

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Faculty

Faculty of Social Studies

Applicant

Mgr. et Mgr. Marína Urbániková, Ph.D.

Habilitation thesis

Public Service Media in Uncertain Times: Normative Ideals, Institutional Struggles, and Public Perceptions

Reviewer

Prof. Hilde Van den Bulck

Reviewer's home unit, institution

Drexel University, College of Arts and Sciences,
Department of Communication

The habilitation thesis *Public Service Media in Uncertain Times: Normative Ideals, Institutional Struggles and Public Perceptions* by Mgr. et Mgr. Marína Urbániková, Ph.D. presents a coherent and substantial body of scholarly work that makes a clear contribution to contemporary research on public service media. The thesis brings together seven peer-reviewed publications, including three single-authored and three first-authored papers with established co-authors, in well-established international journals and edited volumes. It demonstrates the candidate's sustained engagement with key debates in media and communication studies, particularly in the areas of public service media, journalistic autonomy, political pressure and public legitimacy.

A major strength of the habilitation lies in the clarity and coherence of the research programme that underpins the individual studies. Rather than presenting a loose collection of articles, the candidate convincingly articulates a unifying intellectual agenda structured around three interrelated perspectives: a normative perspective on the mission and values of public service media, an institutional perspective focused on professional autonomy and interference and a public perspective centred on trust, expectations and willingness to pay. This tripartite framework is well motivated theoretically and provides a strong foundation for integrating conceptual reflection with empirical analysis.

The work is particularly valuable for its sustained focus on public service media in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, contexts that remain comparatively under-researched in the international literature. The thesis makes a strong case for why Central and Eastern European settings are analytically significant, given their historical trajectories, institutional vulnerabilities and heightened exposure to political pressure. By situating the empirical findings within broader international debates on media capture, public value and democratic legitimacy, the candidate successfully avoids a narrow national focus and demonstrates the broader relevance of her research.

Methodologically, the habilitation displays a commendable degree of pluralism and rigor. Across the studies, the candidate employs qualitative interviews, focus group discussions, survey research and normative conceptual analysis, consistently selecting methods that are well suited to the research questions at hand. The qualitative studies of newsroom conflict and perceived interference offer rich and nuanced insights into the lived experiences of public service media practitioners, while the audience-focused studies contribute to an area

that has long been underrepresented in public service media research. The explicit attention to both trust and distrust, as well as to public expectations and willingness to pay, adds conceptual depth to ongoing discussions about public legitimacy and sustainability.

The normative dimension of the thesis, especially the discussion of public service journalism in the digital era, provides a clear and well-grounded synthesis of existing frameworks and connects them thoughtfully to contemporary challenges such as platformisation, political polarisation and technological change. While the theoretical contributions are primarily integrative rather than radically innovative, they are carefully developed and empirically informed, and they offer a solid basis for future theoretical refinement and comparative research.

Taken as a whole, the habilitation thesis demonstrates scholarly maturity, international orientation and a clear capacity to conduct independent, high-quality research. It confirms the candidate's position as an established researcher in the field of media and communication studies, which has also been evident in her participation in conferences and scholarly bodies. The thesis consistently shows both a distinctive empirical focus and a conceptual orientation.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence

I want to start by congratulating Mgr. et Mgr. Marína Urbániková on her consistent work and contribution to the field. I also have two questions that must be read as invitations to further reflection rather than as points of criticism.

1) Integration and future development

The habilitation brings together normative perspectives, institutional analyses and audience research. How does the candidate see these three perspectives informing one another more directly in future work and what would a more fully integrated model of public service media legitimacy look like?

2) Normative frameworks and context

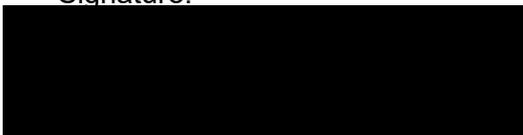
Much of the normative framework used in the thesis draws on Western European conceptions of public service media. To what extent does the author believe that the Czech and Slovak experiences call for an adaptation or rethinking of these dominant normative models, particularly in contexts marked by democratic fragility and political pressure?

Conclusion

The habilitation thesis entitled "Public Service Media in Uncertain Times: Normative Ideals, Institutional Struggles, and Public Perceptions" by Mgr. et Mgr. Marína Urbániková, Ph.D. **fulfils** requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Media and Journalism Studies.

Date: December 26, 2025

Signature:



Hilde Van den Bulck