

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Faculty

Faculty of Social Studies

Applicant

PhDr. Pavel Horák, Ph.D.

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

prof. Ing. Michal Plaček, Ph.D.

Reviewer's home unit, institution

Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

1. Relevance and Significance of the Topic

The habilitation thesis presented by Pavel Horák focuses on a pivotal, yet still insufficiently explored aspect of public policy in the Czech context—the implementation process viewed through the lens of "street-level bureaucracy" (SLB). The author correctly identifies that the success of any reform or employment policy depends not only on the legislative framework established at the central level but primarily on the discretion, attitudes, and decision-making of frontline workers in direct contact with citizens.

In the context of contemporary challenges such as the digitalization of public administration, rising social inequalities, and the pressure for efficiency in public spending, I consider this topic highly relevant. The thesis does not merely expand upon Michael Lipsky's classical concepts theoretically; it applies them to pressing issues of regional development and social inclusion, thereby providing clear societal impact and practical utility.

2. Theoretical Framework and the Analytical Model

In the introductory chapters, the applicant demonstrates an extraordinary command of international literature. I particularly appreciate how the author synthesizes findings from the "three generations" of implementation research. Rather than providing a mere descriptive overview of theories, Pavel Horák successfully identifies gaps in current knowledge and, on this basis, constructs his own "Organizational Model of Implementation."

I consider this model to be the primary theoretical contribution of the thesis. The author integrates five key dimensions: (1) individual capacities, (2) working conditions, (3) organizational resources, (4) institutional policy, and (5) the external environment. Through this approach, the author moves beyond the traditional, often overly psychologized view of frontline workers, situating their actions within a broader organizational and political framework. The model is robust, logically coherent, and sufficiently flexible for application across various sectors of public administration.

3. Research Methodology

The methodological design is based on a qualitative strategy, which is the correct choice for studying the discretion and internal motivations of public servants. The author conducted 30 in-depth interviews across two branches of the Czech Labour Office (located in regions with differing socio-economic profiles). I commend the precision with which the techniques for data collection and analysis—such as coding and data triangulation through the analysis of internal documents—are described.

From a methodological standpoint, the thesis serves as an example of "best practice" in the field. The author does not shy away from reflecting on the limitations of his research, which testifies to his scientific integrity. However, it might have been beneficial to further discuss how the model could be complemented by quantitative validation (e.g., through a survey on a representative sample of all Labour Office branches) to strengthen the generalizability of certain findings.

4. Empirical Analysis and Key Findings

The empirical section of the thesis brings several original insights into the reality of Czech employment policy. The analysis of the conflict between "administrative logic" (adherence to formalized procedures) and "professional logic" (the effort to genuinely assist the client) is particularly thought-provoking. Pavel Horák convincingly demonstrates how street-level bureaucrats utilize their discretion to cope with a lack of resources and time.

I consider the analysis of the impact of European Social Fund (ESF) projects on the stability of the implementation environment to be a crucial finding. The author highlights the paradox where projects bring innovation and resources but simultaneously create internal team fragmentation and uncertainty regarding the long-term sustainability of services. These findings carry significant weight for policymakers and the management of public institutions in the Czech Republic.

5. Assessment of the Applicant's Publication Record

The list of published works (Annex No. 5) confirms that Pavel Horák is an established author in the field of public policy. Publications in journals such as the *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration*, *Public Money & Management*, and *Sociologický časopis (Sociological Review)* demonstrate that the author's results hold up in demanding international competition.

Furthermore, I value the breadth of the author's scope—ranging from theoretical papers on the resilience of public sector organizations to applied analyses for specific municipalities (e.g., the city of Znojmo). This demonstrates the applicant's ability to bridge the gap between academic research and the needs of practitioners, which is a vital qualification for a candidate for an Associate Professorship.

The habilitation thesis of Pavel Horák meets all the requirements for a work of this type in the field of Public Policy and Administration. The author has demonstrated the ability to identify a relevant research problem, develop an original analytical framework, and conduct precise empirical investigation. The thesis is written in a sophisticated academic style, possesses clear logic, and yields substantial new knowledge.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence

How does the growing trend of automation and digitalization of processes enter the author's model? Does digitalization reduce the space for discretion, or does it merely shift it to a different level (e.g., the algorithm design phase)?

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: 13.4. 2026

Signature:

