

Review of the Dissertation of Lenka Lauková

“Soft” Concepts in Economics: Essays on the Role of Non-Cognitive Skills and Cultural Values

The thesis is composed from three chapters. In the first chapter, PISA data are used to show the effect of parents' education, cognitive abilities and non-cognitive skills on pupils' application decisions into secondary schools. In the second and third chapters, the European Social Survey is used for highly original examinations of transmission and change of some key values. The manuscript was already largely commented by excellent scholars and considerably improved during the process which I could also partly follow. Thus I have only a few comments to the draft of dissertation which I consider as of excellent quality.

Ad Chapter 1 Determinants of Secondary School Choice in the Czech Republic

Czech education system and factors of selection process were at large studied by Munich, Matějů, Straková referred to in the text. Worth to be mentioned would be also social stratification research arguing on the “return to social origin”, meaning the current reduction of upward mobility – characteristic for early 1990s – by greater status stability in intergenerational terms (Katrňák and Fučík 2010). The Lauková's analysis contributes importantly to the knowledge already collected by investigating the effects of education of both parents, cognitive abilities and, in particular, non-cognitive skills on the choice of secondary school. Her approach is original and enriching.

In her analysis, three types of secondary education are considered, all of them providing general certified exam (matura) – general, vocational and apprenticeships. Indeed, it would be also worth to mention that general academic secondary education is split (about half and half in numbers of pupils) into four-year and eight-year programmes which give unequal chances in later education career. Indeed, the choice of multi-year gymnasium highly increases chances to enter university (see Matějů and Straková, 2006, chpt. 2.3). There is not clear how the author deals with this issue – some authors exclude pupils already attending multi-year gymnasiums from analysis of educational aspirations (see Matějů and Straková, 2006, chpt. 2.2). It would be good to clarify the applied procedure in the text.

The other issue worth to be at least mentioned is the increasing percentage of pupils living in single-parent families. By my rough estimate based on 2008 EU-SILC data, 17% of pupils 10-

15 years of age live in households with only one parent. Such a situation must affect the decision making of pupils considerably due to direct and indirect effects of budget and time constraints of the single parents (mostly women), missing motivating father/male models (mostly for boys). Lonely mothers are surely happy if their sons start their earned activity sooner what might also affect a higher priority given to apprenticeships among boys detected by the author. Provided the PISA data enable such an analysis (what I suppose), it would be interesting to introduce this argument briefly.

Maybe the overabundant analytical documentation in the Appendix of this chapter might be reduced - e.g. the reading of results would be easier if analyses of academic high school and apprenticeships would not be separated in different tables. On the other hand, summary information about PISA survey and the Czech amendment to the original OECD module could be provided in the Appendix, reproducing information already given but dispersed in the text and maybe yet enriching it partly.

Ad Chapter 2 Assessment of Inter-Generational Transmission of Cultural Values

The chapter (written with Jan Hanousek) devoted to the intergenerational transmission of cultural values (although indicated only very selectively) presents a sophisticated use of the ESS data in the full range of countries and available waves. A new sample matched of individual waves allowed a meticulous analysis which proves persistence of “tradition” and “freedom” values across generations, further also after accounting for GDP, human capital and female share in the labour force. Among many others findings, revealing is the importance of religion, surprisingly highly significant in almost all denominations.

Here I would recommend to precise the fact that the investigation does not concern the “intergenerational transmission” as such (from parents to children), but that values across generations observed cross-sectionally are observed (unlike as e.g. van Doorna, Popb and Wolbers 2010 use the ESS data for the analysis of intergenerational transmission of education – the paper maybe worth to be quoted). Highly original is also the use of ESS data for displaying value (dis)continuity among immigrants where a genuine intergenerational transmission could be observed.

Similarly as in the Chapter 1, it would be useful to provide in the Appendix some more information about ESS survey and the sample actually used in analyses – not omitting such

important information (which might be easily not noticed) in the footnote 6 on p. 87 regarding the reduction of the sample on respondent having parents and living in the same country. Also information about matching waves of the survey and construction of analytical dataset is to be provided here. Maybe it would be illustrative to shift here Table 4 and complete it by national sample sizes.

Ad Chapter 3 Traditional Values vs. Female Labor Force Participation

In continuation to ESS use for demonstration of the evaporating impact of traditional culture, the author proves that the individual measure of traditional values – but only if it is captured by the shift from the representative culture in country of origin relative to the cultural distance between country of origin and country of residence – has a significant impact on labour participation status of second-generation immigrant women. This is a very interesting result obtained despite the fact that sub-samples are small, in particular regarding really culturally distant shifts from Eastern to Western countries.

Here, some corrections in the text should be done. Comments on individual columns of Table 3.3. (p. 146) should be corrected by shifting them. In Table 3.3., father's education is included twice, the second row should be apparently partner's education. Given the high educational homogamy of couples, partner's education appears to be insignificant – in such a case, the variable of economic activity of the partner might be involved. See for this e.g. Martina Mysíková's (2010) paper on income inequalities within couples where the intergenerational transmission of the traditional division of gender roles is analyzed on EU-SILC data. While difference in education level is not significant in her analysis, the occurrence of non-working partner is highly significant.

Relative to Table 3.6 and the particular case of Switzerland, the culturally “close” and “distant” countries should be concretely enumerated - according to Table 3.1. more than 10 cases were immigrants to Switzerland only from Austria, Germany, France, Italy and Spain – probably the last two countries were considered as culturally more distant than the first three or otherwise? However, an authentic cultural/religion/value distance could not be apparently exemplified in this data source – maybe reference to some focused research on value transfer and adaptation would be useful, be it only for stressing the limits of the data source used by the author(s).

Not regarding my minor comments and suggestions, I consider the draft thesis as outstanding due to its focus on important topics, presentation of relevant research questions and formulation of clear arguments. Using various original data and applying economic, psychological and sociological measures, the author analyses relevant problems with invention and care. Drawing a vast literature, she consistently develops further knowledge about cultural values and economic behaviour of Czech and European populations. Taking into account all of this, I state that the current draft text of dissertation is of high quality and surely warrants defence and the eventual award of a doctoral degree.

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Literature:

Doorna, van Majka, Ioana Popb and Maarten H. J. Wolbers 2011. Intergenerational transmission of education across European countries and cohorts. *European Societies* 13(1) 2011: 93-117.

Katrňák, Tomáš a Petr Fučík. 2010. *Návrat k sociálnímu původu: Vývoj sociální stratifikace české společnosti v letech 1989 až 2009*. Brno: CDK.

Matějů, Petr a Jana Straková eds. 2006. *(Ne)rovné šance na vzdělání, Vzdělanostní nerovnosti v České republice*. Praha: Academia (the book is referred to in the dissertation).

Mysíková, Martina 2010. Income Inequalities within Couples in the Czech Republic and European Countries. Luxembourg Income Study Working Paper No. 552.