

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Faculty

Applicant

Habilitation thesis

Reviewer

**Reviewer's home unit,
institution**

Faculty of Social Studies

Mgr. et Mgr. Marina Urbániková, Ph.D.

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

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The habilitation thesis titled *Public Service Media in Uncertain Times: Normative Ideals, Institutional Struggles, and Public Perceptions*, submitted by Dr. Marina Urbániková, addresses a topic of high relevance within the fields of journalism, media, and communication studies. This relevance stems from the crucial role of public service media (PSM) in fostering informed citizenship and sustaining democracy on the one hand, and from the numerous challenges PSM face in contemporary societies on the other.

The thesis comprises a title page, a declaration of authorship and citation, an abstract, acknowledgments, a table of contents, 43 pages of *Commentary on Submitted Works* (including references), and seven published studies. Its key part—the *Commentary on Submitted Works*—is a well-structured, clearly written, and well substantiated text. The author guides the reader smoothly through six coherently organized sections.

The *Introduction* comprehensively presents the topic of the thesis and its scholarly significance. It outlines the seven published studies on which the thesis is based, delineates their distinct perspectives, methodological approaches, and key issues vital to the future of PSM, and highlights their contribution to several under-researched areas.

The *Theoretical and Conceptual Framework*, comprising three subsections, provides a solid foundation, demonstrating the author's strong theoretical competence in research and critical reflection, as well as her profound understanding of the current broader media and social contexts that shape the issues and challenges of PSM. First, the author presents a concise overview of the normative perspectives on PSM in relation to its societal mission. In outlining different conceptions of PSM's purpose, she highlights that the central challenge lies in defining and sustaining PSM's role within a changing society and in adapting its mission and remit to contemporary contexts. The section demonstrates the author's awareness of the need to combine normative and theoretical approaches with the perspectives of key societal stakeholders, including the public and PSM professionals—an argument she supports with reference to three of the studies included in this thesis. Second, the author addresses major challenges confronting PSM in Central and Eastern Europe, considering issues such as media capture, autonomy, interference, and resistance. This subsection draws on two of the included studies to substantiate the argument. Third, the author addresses the role of the public,

focusing on public expectations, trust, and payment behaviour, again referring to three of the included studies. Overall, this section offers a consistent and well-grounded framework that underlies the thesis as a whole.

The section *Context: PSM in the Czech Republic and Slovakia* is particularly valuable for international readers, as it clarifies the specific circumstances and challenges of PSM in Central and Eastern European countries—specifically the Czech Republic and Slovakia—compared with their Western European counterparts. Given that the thesis focuses on these two countries, the author appropriately emphasizes the importance of a comparative perspective, drawing on six of the included studies to support this approach.

The *Overview of the Studies and Author's Contribution* section systematically presents the seven published studies on which the thesis is based—publications authored independently or in co-authorship with substantial contribution. Six of these are scientific articles published in high-impact international journals, and one is a book chapter. In my professional opinion, these achievements clearly attest to the author's high level of scholarly competence in the field of media and journalism studies. The journals in which she has published—particularly *Journalism*, *Journalism Studies*, and *Media, Culture & Society*—rank among the most respected in the discipline, known for their rigorous peer-review processes and high rejection rates.

The *Studies' Aims and Methodological Design* section summarizes the aims and methodological approaches of the seven published studies. One is normative/conceptual, while six are empirical. The use of both qualitative and quantitative methods demonstrates the author's methodological versatility. Having reviewed the methodological approaches employed in the individual studies, I can confirm the author's ability to select and apply appropriate research methods to effectively address the research questions explored in her work.

In the *Discussion and Conclusion*—an extensive section further divided into four subsections—the author convincingly demonstrates her capacity for logical analysis and synthesis, critical reflection, and the formulation of well-founded conclusions, as well as her ability to anticipate future trends and challenges based on the studies' findings. Drawing on all seven published studies, she discusses the results from three interrelated perspectives: the normative, the institutional actors', and the public perspective. Finally, she suggests five directions for further research, demonstrating her in-depth knowledge of the specific topic and the wider media and societal context.

The *References* section shows that the author is well acquainted with the relevant scholarly works, both foundational and contemporary.

Overall, I find the reviewed habilitation thesis to be a significant and timely contribution to the ongoing scholarly debate on PSM in an era of profound media and societal transformations. The findings presented and discussed in this thesis advance several underexplored areas within the existing body of scholarship, such as the integration of audience perspectives in PSM research and the provision of empirical insights into how institutional actors experience and respond to political pressure. They also contribute to addressing the relative scarcity of studies on PSM in Central and Eastern Europe. The thesis written by Dr. Marina Urbániková attests to the originality, relevance, and quality of the author's research and provides convincing evidence of her academic competence.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence

1. You identify the integration of AI and the implementation of personalised recommendation algorithms as a relevant topic for future research on public service

journalism and highlight several challenges posed by these developments. Some of these issues fall within the ethical domain, raising new concerns about the implications of AI integration for editorial quality and other aspects of journalism. Some scholars (e.g., Porlezza et al., 2022) have already presented case studies on the governance of AI in selected PSM. How do you see the role of journalism and media self-regulation, as well as external regulation, in sustaining the mission of PSM (journalism) amid the increasing use of AI in newsrooms?

2. You note that most prior studies have focused on perceived autonomy or influence without specifying the concrete manifestations of interference. This suggests a need for methodologically innovative approaches. Could you elaborate on potential methodological approaches that would allow researchers to move beyond examining perceived influence toward assessing actual influence?

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: 15. 11. 2025

Signature

