

## HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

**Masaryk University**

**Faculty**

**Applicant**

**Habilitation thesis**

**Reviewer**

**Reviewer's home unit,  
institution**

Faculty of Social Studies

Alena Kluknavská, PhD.

Populist communication: content, actors, opportunities, and impacts in times of crisis

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Dr Alena Kluknavská's habilitation thesis titled "Populist Communication: Content, Actors, Opportunities, and Impacts in Times of Crisis" addresses a highly pertinent and contemporary topic of populist communication. Its main research objectives are to examine specific communication elements of populist narratives, understand the roles played by political and public actors, uncover the impact of contextual opportunities for creating and disseminating such communication, and assess public reactions to this form of political communication. These research objectives translate into more specific research problems focusing on specific content and stylistic elements of populist communication, their employment by political and public actors within the mediated public debates, the influence of contextual characteristics spanning different crises, countries, and political configurations, as well as verbal or emotional responses to hostile and negative communication.

The thesis is composed of a comprehensive collection of ten academic studies published between 2016 and 2023, accompanied by an informative commentary. A notable aspect of the thesis is the collaborative nature of the research, with none of the ten academic studies being single-authored by Dr Kluknavská. This is somewhat uncommon in habilitation theses, as the authors usually decide to include at least one single-authored work. However, Dr Kluknavská provides a detailed account of her specific contributions to each study, underscoring her various key roles in the collaborative research process.

The structure of the thesis is well-organized and impressively coherent. The first two introductory chapters lay a solid foundation for understanding what comes next. They delve meticulously into the conceptualization of the communicative aspects of populism, elucidating how populist messages are crafted and disseminated in the public sphere. They also specify the role of populist actors and the context as well as the influence of populist communication

and the affinity between populism and post-truth communication, thus offering the readers a detailed orientation to the subsequent studies. The dossier is well-situated within the broader scholarly discussions on populist communication and concludes with a synthesized summary of the findings, whilst also presenting exciting possibilities for future research in this field.

The core of the thesis consists of ten distinct texts (nine journal articles and one book chapter) that explore various aspects of populist communication. These texts approach the issue from multiple perspectives, in different contexts, at various levels of analysis, and utilize diverse methods and data sources. This diversity is a testament to the work's scholarly breadth and depth, allowing for a nuanced understanding of populist communication from multiple vantage points. What is particularly commendable is the way in which these varied approaches are harmoniously integrated into a cohesive and unified whole. Indeed, despite the mentioned diversity, the compendium maintains a strong internal coherence. The articles are compatible with each other and complement each other well, with a clear unifying theme running throughout.

There is no necessity to reiterate the comprehensive summaries of the individual studies within the thesis, as the author has adeptly undertaken this task. Rather, it is sufficient to highlight that the dossier embarks on an ambitious, in-depth exploration of four main dimensions of the multifaceted dynamics of populist communication during times of crisis: 1) the content and style of populist communication employed in the public sphere, 2) the role played by political, public, and media actors in creating and disseminating populist messages, 3) the role of the political and discursive opportunities and the crisis contexts in shaping populist messages, frames, and narratives, and 4) the public responses and reactions to populist communication.

All ten texts are of excellent quality. Many of them have been published in top-tier international peer-reviewed journals, with the rigorous peer review process that they underwent attesting to their scholarly merit. The studies are innovative and methodologically sophisticated, drawing on persuasive data, with the empirical analyses both thorough and compelling. They not only pose and answer critical research questions but also demonstrate a robust involvement with the ongoing debates within the scholarship on populist communication. This deep engagement, coupled with theoretical acuity and analytical rigor, underscores the outstanding contributions of the studies to the field.

Collectively, the thesis represents an original, novel and substantial contribution to the scholarly understanding of populist communication, offering valuable insights into the intricate dynamics of populist communication during times of crisis and its far-reaching impact. I regard Dr Kluknavská's work as distinguished by its ambitious scope, meticulous research design,

methodological rigor and profound analytical depth, marking a valuable advancement in the academic investigation of this multifaceted phenomenon.

### **Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence**

I am fully aware that addressing my questions necessitates a great degree of simplification, given the complex and multifaceted nature of the subject. Yet, would it be possible to elaborate briefly during the habilitation thesis defence on whether there have been any discernible shifts in the patterns of populist communication within the studied cases over time and what might these temporal dynamics reveal about the adaptability or resilience of populist discourse in the contemporary political landscape? Additionally, given that the habilitation thesis engages with populist communication across various regions, my second question touches upon the regional variations in this phenomenon. Would it be possible to reflect briefly on the key differences in how populist communication is employed and received across the diverse geographical contexts?

### **Conclusion**

The habilitation thesis titled “Populist communication: content, actors, opportunities, and impacts in times of crisis” by Dr Alena Kluknavská **fulfils** requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Political Science. It is an exceptionally interesting, remarkably well-researched and profoundly mature work that successfully accomplishes all its objectives. It significantly enhances our understanding of populist communication, with its originality and multi-dimensional approach contributing meaningfully to the international scholarly community.

Date: 9 August 2024

Signature:

