

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Faculty	Faculty of Social Studies
Applicant	Mgr. et Mgr. Jiří Navrátil, Ph.D.
Habilitation thesis	Contesting post-socialism. Transformation of the Czech economic protest between 1989 and 2021
Reviewer	Prof. Mario Diani
Reviewer's home unit, institution	University of Trento, Department of Sociology and social research

This is a solid and competent piece of work that addresses an important conceptual and empirical issue, namely, how to apply a genuinely relational logic to the study of the evolution of collective action fields over time. On this ground it offers a distinctive contribution to knowledge, significantly expanding over both earlier studies of the evolution of fields, that were largely relying on accounts from the main players (e.g. Armstrong, Elizabeth A. *Forging Gay Identities: Organizing Sexuality in San Francisco, 1950-1994*. University of Chicago Press, 2002), or systematic studies that were however largely missing the time dimension, such as my own exploration of civic networks in British cities (e.g. Diani, Mario. *The Cement of Civil Society: Studying Networks in Localities*. Cambridge University Press, 2015). The study also illustrates the power of network analytic tools in mapping field change over time, *contra* critics of the approach (e.g. Fligstein, Neil, and Doug McAdam. *A Theory of Fields*. Oxford University Press, 2012).

In Ch1, Dr Navrátil introduces the three main goals of the dissertation: to identify the actors who promoted resistance to post-socialist economic transformation in the Czech republic; to chart the relational processes that support collective action and account for the relative lack of resistance to socio-economic change in post-socialist societies; to use the concept of embeddedness to look at the impact of changes in political and economic context over cooperation in economic protest. He uses the concept of “collective action field” as an analytic tool to explore interactions, but in contrast to other analysts of fields he relies heavily on network analytic techniques. Major inspiration is Polanyi’s theorization of the great transformation.

Ch.2 delves deeper into Polanyi’s approach and shows its greater ability than Marx’s or others’ to capture the complexity of resistances to deep social transformation. It also refers to structural accounts of recent socio-economic developments, combined with a summary of social movements’ “classic agenda”. Overall, the chapter convincingly illustrates the difficulties of existing studies to capture the complexity of recent mobilizations, and the full range of actors behind them

Ch.3 illustrates the distinctiveness and the challenges of studying the particular pattern towards neo-liberal policies experiences by former socialist countries. It is rich and informative.

Ch.4 introduces the relational perspective on collective action and political protest, drawing on network analysis and approaches to collective action fields. The review is good but the chapter might have better specified the key hypotheses. It clearly identifies lines of investigation and research questions, but is comparatively less effective in hypothesizing clear connections between network structures and environmental mechanisms – although that becomes clearer the more readers get into the empirical material.

Ch.5 introduces the empirical study, with both technical details on data and methods, and a long presentation of the specific case. Given its reliance on rich historical and background material, the latter might perhaps have been placed in the same section that introduced the process of socio-economic transformation of former socialist countries, but that is a matter of taste rather than an objective weakness.

Ch. 6 illustrates networking behavior from the actors' point of view, with interesting insights into the different approaches adopted by formal and informal organizations. The attention to variations in coalition patterns across phases, with similar and dissimilar trends for established and grassroots actors, is particularly valuable. So is the discussion of relational flows across different sectors of civil society.

Ch. 7 provides a very dense account of the structure of alliance patterns, and their variation over time. While the details of specific configurations, and the mechanisms accounting for them, may be difficult to account for, the overall patterns are clearly summarized. The identification of some basic network patterns over a significant period of time is likely to represent in my view a reference for future longitudinal studies of network processes in collective action.

Finally, Ch. 8 effectively summarizes the main findings. It might perhaps have been more ambitious in showing how the dissertation will influence future discussions of the evolution of collective action networks over time and its relationship to environmental factors.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence (number of questions up to the reviewer)

Like all good works, this dissertation has raised a number of questions/points for clarification that might be worth addressing. Below are just a few of them. I leave it entirely with the examination committee whether to address all of them or just select a few during the defence.

- 1) I am a big fan of Polanyi and I find it absolutely correct to refer to his work as a reminder of the complexity of the resistance against radical social transformation. As a social movement analyst, however, I wonder why to assign so much importance to the category of “counter-movement”, which in that field is used primarily to denote opposition to other social movements (and which, by the way, I am not particularly fond of). The late Charles Tilly contrasted “reactive” to “proactive” movements and I wonder whether that would not be a better characterization of the phenomena Dr Navrátil is exploring in his dissertation.
- 2) In places, Dr Navrátil's view of fields contradicts his relational standpoint - or at least, it looks unclearly formulated to me. For example, on p.66 we read that the study excludes “social movements organizations with an institutionalized repertoire of action, non-protesting interest groups, lobbying agencies, or various service-provision oriented civil society actors”, treated as “different animals”; or, on p.94, Dr Navrátil refers to “only a minor presence of SMOs”. Now, assuming that there are organizations that by virtue of their traits are – or are not – part of social movements and qualify as SMOs is probably the dominant approach in the field, but this is

basically a categorical approach logic. I find this somehow at odds with the relational perspective that Dr Navrátil advocates, and successfully applies in this study. Why ruling out that “non-protesting interest groups” or the like might on occasion be involved in protest? After all, many of the actors mentioned in the dissertation do not fit the profile of the standard SMO. It may just be a matter of misunderstanding, but I would urge the author to elaborate on this issue.

- 3) I would also want to hear more on Dr Navrátil’s characterization of strong and weak ties. In the dissertation, strong ties are defined by the frequency of interaction, i.e., co-participation in several events. This makes perfectly sense and is also consistent with Granovetter’s original formulation. However, it is not the way Baldassarri and Diani (“The Integrative Power of Civic Networks.” *American Journal of Sociology* 113: pp. 735–80, 2007), that Dr Navrátil amply references, define them: in their work, strong ties (aka social bonds) are multiplex ties consisting of both resource exchanges and ties of solidarity and identity (they use shared members as a proxy). In fairness, it would have been very difficult – probably impossible - for Dr Navrátil to obtain solid measures of solidarity/identity ties between actors over time. Moreover, the substantive insights from Baldassarri and Diani about the distribution of strong and weak ties in a collective action field may still make sense. But the differences in conceptualizing strong ties should be recognized.
- 4) The very small number of strong ties (only 2% of the total) also prompts another question, namely, whether that figure reflects actual practices or is rather exacerbated by the particular data source. We might use a more extended discussion of the limitations of data originated from news agencies. To be clear, I do not see many reliable alternatives as of now, and Dr Navrátil is to be commended for creatively using those data to map network evolution. At the same time, news reports have been found lacking when it comes to identify all the actors involved in public events (see e.g. Fillieule, Olivier, and Manuel Jiménez. “Media Event Analysis and Environmental Protests: A Methodological Reflection.” In *Environmental Protest in Western Europe*, edited by Christopher Rootes, 258–79. Oxford University Press, 2003); accordingly, the number of co-participations might be significantly underestimated.

Conclusion

The habilitation thesis entitled “Contesting post-socialism. Transformation of the Czech economic protest between 1989 and 2021” by Mgr. et Mgr. Jiří Navrátil, Ph.D. fulfils the requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Sociology.

Date: 5/1/2025

Signature:

