the Pirate proposal to abolish bio-component additives in fuels was rejected.⁶ On the one hand, such bio-components are expected to increase the share of environmentally-friendly fuels; on the other, they lead to increased use of chemicals in agricultural production and devastation of agricultural land, aid its erosion and reduce the diversification of crops, as bio-fuel production is reliant on a dominant and excessive crop of rapeseed and maize, the two plants used for this purpose. In environmental terms, first-generation bio-fuels are seen today as insufficient and their production in the present scope is a burden to the environment. The Pirate proposal was again supported by environmentalists and environmental organisations (Mol 2010; Pirate party 2019).

A recent environmental disaster on the Bečva River in the eastern part of the country provided an opportunity for the CPP to burnish its environmental credentials. Forty tonnes of fish died from cyanide poisoning and parts of the river's biotope were almost irretrievably damaged. The Pirates initiated some of the steps taken in response to the disaster (e.g., taking and assessing water samples and developing a summary comprehensive website). The protracted investigation and the government's chaotic response opened it up to extensive criticism, mounted by the opposition. The Pirates also had their member in the parliamentary

commission of inquiry. Although, in reality, the affair mainly helped the Pirates to delineate their policies in opposition to the government, the disaster spurred an extensive public debate about the state of the landscape and environment.

The CPP's reflection of environmental issues and climate change was not limited to its programme and parliamentary rhetoric. That this is part of their broader convictions and, in some way, a lifestyle, is shown by how most of their MPs get themselves to and from parliament – by cycling or taking public transport. The party e-shop offers items such as bio-degradable inflatable balloons, and during the campaign, they were giving out zero-carbon-footprint ice lollies to supporters. This shows some of the connections and reflection on environmental issues by party representatives in practice.

The main difference from the Greens' agenda is that the Pirates openly accept nuclear power as a relevant source of electricity. Recently they have been critical of the EU Green Deal, preferring in particular a gradual departure from internal combustion engines rather than a strict ban, while the Greens view it positively, as an opportunity. However, given its overall emphasis on green policy, it makes sense for the Pirate Party to be a member of the Greens group in the European Parliament.

Election 2021 and governmental prospects

The environmental programme of the current Pirate-STAN coalition bears the hallmarks of the CPP and has substantially helped to shift STAN towards the pro-environmental agenda (as compared to e.g., their manifesto in the 2017 elections which contained only very generic phrases; STAN 2017). Despite this, the coalition, nor the Pirates did not present environmental issues and the climate crisis as the dominant topic in their electoral campaign, as, for instance, happened in the 2021 election in Germany. This, together with their somewhat unfocussed campaign⁷, was probably a factor in their failure to mobilise enough young voters – many of whom might have cast their votes for the winning electoral coalition, SPOLU – and hence the Pirates and STAN only won 15.62 percent of the vote. The coalition only garnered above-average support in the broader environs of Prague (domain of pro-liberal voters), where it polled 17–23 percent of the vote. Moreover, thanks to the system of preferential votes – awarded to individual candidates as opposed to the party candidate lists – the

5 Dana Balcarová MP was the chair of the Environment Committee, Ivan Bartoš, the party leader, chaired the Public Administration and Regional Development Committee, and Radek Holomčik MP became deputy chair of the Agriculture Committee.

6 The obligation to add bio-components to fuels was abolished in early March 2022 (Křížková/Štěpán 2022).

7 Complementing this factor was a substantial disinformation campaign about migrants from Islamic countries, mounted by the government party ANO and the radical right party Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD), a campaign that the Pirates, as a pro-internet party, failed to counter adequately.

Pirates won four seats in the Chamber (18 fewer than in 2017). Despite this unconvincing result overall, the Pirates showed a willingness to enter into a center-right government coalition formed from five political parties. When the pre-election performance expectations were not met, some in the party (in particular its MEPs) criticised the idea of joining the government. However, the party supported its government participation by holding a vote (plebiscite) in the party, which by a clear majority of 82 percent confirmed the negotiated positions (Helios 2021).

Despite a decrease in voter support, the Pirates remain a relevant force, have three ministers in the government as of 2023, and are in a position to promote their programme. During the coalition government negotiations, they showed no particular interest in heading the Environment Ministry. They did, however, win the relatively powerful Regional Development and Foreign Affairs Ministries.

The party soon experienced a hard clash with the reality of governing when a decision was taken about a controversial intergovernmental agreement concerned with the Turów lignite mine on the border with Poland. The Pirate ministers' consent to this agreement – which raised several environmental concerns – elicited much discussion in the party.⁸ The agreement was not welcomed by environmentalists. Emphasis was mostly placed on potential future threats, e.g., to groundwater in the area subject to continued mining. The Pirate ministers maintained a pragmatic posture, combined with their weaker position and representation in the coalition government (Morales 2022).

Many difficult debates, including on extending coal mining and the feasibility of the various aspects of the Green Deal, the construction of new nuclear power plants, or the measure of public support for renewable energy sources, can be expected in connection with the Russo-Ukrainian war, as well as efforts to decrease public expenditure. The Pirates' pro-environmental positions are likely to be severely tested. Even within the government agenda, given the small size of the Pirate parliamentary party, some of these aspects now seem somewhat second-rate.

Conclusions

It is not true of the Czech Pirates that they would rather be 'correct' than win (Dalton/McAllister 2015). On the contrary, the party has experienced a gradual, yet substantial manifesto shift. Since its foundation in 2009, it has increasingly established itself on environmental

issues, which have become more important in the programme and the (so far mostly oppositional) politics of the party. In the party system, the agenda gap became obvious and the Pirates made the environment one of the pillars of their policy programme. Although these issues were not their original focus, they enabled the party to become less technocratic and to differentiate from others, preserving a somewhat loose party character with proximity to groups of activists and free-thinkers – important factors in their perception as a credible, pro-liberal, political alternative.

Generally, the movement-party concept covers most of the CPP's origins and characteristics. Until 2016, in many respects, the way the party functioned was a process of political learning using trial and error, including the programme. However, its original focus as an internet-oriented movement party failed, and another strategy had to be sought – replacing its protest appeal with a clear drive to succeed in the 2017 elections, preventing chaos by bolstering party structures and accentuating various topics, as the party gradually started to embrace matters outside its original core issues. The CPP proved to be quite flexible with an ability to adapt to the situation.

The broadening of the manifesto followed changes in internal organisation and efforts carefully to steer the Pirates in a more clearly defined direction, including more numerous membership and stronger structures. The limited objectives as set out in its initial proposals – at a time when party capacities were limited – were gradually replaced by more general appeals, with a visible drop of interest in the former 'pirate core' of the manifesto. Then, gradually accepting a greater role in environmental issues, the party nevertheless maintained its post-material accent.

It is important to note that this originally internet-based party has followed the same pattern that Kitschelt (2006) envisaged for a 'classic' movement that does not emphasise the internet and has broadened its scope by the inclusion of entirely new topics. This underlines the party's desire to expand its programme regardless of the party's character and confirms the concept's applicability to modern party actors.

However, contradicting Kitschelt, this manifesto's scope extension preceded political success – it was not its consequence but rather was involved as one of the factors that have led to the political-electoral success and the Pirates' relevance in the Czech party system. This thematic shift proved the importance of the programme for the functioning (improved stability) and the character (specified profile) of the party. Broadly, it helped to change CPP's public perception – from a mock 'download' party to a credible political force.

⁸ This even led to a vote in the supreme party body in an effort to disassociate the party from the agreement (Helios 2022; IPF 2022).

The acceptance of this pathway through an agenda extension can offer a possible way out of political marginalisation for other parties.

Thus, through their coalition with the Green party for the regional elections in 2016 – the later rejection of such coalition in 2017 nationally – the Pirates were able comprehensibly and credibly to develop the environmental agenda in their programme, and with their fresh, anti-establishment appeal in 2017, combined with factors such as good communication skills, their relatively young charismatic leader, became a much more attractive and trustworthy alternative than the Greens for many young voters.

It was precisely this combination of post-material emphases on modern technologies, digitalisation, the environment, and fighting corruption that worked for the Pirates. Yet the party also responded to the demands and the visions of many liberal voters, as shown, among other things, by its substantially higher-than-average performance in Prague and its environs (Jääsaari/Šárovec 2021).

In Czechia, the Pirate Party endeavours to provide a liberal alternative, and seeks to combine this position with a relatively unambiguous pro-environmental appeal, emphasising modern technologies in public administration. In this respect, the CPP can be seen as an alternative that by its emphasis on these issues is strongly distinguished from the other relevant parties in the system.

Of the Czech political parties that can be considered relevant according to Sartori's (2005) definition, the Pirates are the greatest proponents of environmental issues with a developed programme and proposals that are similar to those advocated by parties in many Western European democracies. The CPP came much closer to pragmatic, non-orthodox European green parties accentuating a broader leftist agenda (including same-sex marriage), but not an entirely libertarian-progressive one (consider its careful position on migration, yet the party is in favor of marijuana liberalisation), usually in combination with limitless transparency often presented as a fundamental rule of politics. This continues to reflect its original protest-based ethos. The Czech Pirates present themselves as a liberal-center party, particularly after 2017. But compared to other Pirate (or even Green) parties, their programme is, in a sense, *sui generis*. The environmental agenda is in a sense a continuation and a substantial extension of its original post-materialist line, which proceeded from an emphasis on freedoms in the digital age and the online world.

However, this pragmatic shift brings problems concerning the wider pirate movement. The process of manifesto extension distinguishes the CPP from other pirate parties and makes it difficult to define what is

meant by 'pirate politics'. What would its basement, main ideas, and ideological guidance be without that shift, despite not jeopardising the manifesto's and party's mostly post-material essence (Kenny 1994). When the former core *de facto* lost its political relevance and appeal to the majority of (Czech) society after 2013, environmental issues (together with transparency) became most significant. This reinforces doubts about whether the establishment of pirate parties can be considered a new, independent, and sustainable cleavage within society after 2006.

Currently, they are facing their greatest challenge yet – participation in government as a junior party and the first pirate party worldwide with a possibility of doing so. It remains unclear whether the party will be able to translate its clear pro-environmental approach (and programme) into political outcomes. A clear intra-party consensus on promoting the environmental agenda – alongside digitalisation and some other questions of value and culture – continues to be expected in the future.

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