

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Faculty

Faculty of Social Studies

Applicant

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Habilitation thesis

Implementation of Labour Market Policy by Street-level Bureaucrats in Public Administration Affecting Regional and Social Development: Analytical Model and its Applications

Reviewer

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I evaluate the habilitation thesis according to the following areas and criteria as follows:

Topicality of the topic

The topic is interdisciplinary. It is examined from the perspective of public policy, public administration and sociology. The scientific topicality of the problem is mainly due to the fact that the author offers a new view of "line workers" (or "street-level bureaucrats"). I positively evaluate that the author has studied extensive literature on the problem and carried out a detailed and critical analysis of it.

Selected explanatory paradigm and theoretical-conceptual framework

The result of the scientific explanation of the investigated problem depends to a large extent on the appropriately chosen explanatory paradigm and on the choice of the theoretical-conceptual framework. I state that the chosen explanatory study corresponds to the nature of the research subject and the set research goals. The author relies on the classic concept of "street-level bureaucracy" by the American political scientist Michael Lipsky and his many followers. In his habilitation, the author convinced that he can creatively apply the explanatory paradigm.

Structure of the thesis and suitability of the chosen methodological procedure

The structure of the thesis corresponds to the requirements for a qualification thesis. It is divided into the following parts: theoretical part, methodological part, analytical part and final part.

The individual parts are purposefully divided into sub-paragraphs. Overall, I state that the habilitation thesis has a logical structure that allows the research goals to be met. Of course, it would be possible to explicitly define a separate paragraph in Part 1 (Theoretical part), for example, entitled "Contemporary scientific discourse (literature systemic review)".

For the sake of correctness of my comment, I note that the analysis is *implicitly* included in Part I. I state that the structure of the thesis is very well substantiated by arguments (see p. 16) and forms a logical transition to the following theoretical part.

Evaluation of the individual parts of the habilitation

"Introduction" section

This part of the thesis fulfills the function of the introduction of the habilitation thesis very well. It clearly justifies the topic of "the implementation of public policy at the line level" shaped and implemented by line workers (so-called "street-level bureaucrats").

The author's introductory analysis is stimulating in that it allows us to clearly distinguish the intensity and extension of the concepts (terms) "line workers" and "street-level bureaucrats". The author uses the enumeration definition for this. In the context of this procedure, the author then asks the key question: "What key factors and how do they influence the ways in which public policy is formed and provided by line workers in the environment of local implementing organisations and thus its resulting form, which affects regional and social development?"

The answer to this question is contained in Chapter 4. This chapter deals with the "Organisational Model of Public Policy Implementation by Frontline Workers". I consider the development of this model to be the main theoretical contribution of habilitations thesis. At the end of the introduction habilitations thesis, the structure of the thesis is justified (p. 16). The structure of the thesis is very well justified. At the end of the "Introduction" section, the author lists the personal motives that led him to choose the topic. I note that it was also possible to state the main goal of habilitations thesis. The goal defined in this way would then be followed by research questions.

Theoretical Part (Part I.)

This section consists of three chapters. Chapter 1 deals with the implementation of public policy and the research approach focused on the implementation of public and social policies at the street level. Chapter 2 examines frontline workers and their roles in public policy implementation and introduces the concept of "street-level bureaucracy". Chapter 3 focuses on the possibilities for analyzing public policy implementation at the street level.

At the beginning of each chapter, the author formulates research questions. These questions fulfill the methodological role of Heidegger's "Holzwege". They point to the basic research directions used in habilitations thesis. They formulate key terms and theoretical concepts that are used in the examination of the implementation of labour market policy by street-level bureaucrats in public administration.

The author presents a very good review of the literature and critically evaluates the scientific discourse on the investigated problem. He demonstrates very good analytical skills. I positively evaluate the author's methodological approach, which follows the logic of the general, the particular and the individual.

The author first defines the concept of "policy implementation" and defines possible research approaches. I note that the author demonstrates a very good overview of the state of research. I positively evaluate that his view is not descriptive but scientifically critical and creative. It is based on the already mentioned key idea of "active actors", which it applies to the conditions of policy makers and implementers. This opens up a new research field for the author, which is presented as a set of specific problems (see subchapter 1.3) that have not yet been scientifically investigated. The author successfully combines theoretical reflection with a methodological-praxeological view of how these hitherto unsolved problems can be solved. The author demonstrates that he has a creative potential for analytical work and demonstrates an excellent ability to generalize the findings to date.

Pavel Horák creates a framework explanation of the concept and definition of "line bureaucrats" and "line organisations" and their role in the political process. He brings new knowledge and inspiration for research in the field of public policy, public administration, public economics, sociology, organizational science. Again, I note that the author formulates his conclusions and findings on the basis of careful work with sources.

Part II (Methodological Part)

This part of the habilitation thesis is a logical continuation of the previous part. The author consistently follows the chosen methodological approach. The reader is always introduced to the problem of individual subchapters in the form of questions to which answers are sought. Part II makes the most valuable contribution to the field of scientific knowledge. The author develops an organisational model of public policy implementation by frontline workers. It is an original model that represents the author's creative contribution to scientific knowledge. The author critically builds on the existing scientific discourse. It is based on the finding that most studies focused on line workers in government concentrate on what line bureaucrats have in common, how they approach different clients and how they make decisions. Pavel Horák emphasizes that the analysis of contextual factors that affect the implementation of public policy by line bureaucrats has still been neglected.

The author's novelty of the approach lies in the fact that he redirects research to the path of evolutionary-historical factors, to the search for the influence of "embedded history" (path dependency). This leads to a departure from the predominantly "static" organizational-managerial view of the study of the dynamic evolutionary trajectory of line bureaucrats. This makes it possible to explain the impact of cultural factors on the behavior of line bureaucrats. This can also explain the different views on providing public services in different cultural contexts.

Pavel Horák's approach allows to explain the differences between the individual countries studied and to identify institutional differences and relationships between actors who implement the same type of public policy within individual states.

The traditional prevailing theory of organization does not sufficiently register this problem, nor does it have a suitable explanatory paradigm for a holistic explanation. If traditional organizational theory seeks an explanation, then its paradigm is based mainly on a partial and analytical approach. The author critically abandons such an approach, or rather does not advocate it. It focuses on a new approach.

Mr. Horák starts from the assumption that the provision of public services and the activities of line bureaucrats is influenced by contextual factors. From the point of view of dynamic systems theory and the idea of historical institutionalism, it is a feedback relationship. Contextual factors have a systemic impact on the way you manage. They induce new ways of managing public administration and influence the structure of public administration and the institutional arrangement of line organizations. The transformed structure of public administration then opens up new windows of opportunities for line workers.

Line bureaucrats activities are a shared and integrated activity. However, it is not an automatic (self-driving) process. This process is the result of conscious and targeted action. In order to implement it effectively, it is necessary to find a tool that will allow the implementation of targeted activities. The author offers such a tool.

This tool is a structurally functional and procedural organisational model of public policy implementation by frontline workers. The functions of this model are process explanation, their evaluation and integration of frontline workers' activities.

The organisational model makes it possible to identify and evaluate the impact of systemically linked factors that influence the way in which line officials implement public and social policies in a given organisational environment. In this sense, it is actually the case of Leontieff's input-output model showing the role of input factors and the contextual environment on the result of frontline workers (output; performance).

The model thus makes it possible to understand how the policy is implemented at the local level. That is a procedural aspect. At the same time, the identification of factors makes it possible to explain the role these factors play in the implementation of policies. This is a structural-functional view that allows you to observe how a change in input parameters changes the implementation of the policy and its result (output from the model), which is the services provided.

The "value" of this output can be monitored by frontline workers in feedback and see how goals were met. Of course, instead of simple feedback, it is possible to consider forward feed

back. Such links make it possible to make continuous corrections in the management of the services provided.

Evaluation of the model and suggestions for further research

In this part of the review, I focus on the analysis of the model. I will look at the model from two points of view. Firstly, I will look for an answer to the question of what new the model brings to the field of social science theory, and secondly, I will try to give the author ideas for further elaboration and improvement of the presented model.

First of all, I would like to state that the model represents an innovative achievement. Pavel Horák presents the model as an analytical tool that is supposed to (and I quote) "to provide an analytical tool that would be able to identify the broadest possible complexes of factors that have the potential to influence work procedures to a greater or lesser extent in practice and thus the resulting method of providing public services by line bureaucrats within the framework of a specific implemented public policy in this context". I note that the author has managed to meet this goal.

I will try to critically evaluate the author's work. Of course, the model is always a simplification of the "displayed" reality. This results from the complexity of the reality under study. If we want to explain (and understand) real processes, then we need a suitable explanatory tool. The model as an epistemological image of reality works under certain simplistic conditions. This simplification is useful because it allows us to concentrate on those problems that need to be explained.

Here, I recommend the author to define its prerequisites and conditions of operation in the next research work at the beginning of the model. Such definitions are related to the explanatory constraints of the model. The constraint then allows the author of the model to "come to terms with" any ontological inconsistencies that the model cannot explain. The user of the model may then ask the question: Is it an anomaly that signals the need to improve or reconstruct the model, or is it a "natural consequence" resulting from the defined constraints of the model?

The author derives the model from three ontological entities. He calls these entities "three interconnected topics". It then defines them as follows: '(i) the "process" of providing public services, (ii) the "ways/forms" of providing public services, and (iii) the "factors" that influence the process and thus the mode of providing public services'. (p. 124).

These three interconnected topics represent the basic elements (or subsystems) of the model, its structural and functional links. The author presents the model in a detailed, careful analysis in chapter 4. It is an inspiring and innovative part of the habilitation thesis.

The model is based on a well-founded analysis of scientific discourse. This analysis was creatively used to build its own model. I very positively evaluate the author's efforts to graphically depict the researched processes, elements and subsystems of the model in the form of process and structurally functional schemes. This makes the author's result user-friendly and understandable for the reader.

I consider the author's definition of various modes of providing services to be beneficial. The author is aware of the weaknesses of various mods. Here I give the author inspiration for further research. The limitations of the various modes are anchored in "limited rationality". For example, managerialism is based on the classical subject-object relationship. The subject (manager) is an active entity, the controlled object is influenced by the activities of the subject.

Here is the answer to why managerial approaches fail. Pavel Horák documents this limitation of managerialism on the bureaucratic approach. He writes (and I quote): "The "bureaucratic approach" is characterised by impersonal behaviour, which is a manifestation and consequence of the tendency of workers to adhere to predetermined legislative and organisational rules and norms, which also determine their qualifications and powers." (p. 126).

Yes, it is so. Here we have revealed the general cause of why management processes in public administration fail. The professional approach points in a different direction. It is an

inclination towards a personal and non routine approach. The provision of public services is aimed at small groups of clients. This is again inspiring for public administration reform. I would express this potential research direction with a thesis: from the supply system to the demand system (citizen-centred) management of public administration.

Pavel Horák shows that the integration of these two approaches in the form of the "bureau-professional approach" can lead to change. I recommend looking for a way out in the concept of stewardship.

On the other hand, I unreservedly evaluate the author's analysis of the factors influencing the process of solving a client problem (p. 129). It is a beneficial analysis of the individual factors influencing the process and the resulting method of providing public services (see Figure 4.2). These factors are taken into account when creating the model (see Figure 4.3). The carefully elaborated model is the result of one's own investigation and analysis of scientific discourse.

Here I give the author an idea for further development of the model. From the point of view of the methodology of science, we can view the model as a scientific research program.

Lakatos applied the idea of a scientific research program to the case of physical and mathematical sciences. When studying habilitation thesis, it is proposed to apply this research program to the social sciences, or to the problem of research labour market policy by street-level bureaucrats in public administration. In this case, the hard core is the author's model (or rather the related theory). Around the hard core oscillate a set of progressive theories and a set of regressive theories.

Part III.

The methodological part (Part II) is followed by Part III, which deals with the implementation of labor market policy in selected regions of the Czech Republic. In it, the proposed organisational model of public policy implementation by frontline workers is verified. The author verifies his model of labour market policy in selected regions of the Czech Republic. The integrating factor to research activity is **the research goal**. The author defines it as follows: "Our research aimed to use the organisational "model" presented in the previous chapter to analyse the implementation of labour market policy in the Czech Republic. The key effort was to use this analytical tool to reveal the "process of providing public services" to various groups of unemployed people by line bureaucrats referred to as "line workers" and to identify the degree of influence and nature of specific factors contained in individual areas of the model" (p. 150).

I state that the research goal fulfils the function of an integrator of research activities and indicators of the directions in which the research will be pursued. These directions are indicated in the titles of individual paragraphs. I have the following comment on the formulation of the goal. In research directions, the author performs verification (or verification) of his model. This activity could have been included in the formulation of the goal.

Date

The author obtained data based on interviews. He conducted interviews with thirty employees of the Labour Office of the Czech Republic. Specifically, the author conducted 21 semi-structured interviews with line workers and 9 interviews with senior line managers across two types of workplaces.

The conduct of the interviews corresponds to the standards. The interview scenario consisted of four thematic blocks. From these blocks, the author obtained the following information about line workers: information about their job status, information about the organization in which line workers perform their activities, information about the capacity of line workers and the methods they use for their activities, and information about self-reflection of their activities.

The analysis of the data obtained is beneficial for both theory and practice. In the field of theory, the acquired knowledge can be used by experts dealing with the sociology of work,

work organization and employee motivation. From the point of view of practice, the problems revealed are inspiring for the reform of public administration.

Final Part

The final part IV (Chapter 6) is a summary of key findings. I see the benefit of this part of habilitation thesis in the following: Firstly, this chapter contains a summary of previous research. The reader thus has the opportunity to gain synthetic knowledge from the analysis of labour market policy in the Czech Republic.

Secondly, the text contains a comparison of the results from empirical research (see chapter 5) and the current scientific discourse on this issue (see chapter 1–4). This makes it possible to clearly identify the author's contribution to the scientific knowledge of labour market policy. At the same time, the author thinks about the benefits of the tested model. It formulates proposals for further research. I agree with the proposed conclusions.

The author's analysis has the character of qualitative research. However, it is also possible to consider formalizing the model and related methods in the future. The outputs from the model can be monitored as results R .

$R = f(x)$ applies.

This means that it is possible to mathematically model the results (outputs). We know (determine) the factors and model their impact on R .

Theoretical contribution of habilitation thesis

The scientific topicality of the problem is mainly due to the fact that the author offers a new view of "line workers" (or "street-level bureaucrats"). In the theoretical reflection of this problem so far, these workers are mainly understood as implementers of public and social policies. The theory of public administration and public policy defines them as implementers of public policies and executors of public administration tasks.

In the traditional explanatory or explanatory paradigm, the bureaucrats implementing the policies are understood as line workers, or street-level bureaucrats. To explain this problem, mainstream theory uses a rationalist explanatory paradigm based on the axiom *homo economicus* (Mill, von Neumann and Morgenstern). In the explanatory paradigm of public choice, bureaucrats are conceived as actors pursuing their own benefit.

It is obvious that these traditional paradigms cannot offer a satisfactory explanation for the problem of the activities and motives of street-level bureaucrats and explain the real impacts of these activities on regional and social development.

The author of the habilitation thesis therefore directs his research view in a different direction. He understands street-level bureaucrats as *active* actors. Although the author uses the original term (word) "street-level bureaucrats" (or "line workers"), the content of the term is different.

For the author of the habilitation thesis, these workers are *actual policy-makers*. They become *active* actors who influence the way and form of policies. This is a different view than traditional research directions in the social sciences usually offer. The author's work thus indicates an inspiring subject for further interdisciplinary exploration of this problem.

The author's framing of the problem is also valuable, when he writes that the activity of the actors is influenced by the dynamic environment. This opens up new possibilities for explaining the problem. It is a challenge for the creation of new research programs that respect the fact of environmental dynamics. Traditional research programs have limited research potential because they often use linear models that are ineffective in terms of explanatory application to a dynamic environment. This has practical implications in that policy outcomes are not unambiguously predictable or pre-programmed.

I add to this author's finding that active actors can respond to the dynamic environment with an adaptation strategy (Nowak). The author can respond to this topic in further research.

Practical benefit of habilitation thesis

The results of the habilitation thesis are usable in public administration and social reforms. The new knowledge is usable for the implementation of regional reform and for the implementation of public policies. The content of the habilitation thesis provides guidance on how to implement labour market policy by street-level bureaucrats in public administration in the conditions of regional and social development. The analytical model is also valuable. This can be used in practice as a support tool to streamline the performance of labour market policy.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence:

1. Discuss the assumptions and limitations of the model.
2. Explain how the proposed model can contribute to public administration reform?
3. Briefly respond to the (un)reality of my suggestions for further research.

Conclusion

The habilitation thesis entitled "Implementation of Labour Market Policy by Street-level Bureaucrats in Public Administration Affecting Regional and Social Development: Analytical Model and its Applications" by PhDr. Pavel Horák, Ph.D., **fulfils** requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Social Policy and Social Work.

Date: May 5, 2026

Signature:



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