



## MASTER THESIS ASSESSMENT REPORT

**Assessment type:** Master thesis review

**Author of thesis:** Izabela A. Kulesza

**Title of thesis:** Path Dependence in American Public Education

**Author of assessment:** Mgr. Jan Kohoutek, PhD.

As suggested by its title, this Master thesis takes up the theme of evolvement of US public education (K12 covering primary to secondary levels). More specifically, the thesis reviews historical developments of US educational public policies over time in order to identify their corresponding foundational principles (formed by key sequences) (abstract, also p. 4). From the theory perspective, this is done by application of path-dependence theorizing. The foundational principles are then analysed and examined for their relation to school choice policies, in sense of the extent to which each of the principles is challenged or reinforced by the school choice policies (p. 53). Finally, a typology of explanations of institutional reproduction is applied to assess the strength of public schools' reproduction (p. 55). Methodologically, the thesis makes use of secondary data only, obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics and the Bureau of Census Statistics (p. 12).

The thesis delivers with respect to the identification of foundational principles and key events. Utilizing historical review, five such principles are identified. They are decentralized system, secular education, universal access, achievement gap, and global competition (see table 6, p. 24). The review itself makes up for most of the thesis content, spanning more than 20 pages. The historical review does give some good insight into the factors and events shaping up US educational policies, including those of school choice. The outline of US school choice programs (pp. 42-45) and types of schools to be chosen from (pp. 46-48) are also to be considered as the thesis' strength. From the grammar viewpoint, the thesis shows very few typo mistakes.

On the other hand, the thesis has several limitations. First, the research problem the thesis is supposed to address is not clearly documented as well as argued for in the introduction (effects of neo-liberalism and NPM in Anglo-Saxon public policies incl. education, if this is the core argument, can be traced back into the 1980s, with current US administration building up on/aiming to reinforce them). Also the research question(s) is missing from the introductory parts (a question on the effects of school choice policies on the foundational principles is, nonetheless, posed on p. 53 and dealt with throughout comparative section 7.3.1). Second, the analysis of the extent of convergence of the school choice policies with the identified foundational principles lacks analytical depth and data evidence, not least due to the sheer magnitude of issues dealt with. Nor it is particularly clear why just "school choice" in itself was chosen as a phenomenon for explanation (why not school governance or funding (that cuts across the analysis as well?)) Third, the linkage of the historical context as an input to the assessment of mechanisms of institutional reproduction (pp. 55-58) is so complex that it would warrant much deeper research enquiry (esp. clarifying the role of particular



school types as institutions and their possible responses, see also the works of K. Thelen); here particularly the reliance on secondary data only shows as a limitation (utilization of interviews with e.g. US researcher(s) studying this subject would have been productive here).

**From the above stated reasons, I recommend the thesis be submitted for defence and assessed as “Very Good”.**

Date: 20 August 2017

Signature: .....