

Habilitation Thesis Reviewer's Report

Masaryk University
Faculty of Social Studies

Procedure field: Political Science

Applicant: Mgr. Petr Ocelík, Ph.D.

Applicant's home institution: Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University

Habilitation thesis: Energy transition from a political science perspective: Selected cases

Reviewer: doc. Oldřich Krpec, Ph.D.

Reviewer's home institution: Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University

Petr Ocelík's habilitation thesis explores the political dimension of the energy transition. The text draws on established but in given problem area still innovative theories and applies an interesting set of methods to original empirical data obtained from research conducted mainly in the Czech Republic.

The core of the habilitation thesis consists of five studies, which the author and his co-authors have published typically in the last few years in prestigious journals in the field (the exception is one chapter published as part of an edited collection). These papers are supplemented by passages that summarize the literature and previous research that has guided and inspired the authors, describe the initial theoretical assumptions, and present the methodological approaches applied in their research. Above all, however, these parts of text are useful because they succeed in presenting the individual essays as part of a more general contribution to the theoretical discussion of the issue and find broader theoretical but also practical implications and a basis for further research on politics of energy policy and transition.

If we are to comment on the content of habilitation thesis as a whole, it works with two analytical approaches - discursive and interactional. It attempts to investigate how actors use discursive strategies to enforce or block the current energy regime and how they try to promote or prevent policy change towards decarbonization. It can be said that social network analysis is applied as a general meta-theoretical and methodological framework of the habilitation thesis. The main argument that can be identified across the different parts of the thesis is the claim that there is considerable potential for integrating of policy processes theories within a broader context of the study of energy transition. The author argues that although policy is an integral part of the study of energy transitions, as is the case with other sociotechnical transitions, it has not yet received sufficient attention (compared to technical, economic and efficiency issues).

Therefore, the present habilitation thesis has the ambition to contribute in this respect by analyzing political processes and public policy (Study IV), researching social movements and

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issues of community acceptance (Studies II, V), and analyzing the discursive construction of energy transition (Studies I, II, III). In addition, the media (Study I, II, III), both legacy and social media are also important part of presented research. Besides discourse, the subject of study is the issue of transactional interactions. These interactions are investigated on inter-organizational (Study IV) and inter-personal (Study V) level. Study V examines the importance of network embeddedness for differential participation in the opposition and engagement of ideologically diverse actors. The chosen meta-theoretical and methodological framework (the social network analysis) allowed the author and his co-authors to use a range of methodological approaches. Qualitative approaches to data collection and analysis are applied in Study I, quantitative approaches in Studies IV and V, and mixed-methods approaches in Studies II and III.

Four of the five studies present research focused on the Czech Republic, with the exception of the first text, which deals with Russia. The author of the thesis presents relevant reasons why the Czech Republic is an interesting case to investigate the chosen issues as it is a significant consumer of lignite, a highly industrialized economy, a significant exporter of electricity, a significant CO₂ emitter, at the same time an economy with a skeptical approach to the problem of climate change and a salt position of conventional energy incumbents.

As already mentioned, all five papers forming the core of the thesis were published in prestigious journals within the field. Petr Ocelík and Jan Osička's text "The framing of unconventional natural gas resources in the foreign energy policy discourse of the Russian Federation" was published in 2014 in the journal *Energy Policy*; Ondřej Černý and Petr Ocelík's study "Incumbents' strategies in Media Coverage" in the journal *Politics and Governance* in 2020; Petr Ocelík's chapter "Climate change skepticism in the Czech Newspaper front-page coverage" in *Handbook of Anti-Environmental Claims* (edited by D. B. Tindall, M.C. Stoddart, R.E. Dunlap; Edgar Elgar Publishing) in 2022; an article Petr Ocelík et al. "A contested transition toward a coal-free future" in *Energy Research & Social Science* in 2019; and the text "Beyond our backyard: social networks, differential participation" in the same journal with co-authors Lukáš Lehotský and Filip Černocho in 2021. In the case of a habilitation thesis that consists of a set of co-authored research papers, the assessment of the candidate's contribution in individual papers is of importance. In the case of Petr Ocelík, the indicated authorial share is at least half, but mostly predominant and he is the first and/or corresponding author in all cases.

As far as the contribution of the set of articles to the study of the issue is concerned, it is indisputable. The articles contain theoretical arguments based on original data collected for the purposes of the research. The research as a whole has more general theoretical implications. Mention should be made of the outcomes of the discursive analysis, which, using research focused on the Czech Republic, showed how regime-resistance actors were building complex narratives using securitization appeals. Frames or discursive strategies advocating the existing regime were supported by actors well established in the decision-making process and/or resource rich. As for the part of the research focusing on transition-related processes - this

provided relevant insights into the behavior of actors within the political system. Interesting findings relate to the conflictual nature of advocacy coalitions in the Czech political system engaged in the examined issues of energy policy and its transition, in particular the conflictual nature of interactions between coalitions with low compatibility in policy beliefs and high intra-coalition cohesion. In examining the social movement representing opposition to established actors in the energy sector, the authors characterize this movement as organizationally, ideologically and spatially heterogeneous with intensity of participation predicted by embeddedness within the opposition network and not by individual attributes. In a number of cases, relevant practical/policy implications are also identified. Promising research directions are identified at the very end of the thesis.

The habilitation of Petr Ocelík fully demonstrates the author's high professional and academic level, consist of texts that have established him as a leading Czech expert not only in energy policy research, but also as an outstanding theorist and methodologist in the field of political science.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defense

- 1) The presented studies focus on the analysis of the initial (agenda setting) and intermediate (advocacy strategies) phases of the political process. In what way could the outputs of the political process, i.e. specific policies, also be grasped and analyzed?
- 2) How is the Czech case of energy transition specific in the European context and how can it contribute to a better understanding of the transition in other European countries?

Conclusion of the Reviewer's report

The habilitation thesis with the title "Energy transition from a political science perspective: Selected cases" by Mgr. Petr Ocelík, Ph.D. **fulfils** the requirements of a habilitation thesis in the field of Political Science.

In Brno, 5 September 2022,

doc. Oldřich Krpec, Ph.D.