

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Applicant

Ing. Mgr. Lucie Coufalová, Ph.D. et Ph.D.

Habilitation thesis

Lost in Transition and Ballot Papers: Four Papers on Economic Policy

Reviewer

Prof. Ing. Jan Fidrmuc, Ph.D.

Reviewer's home unit, institution

IESEG School of Management, Université de Lille

This habilitation thesis comprises four previously-published papers, co-authored (three) or single-authored (one) by the candidate. The papers fall in two areas: economic history and determinants of voting. While these four papers were all published only recently – in 2023 and 2024 – the candidate has an impressive track record of related publications in the last 5-10 years. In fact, she could easily have included more than four publications in this thesis. The four papers included in this thesis were all published in respected peer-reviewed international journals: three are ranked 3 in the ABS ranking of journals, and one is even ranked 4.

Coufalová is a promising and productive young academic who, in my opinion, amply deserves the *habilitation*.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence:

When commenting on the outcomes of transition across the different countries, you suggest that “although they followed different paths, the outcome of the reforms was very similar across all countries.” This strikes me as odd. Would you say that the outcomes of transition in the Czech Republic and Slovakia were similar? Or in Poland and Russia?

When discussing the oral histories as reproduced by enterprise managers, you discuss the impact of the collapse of the COMECON trade. What about the break-up of Czechoslovakia? How did this affect the firms in question?

I share your enthusiasm for collecting oral histories as part of research into historical events. What other aspects of Czechoslovak history, in your opinion, should be explored in this way (besides the role of state bureaucracy that you highlight in Section 1.7)? For example, do you see a potential for using this method to analyze the experience of border regions, which you also briefly mention in Section 1.7 and which you analyze more deeply in your recent WIFO working paper?

You discuss the various biases that could plague your data, such as the education and gender bias (resulting in the higher share of highly-educated men in the sample), or the self-selection bias (resulting in omission of potential narrators who engages in illegal or semi-legal activities during the wild 1990s). A related issue is survivorship bias: your sample is likely to include predominantly firms that survived long enough in the wild 1990s to enter the

Czech collective memory. In contrast, state-owned firms that were liquidated early or (or absorbed into other, more successful, firms) are less likely to be reviewed – with the exception of particularly large or systemically important firms whose failure was noteworthy. The survivorship bias implies that oral histories are likely to tell us more about factors that helped firms do well or even flourish and less about factors that made them fail or perform poorly. Have you made any attempt to deal with this issue?

The paper on homophily in voting behavior seeks to shed light on the determinants of individual voting choices but is based on aggregate data on Czech municipalities. As such, it suffers from the so-called ecological fallacy: inferences about individual choices can be invalid if they are based only on observing aggregate outcomes. Do you think that your paper's findings should be reevaluated in the light of this criticism?

While you show that the patterns of homophily in voting behavior are statistically significant, are these results also economically significant? For instance, if the candidates in the below-median municipalities all had average characteristics (or were distributed across municipalities randomly), how different would be the parliament's composition?

The example of the ballot paper given in Figure 2.1 features three candidates whose entries take up more than one line. This, effectively, relegates the last three candidates, to the second page of the ballot. There is a specific trade-off here: the party wants to give more precise information to the voters about the candidates' background (so that homophilic voters can vote for them), but this in turn reduces the chances of the last few candidates. Would parties be better off by providing abridged information about all candidates so that none are relegated to the second page? Alternatively, is it possible that parties relegate some candidates to the second page intentionally?

Conclusion

The habilitation thesis entitled *Lost in Transition and Ballot Papers: Four Papers on Economic Policy* by Ing. Mgr. Lucie Coufalová, Ph.D. et Ph.D. **fulfils** requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Economic Policy.

Date: 21 August 2024

Signature: Jan Fidrmuc

