

## HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

### Masaryk University

**Applicant**

Ing. Štěpán Mikula, Ph.D.  
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**Habilitation thesis**

Blast from the Past: Essays on the Long-Term Impacts of Historic Events

**Reviewer**

Prof. Ing. Jan Fidrmuc, M.A., PhD

**Reviewer's home unit, institution**

Université de Lille

The Habilitation Thesis by Štěpán Mikula comprises three Chapters exploring the impact of historical events on present-day behavior and attitudes. All three papers have already been published in highly-reputable peer-reviewed journals. Although these papers were published only relatively recently (between 2019 and 2021), they have already accumulated a respectable number of citations. The Habilitation Thesis thus presents an impressive achievement and scholarship. As such, I believe that it amply meets the requirements of a habilitation.

### **Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence** (number of questions up to the reviewer)

#### Chapter 1.1

This Chapter attributes the higher residential mobility in the resettled Sudetenland to low stock of social capital and low degree of local attachment. An alternative explanation is that the initial settlement pattern did not constitute a residential and labor-market equilibrium: people moved somewhat in a chaotic manner (as you observe). They probably had only partial information about the quality of life and labor-market opportunities in the destination. One might therefore expect higher mobility in the years and decades after the initial move, as the settlers sought to improve on the initial allocation. The fact that especially the emigration rate but also the immigration rate decline over time would be consistent with this explanation. Could your analysis account for this motive?

By definition, the settlers were people who were inherently more mobile than their counterparts in the rest of the country – they moved (to Sudetenland) while most of the others stayed in their original place of residence. Thus, if there are two types of individuals, *stayers* and *movers*, most of the Sudetenland residents would be movers and their descendants, whereas most of the residents of the rest of the country would be stayers and their descendants. I am not convinced that your analysis of values, which looks at things that

people consider important in life, sheds much light on this question: movers and stayers can value similar things in life, even though their willingness to move is different.

## Chapter 1.2

The analysis in Chapter 1.2 is presented as merely correlational and not causal, owing to the absence of a suitable instrument or a quasi-experimental setting (as you state at the end of Section 1.2.2). Yet Chapter 1.1 points out that the stock of social capital in the repopulated Sudetenland is lower than elsewhere in the Czech Republic. Could you not use living in an resettled area as an instrument for social capital? Many other post-communist countries also experienced large-scale population movements – most notably Poland. Therefore, this kind of analysis need not be limited to the Czech Republic. Of course, Chapter 1.2 was published before Chapter 1.1, so it may not have been possible to do so in the published paper. Nevertheless, you could do this for your Habilitation Thesis, as an extension of your original published paper.

You find that individuals with more social capital are more willing to move. This is counter-intuitive. Social connections and networks are to a large extent local. If anything, individuals with more local social capital should be less willing to move, as also argued by Belot and Ermisch (2009, cited in the thesis). How do you reconcile your finding with the results of Belot and Ermisch?

Is there a reason why no results (Tables or Figures) are presented in the public text of this Chapter?

## Chapter 2

The analysis in this Chapter shows that second-round support for Swarzenberg was lower, support for Zeman was higher, and turnout was also higher, in municipalities with a high share of houses presumed at risk of being returned to Sudeten-Germans. The implication is that the owners of the *houses at risk* were successfully mobilized by Zeman's disinformation campaign claiming that their houses might have to be returned to ethnic Germans if Swarzenberg won. While you are admittedly very careful not to state this prediction explicitly, deriving such a conclusion from your results (as many readers might) would be a case of *ecological fallacy*, when aggregate data are used to make potentially erroneous predictions about individual behavior or preferences. For example, inhabitants of resettled municipalities – the settlers and their descendants – may hold attitudes and worldviews that are different from those of inhabitants of municipalities not affected by resettlement after WW2. Indeed, in Chapter 1.1, you find that resettled municipalities have a lower stock of social capital (which does affect turnout and may affect voting preferences too). Would it be possible to verify the results of Chapter 2 with individual-level data?

The *Treatment* variable in this Chapter is the product of the share of Sudeten-Germans in each municipality, and the share of houses built before WW2. What about houses that were built after WW2 on land that used to be German-owned (e.g. after tearing down the original house). The number of pre-WW2 houses that were demolished (either during the war or later) and then built anew is probably not negligible. New houses built on previously German-owned land might also be seen as being at risk.

There are many parallels between Chapters 1.1 and 2. However, the former relies methodologically on regression-discontinuity design while the latter comprises all Czech

municipalities (with available data). Would it not be better to estimate the analysis in Chapter 2 also with RDD, either as the primary estimation method, or as a robustness check?

## **Conclusion**

The habilitation thesis entitled *Blast from the Past: Essays on the Long-Term Impacts of Historic Events* by Štěpán Mikula **fulfils** requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of *Economics*.

Date: 1 August 2022

Signature: Jan Fidrmuc