

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Applicant

Mgr. Petr Ocelík, Ph.D.

Habilitation thesis

Energy transition from a political science perspective:
Selected cases

Reviewer

Dr. Melanie Nagel

**Reviewer's home unit,
institution**

Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, University
of Tübingen

1. Applicant's research focus

Petr Ocelík's studies in this cumulative habilitation thesis entitled "Energy transitions from a political science perspective: Selected cases" deal with the political dimension of the energy transition with a geographic focus on the Czech Republic and Russia. The studies contribute to the scientific community by providing theoretical reflections and novel empirical evidence on political and policy processes. The research perspective applies the relational approach of policy network analysis and focuses on two levels of analysis —discursive and interactional networks— in order to analyze discursive struggles of policy actors and their interaction regarding the exchange of resources or coordination in policy networks.

2. Format of the thesis

This cumulative habilitation thesis of Petr Ocelík consists of five studies, which are already successfully published, four of them in high-quality peer-reviewed international academic journals and one book chapter in the reputable book "Handbook of Anti-Environmentalism", published by Edward Elgar Publishing.

In particular, the publications of this habilitation thesis include the following articles: 1) Study I, with the title "The framing of unconventional natural gas resources in the foreign energy policy discourse of the Russian Federation", written by Petr Ocelík and a coauthor, and published in *Energy Policy* in 2014. 2) Study II, entitled "Incumbents'

Strategies in Media Coverage: A Case of the Czech Coal Policy”, published in 2020 with one coauthor in the journal *Politics and Governance*. 3) Study III, a book chapter entitled “Climate change scepticism in the Czech newspaper front-page coverage: A one man show” and published in the *Handbook of Anti-Environmentalism* —edited by D. B. Tindall, M. C. J. Stoddart, & R. E. Dunlap. 4) Study IV (“A contested transition toward a coal-free future: Advocacy coalitions and coal policy in the Czech Republic”), which has been published in *Energy Research & Social Science* in 2019 with Petr Ocelík as the lead author who had done most of the work. 5) Study V, published in *Energy Research & Social Science* with the title “Beyond our backyard: Social networks, differential participation, and local opposition to coal mining in Europe”, also with Ocelík as the lead author that had carried out the largest amount of work.

The five scientific research papers of this cumulative habilitation thesis, published in prestigious international academic journals and a book chapter, impressively demonstrate that Petr Ocelík is highly capable of producing high-quality scientific work and publishing them both as a single author and as a co-author.

3. Evaluation of the content

Overall, the studies of this habilitation thesis are all well-written and deal with scientifically and socially relevant aspects concerning the transformation of energy policy in the Czech Republic and Russia. Numerous studies already exist in the fields of climate change and energy transformation research, most of them examining Anglo-American or Western case studies, while a smaller amount of works focus on Latin America or Africa. The findings from these studies cannot be easily transferred or applied to East European countries because of different rationales for action, the presence of post-Soviet political systems, and a particular environmental context due to post-Soviet economic constraints and severe environmental degradation. Since climate change and energy transition are global complex problems that can only be successfully tackled in cooperation with all countries worldwide and the international scientific community, studies that address this issue from an East European perspective are needed. Petr Ocelík thus makes a major contribution to environmental research in East European countries.

Methodologically, Dr. Ocelík demonstrates his professional academic skills by using a wide range of qualitative and quantitative methods, which range from frame analysis using qualitative semantic network analysis, discourse network analysis, advanced social network analysis using block modeling techniques to analyze survey data, and an innovative approach of autologistic actor attribute modeling to the analysis of questionnaire data.

Theoretically, Dr. Ocelík presents different theoretical approaches. He utilizes Entman's frame analysis combined with Benford and Hunt's counter-framing strategies to study the concept of foreign energy policy (FEP), the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) to study discursive layers of energy transition in connection with concepts from the socio-technical transition literature, and Olson's collective action theory to study local opposition from a network perspective.

Besides these methodological and theoretical contributions, Dr. Ocelík's studies reveal interesting findings, which are relevant both for the scientific and the practitioner communities. In particular, he found out in study I that, when examining the discursive construction of the so-called quiet revolution in Russian foreign policy and the framing of unconventional resources of natural gas (UNG) in foreign energy policy, two different frames had been used. The first promotes the image of Russia as a reliable supplier, whereas the second frame is constructed around the qualitative distinctiveness of "conventional" gas, which is depicted as ecological, efficient, proven, and safe —as opposed to "unconventional" gas.

For its part, Study II revealed different incumbent discursive strategies in the policy debate on coal phase-out in the Czech Republic, which was centered around the rescindment of the coal mining limits at the Bílina mine. These consist mostly of "[...] *securitization complemented by reinvention and masking, to establish a coherent and persuasive narrative*". Moreover, the "winner tale" identified in this study emphasizes socioeconomic issues of unemployment and regional decline, as well as dependency of heating supplies on coal, while ignoring the negative impacts of coal mining.

Study III analyzed media coverage of climate change in the Czech Republic by mapping the evolution of front-page newspaper coverage of climate change with a focus on climate scepticism. The findings revealed that "[...] *the substantial presence*

of scepticism was to a large extent linked with the presidency of Václav Klaus [...]. Moreover “[...] *the pure common people against the corrupted elites represented by the over-regulating European Union [...]*” had been placed next to each other and the importance of national sovereignty had been brought forward. This study takes a critical look at an unpopular truth and thus openly reflects the danger of one-sided reporting.

On the other hand, Study IV examined the coal policy subsystem in the Czech Republic, and more specifically the coalition structure of the subsystem and the prevailing patterns of interaction within it. The authors found that there are two antagonistic coalitions —the industry and environmental coalitions— and a residual group. The results of the study showed a high fragmentation of policy core beliefs among decision-makers, a targeted outreach to decision makers by both industry and ENGOs, a high level of within-coalition information exchange, and a low level of between-coalition expert information exchange. This limits the potential of policy learning and hinders a rapid phase-out of coal.

Study V is about local opposition to the rescission of the coal mining limits in Northern Bohemia, specifically about the role of social networks in the participation of the local opposition. The authors found that the opposition showed a polycentric organizational structure, which allows for the formation of partnerships —even if they have differences in tactics or beliefs— and also facilitates spatial, organizational, and ideological heterogeneity within the opposition. Actor activity (i.e., the number of ties to other actors) was found as the only predictor of intensity of engagement in opposition activities, which emphasizes that embeddedness in networks matters more than attributes of individuals. They conclude that collective action dynamics are of great importance in the context of a fair and effective energy transition.

In summary, the presented papers and the book chapter impressively show the range of methodologies and theories that Dr. Ocelík covers with his research, as well as his consistent research focus. He is able to contribute methodologically, theoretically, and substantively to transformation research in Eastern Europe. This habilitation thesis provides insights into Petr Ocelík's interests and qualifications in the socially relevant fields of climate change and energy transition.

4. Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence

Q1: Dr. Ocelík, could you relate the findings of your studies on energy transformation, based on data and findings from the previous years, with the current developments in energy policy in the context of the war in Ukraine and the upcoming European energy crisis?

Q2: Where do you see important starting points that can advance the energy transformation in East European countries and what are the major challenges in this regard? What are the main differences between East and West European countries from your point of view?

5. Conclusions

The habilitation thesis with the title "Energy transitions from a political science perspective: Selected cases" by Mgr. Petr Ocelík, Ph.D. **fulfils** the requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Political Science.

August 17, 2022

Dr. Melanie Nagel

