



REPORT ON MASTER THESIS

Name of the student: Izabela A. Kulesza

Study program: Public and Social Policy

Title of the master thesis: Path Dependence in American Public Education

Supervisor: Prof. PhDr. Arnošt Veselý, Ph.D.

Name of the referee: Prof. PhDr. Arnošt Veselý, Ph.D.

Master's thesis of Izabela A. Kulesza is a rather ambitious project. It aims at providing analysis of development of American education over a long period of time. So first of all, I must appreciate courage of the student to take the topic so complexly. Also, it is clear that much effort has been made to include as many information as possible and writing the thesis certainly has taken a lot of time.

Originally, the plan of the student was to focus upon the privatization of education in the U.S. Another considered topic was school choice. The final title "Path Dependence in American Public Education" is thus a bit surprising to me. Clearly, Izabela was fascinated with the theory of path dependence that she decided to leave out the topic of school choice and privatization from the title. The title is thus a bit misleading, it seems to suggest that the thesis is about the whole development of American education system which it is not (and cannot be). Adding subtitle such as "school choice" or "privatization of education" would help in orientation and would be more appropriate. Generally, it is a bit unclear what the thesis focus is.

The thesis is divided into eight parts. First, rather detailed description of theory of path dependency is provided. The theory of path dependence is in public policy often taken as a black box, so I appreciate detailed and varied description of the theory (although the focus is certainly upon the theory of Mahoney). The theory of path dependence is taken as a main optics through which the development of U.S. education is analysed. It is completely legitimate. However, it should be stated explicitly why this theory is supposed to be the most appropriate for studying the phenomenon.

Second, methodology is described. Because the thesis is mainly theoretical (which should be noted more explicitly), the methodological part is concerned with the general



approach to the thesis. Although the thesis is theoretical, it would be useful and appropriate if the research goals and questions are formulated explicitly.

Third, historical overview is provided with the aim to focus upon so called “founding moments and critical junctures”. This overview is divided into two parts, labelled as “Historical background – part 1” and “Historical background – part 2”. Again, the labels of the chapters and the dividing line between them are not completely clear.

Then chapter on school choice in USA is provided, followed by *another* theoretical chapter (this time on school choice). The thesis is concluded with a chapter entitled “Analyses and conclusions”. As the analysis is provided throughout the thesis, it is more about summarizing the arguments (synthesis), previously stated then about a new analysis.

In sum, the structuration of the thesis (and labelling of the chapters) is a bit puzzling. More detailed and clearer structuration (including labelling and numbering of the chapters) would help the reader to orient better in argumentation. It is clearly a result of an effort to include many aspects, topics and perspectives into one thesis. Sharper focus would be more appropriate. However, the motivation of the student to take into account different perspectives should be appreciated.

The overall conclusion of the thesis is not entirely clear and evident. It is written that “*The 370 years of selectively mentioned policies and events show a deeply rooted commitment to public, non-market-driven education. While the likelihood of a change in policy is high, path dependence theory illustrates that events set in motion earlier in the sequence, hold much stronger value than the recent ones.*” Does this mean that we do not have to worry about the privatization of schools because of path-dependency? Also, as Izabela shows, currently there is a great shift towards non-public education. What are the mechanisms behind this shift? How this can be (or cannot be) explained by path dependency theory?

The language of the thesis is clear, and the presentation of arguments is relatively easy to follow. The thesis includes only relatively few typing errors. However, the format for references is not uniform and standard. The references for journal articles, for



instance, should be provided in full (web page is not sufficient). (For instance: not “Mahoney, J. (2000) Path Dependence in Historical Sociology. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3108585>”, but “Mahoney, J. (2000). Path dependence in historical sociology. *Theory and Society*, 29(4), 507-548.”).

Nevertheless, in general, the thesis has been written very carefully, and again I stress that I appreciate the motivation and effort of the student,

Conclusion: I recommend the master thesis for defence and I suggest grading it as very good (2)

Suggested questions for defence:

1. The theory of path dependence is taken as main perspective through which the development of U.S. education is analysed. Did you consider also other theories? Would you get different conclusions about school choice with different theories? If so, why do you think the path dependency is the most appropriate one?
2. How would you explain current shift towards non-public schooling? To what extent it can be explained by the theory of path dependence?

Date of evaluation: August 9, 2017

Referee Signature: