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## STUDENT'S WORK

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# WHAT DO DIPLOMA THESES UNVEIL ABOUT ACADEMIC PUBLIC POLICY IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC?

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**Abstract:** *Although textbooks, conference papers, scientific journals and monographs deal with the research aspects of public policy, only little attention is paid to the way it is taught at universities. In this article we aim to explore academic public policy in the Czech Republic – specifically in terms of teaching outputs – using a unique method: an analysis of diploma theses. In the sample there were diploma theses defended within all the full-time Master's study programmes having “public policy” in their names in the Czech Republic between 1995 and 2013. We conclude that there are two traditions of academic public policy in the Czech Republic, which enriches previous findings in the area and makes them more accurate. The research design and thoroughly described methodology invite other researchers to conduct international comparison of the features of academic public policy. The findings may also illustrate the trajectory made by the newly established discipline of public policy in the past twenty years in the Czech Republic, which may be of great interest to the newly formed international public policy community.*

**Keywords:** *academic public policy, public policy, diploma theses, Czech Republic*

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## INTRODUCTION

Public policy in the Czech Republic has been recently examined in various ways: Potůček (2007) approached the development of public policy both as a scientific discipline and as an object of research, Novotný (2012) presented a detailed description of the development of public policy studies in the European context and articles by Hejzlarová (2010) and Novotný & Hejzlarová (2011) focused on the practice of policy analysis in the Czech Republic. This paper follows up on these texts and aims to broaden the knowledge of Czech public policy. It focuses on *academic public policy* and specifically the way public policy is taught and studied at Czech universities. The aim of the paper is to describe the field specifically in terms of teaching outputs, mainly on the basis of the authors mentioned above.

The above authors touch upon the topic of academic public policy as well, but it plays rather a marginal role and is based on subjective views rather than analysis. In contrast to them, our paper is primarily based on empirical evidence and covers solely the area of Czech academic public policy.<sup>2</sup> We will examine academic public policy as it has been reflected in diploma theses defended by public policy students at Czech universities.

For these reasons we presume the paper to be a significant contribution to the knowledge basis of public policy in the Czech Republic. Public policy in the Czech Republic has been developing as an independent discipline since the 1990's but as an object of research it has not been paid any significant attention until recently. Czech public policy is specific by roots that reach deep into

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2 In the process of finishing the paper, we learned that Novotný extended his previous interest also to academic public policy. Unfortunately, we read the draft too late to be able to ground our research on his findings. Nevertheless, we highly recommend his promising paper (Novotný 2015) and believe that our papers will be complementary.

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the early 20th century and a dynamic development after 1989 when it was facing various (and sometimes contradictory) challenges at the same time: serving the new democratic state through analysis and advice, building Western standards of academic and research outputs and establishing relations with international communities, and reacting to changing features of the country's higher education system. The paper draws a picture of what the development of a new discipline (under these specific conditions) looks like. At the same time it may be inspiring in retrospect as some points of view only become apparent in the longer term.

Moreover, the findings presented here may fit in the wider mosaic of public policy development in the region as well as in the world. This perspective has been gaining significant importance during the past few years as the international public policy community has been formed (e.g. the first International Conference of Public Policy in Grenoble 2013). This year, a special plenary session called "Teaching and School of Public Policy" took place at the International Conference of Public Policy in Milan where various global challenges regarding both students and curricula as well as regional specifics were discussed. We are convinced that the commencing debate on public policy instruction will benefit from papers like ours.

In the paper, we first build the analytical framework and put our research to the context of other authors' approaches. Second we focus on the description and reflection of the methods we applied and then we present our findings in chapters "Comparison of time periods – development of academic public policy in the Czech Republic" and "The state of the art of public policy: comparison of schools". These are followed by the conclusion.

## ACADEMIC PUBLIC POLICY: STATE OF THE ART

There are two main resources our paper is based on: the article of Martin Potůček (2007) and the monograph of Vilém Novotný (2012). Potůček (2007) describes the progress of public policy in the area of today's Czech Republic since the 1920's and illustrates its development by metaphors referring to the phases of human life. We will focus on the period of 1993–2013 which is labelled as childhood (the 90's), adolescence (the beginning of the new millennium) and early adulthood (present days; in Potůček's paper, published in 2007, the upcoming stage). The vision of growth and progress is supported by several arguments: adding a Ph.D. programme to the Prague Master's programme in public policy, establishing the English version of both the Master's and the Ph.D. programmes, developing international co-operation, support from research grants, original textbooks, developing a theoretical and methodological basis of

the discipline, and establishing the Central European Journal of Public Policy. In Potůček's depiction the progress is linear, with no backlashes or slumps, and it focuses mainly on outer features, rather than inner dynamics.

Although Potůček mentions also other institutions where public policy was taught in the last 20 years (ibid, p. 116), he considers the Charles University (CU) in Prague – namely the Department of Public and Social Policy (DPSP) and the Center for Social and Economic Strategies (CESES), both situated at the Faculty of Social Sciences as the almost exclusive academic institution in Czech public policy until 2007. In the isolated context of the Czech Republic Potůček describes the DPSP and the CESES as hegemony and leaders in the area.

The monograph of Novotný (2012) is the second important pillar for our research. It is very detailed; moreover, its scope is close to ours. Novotný distinguishes two approaches to (or schools of) public policy in the Czech Republic: the "Prague" one and the "Brno" one. In the Prague approach public policy is perceived both as an independent scientific discipline and as social practice. It is institutionally and personally tied to both institutions at the CU – the DPSP and the CESES – and connected to a sociological tradition. On the contrary, the *Brno approach* is more focused on policy analysis, has its roots in political science and is connected with the Department of Political Sciences, the Institute for Comparative Political Studies Research and the International Political Studies Institute (ibid, p. 168–170). Talking about the Prague approach, Novotný mentions two generations of teachers and researchers. Members of the first generation of Prague public policy, "founding fathers" in Novotný's words (ibid, p. 169), share the normative view but have heterogeneous research focuses, originating from various disciplinary backgrounds. The first generation treats the discipline of public policy rather as an umbrella approach or a general framework for a variety of interests. On the contrary, the second generation considers public policy to be more of "an established discipline with some institutional autonomy and stability, which should aim to achieve the standards of the international community of public policy research". According to Novotný, the second generation "puts stronger emphasis on value adequacy and methodological issues" (ibid, p. 170).

Deriving from the statements and findings of Potůček and Novotný, we developed an analytical framework centred on the theoretical and methodological basis of the discipline (see Potůček) and the shift from "public policy as an umbrella" to an established autonomous discipline (see Novotný, 2012). Further elaboration of the analytical framework is provided in the following chapter.

The topic of academic public policy is not examined by Czech researchers only. For example, Malíková (2008) sketches the situation in Slovak academic public policy and – not surprisingly – evinces many similarities with the Czech situation described by Potůček (2007). A regional view is also applied by a series

of studies describing the state of policy analysis in selected countries (Dobuzinskis, Laycock & Howlett, 2007; Schubert & Blum, 2013; Vaitsman, Lobato & Ribeiro, 2013). The respective chapters focused on academic public policy or policy analysis show an amazing variety of approaches. The existence of different traditions further stresses the need to understand the regional specifics.

## RESEARCH SUBJECT, DATA AND METHODS

In this chapter we explain what the subject of our research is and how we are going to explore it. We also present the characteristics of the analysed data and discuss the pros and cons of our approach. Then we precise the aim of this paper.

Public policy as an autonomous academic discipline does not have a long tradition in the Czech Republic, which makes the delimitation of our object of interest difficult. Novotný (2012) used an inspiring approach, analysing all the textbooks of public policy published in Czech.

Another option for exploring the field is to focus on institutions (universities) where public policy is taught. There is the question of research sample – what institutions and what study programmes should be taken in account? We decided for a narrow scope and focused on study programmes explicitly referring to public policy, i.e. with the words “public policy” occurring in their names (either in Czech or in English). Name is a crucial part of the social construction of the reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and together with other factors forms the identity of a programme. Another option we considered was to explore the widest range of existing study programmes which are related to public policy: public administration, social policy, political studies, public law, public economics and others. We did not apply this approach because the sample would be poorly delimited, and the sample size also played its role.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, we realize the limitations of our approach; not covering Novotný's “Brno” school of public policy is the most serious one.<sup>4</sup> However, we

are convinced that the “other-way-round” approach might either enrich or put in doubt Novotný's perspective and make his findings and conclusions more accurate.

There are three study programmes at three universities included in our research: Public and Social Policy (PSP) provided by the Charles University in Prague (CU), Public Policy and Human Resources (PPHR) provided by the Masaryk University in Brno (MU) and Public Policy (PP) provided by the Anglo-American University in Prague (AAU).<sup>5</sup> The PSP (CU) programme has the longest tradition, opened in the academic year 1993/1994, the PPHR (MU) programme has been running since 2010/2011 and the PP (AAU) programme since 2007/2008. This sample is in accordance with the sample of public policy institutions by Novotný (2012, p. 193–195).

Various characteristics of the study programmes may become the subject of comparison: one can compare syllabuses, the contents of key courses, graduates' profiles or the characteristics and research interests of staff. We have decided to analyse the content of diploma theses<sup>6</sup>, specifically diploma theses defended in full-time Master's study programmes.<sup>7</sup> The focus on the full-time form is driven by both practical reasons (longer history and the possibility to compare) and symbolic reasons (it is the “basic” form of study programme and therefore the “norm”).

Our choice of diploma thesis analysis is based on several arguments:

1. Diploma theses are more-or-less formalized academic outputs that may be comparable across various academic institutions.
2. Diploma theses are a relatively well-accessible source of data – according to the Higher Education Act (Czech Republic 1998: § 47 b) all theses should be publicly accessible.
3. Diploma theses represent how the field is conceived by college graduates in terms of both theoretical and methodological background (at this point diploma theses differ from syllabuses, in which declared theories and methods represent the pedagogical purpose rather than the impact on students).
4. Diploma theses mirror the topics of interest and specialization of academic institutions.

3 As for the number of study programmes, public administration is the most widespread discipline. There are 38 accredited full-time programmes at the Bachelor's level, 19 at the Master's level and five at the Ph.D. level in the Czech Republic. Public administration is taught either as a single major or, in most cases, as a double major in combination with public economics, law and regional development.

Social policy is accredited as 3 Bachelor's, 4 Master's and 4 Ph.D. study programmes and the combinations are: social policy, social policy and social work, sociology and social policy, public administration and social policy and public and social policy.

Political studies are accredited as 11 Bachelor's, 14 Master's programmes and 6 Ph.D. study programmes. Political sciences are mostly without any combination.

4 Novotný's “Brno school” is not directly connected with a study programme in public policy.

5 We use the following abbreviations of the study programmes and universities for easier orientation: PSP (CU) for Public and Social Policy at the Charles University in Prague, PPHR (MU) for Public Policy and Human Resources at the Masaryk University in Brno and PP (AAU) for Public Policy at the Anglo-American University in Prague.

6 In the Czech Republic, the defence of a diploma thesis is a part of the final state examination obligated by the Higher Education Act (Czech Republic 1998: § 46). The form of diploma theses depends on disciplinary conventions. In social sciences, diploma theses usually represent a compact academic text of 60 to 100 pages. By elaborating their diploma theses students prove their ability to conduct own research and write a scientific paper.

7 In the Czech Republic there is no accredited Bachelor's study programme in public policy.

Our decision to analyze diploma theses was further encouraged by two other works using theses as a source of data we encountered during our research. Czaputowics and Ławniczak (2014) analyze doctoral theses and scientific articles to describe the discipline of European studies in Poland and Starr-Glass and Ali (2012) explore the double standards of thesis assessment in a transnational (Czech-American) programme.

The details of the data collection are included in a footnote.<sup>8</sup> We used content analysis (e.g. Babbie, 2012) to examine the diploma theses and focused on the aspects we derived from the works of Potůček and Novotný, namely theoretical and methodological background, features of international co-operation (both authors) and subject areas which may indicate the shift from the “umbrella” approach to public policy as an independent discipline (Novotný, 2012).

For the analysis of theoretical background the content of chapters named “Theory”, “Theoretical background” or likewise was considered. Such chapters were identified according to their name in the table of contents of the diploma thesis. Also more specific chapters focusing on particular theories were included. We identified all concepts labelled as theoretical by author and classified them according to discipline, level of generality and internationality (Czech vs. international).

For the analysis of methodological background, chapters called “Methodol-

ogy”, “Methods” or likewise were considered. Again, the chapter was identified according to its name in the table of contents. If such a chapter was not included, other possible relevant chapters (like “Aims and research questions”, “Research” etc.) were checked. The “Data collection” variable was covered by the following categories: “interview”, “group interviews (focus groups)”, “questionnaire”, “collection of documents”, and “observation”. We also observed the category of “own data collection”. As for data analysis, we proceeded inductively and recorded all methods of analysis in the words of the authors. The following types of analysis appeared in diploma theses: 1) statistical analyses (various methods), 2) content analysis, 3) thematic analysis, 4) discourse analysis, 5) grounded theory, 6) frame analysis, 7) Q method (Q-factor analysis) and 8) “analysis of documents” (without specification). We also observed policy analytical tools such as “stakeholder analysis”, “prognostic methods”, but also “mental mapping”, “problem tree”.

As for the number of (foreign) sources we considered all the items mentioned in the list of references which is part of every diploma thesis. This means that in the number of sources all books, papers, statistics, laws and internet sources are included. Deciding about the “foreignness” of a source we considered the language of the source, not an assumed nationality of the author.

We focused on the declarative dimension (e.g. the author claimed to have used the Advocacy Coalition Framework) and did not examine the quality of fulfilling such declarations. There could be cases in which the theories or methods declared were actually not applied; on the other hand, some theses can use concepts implicitly without naming them specifically. Nevertheless, such a declaration is a crucial dimension for the social construction of identity. It refers to how the programme is constituted, what language is used, what is supposed to be included in the thesis and what it is supposed to look like.

There are some more limitations to our research beside those described above (sampling only programmes explicitly referring to public policy, narrowing the sample to diploma theses from full-time Master's programmes, and the choice of declarative dimension). First of all, all members of our research team come from one of the examined institutions. We face a considerable risk of ethnocentrism when we draw analytical lines and derive our interpretations from “our” experience with public policy. We kept these doubts in mind and critically reflected each step of the analysis, asking ourselves whether the analysis is not shaped by our present affiliation to PSP (CU). A typical result of such an ethnocentric approach would be if the “other” appeared worse or less developed. To avoid the risk of ethnocentrism we also conducted informal interviews with members of the other institutions. Secondly, our research presumes that diploma theses are relatively formalised outputs and may be comparable across various institutions in the Czech Republic. This assumption is valid only

8 First, we collected all theses defended at the full-time Master's programmes in particular years. As two of the analysed programmes focus not simply on public policy, but combine it with other field or subfield, we excluded diploma theses not relevant to public policy.

As for the “Public and Social Policy” study programme we analysed all available diploma theses because the distinction between public policy, on one hand, and social policy, on the other hand, does not exist in the programme – of course there are diploma theses that are more focused on “public policy” or “social policy” but the distinction is based more on the topic of the thesis than on the theory or methodology that are used. The list of diploma theses and hard copies were gained in the T. G. Masaryk Library of Social Sciences. We also used some help from DPSP secretary Věra Tomandlová and the department's internal archive. The diploma theses had various forms – the oldest theses were available only as hard copies, newer ones were on floppy discs and CDs, and the recent ones were accessible on the internet.

Also at the PPHR programme the fields of “public policy” and “human resources” were not strictly distinguished. However, we identified some topics not related to public policy issues. We excluded theses which dealt neither with the public or civic sectors, nor with public resources or public interest (e.g. “Evaluation of quality of human resources activities, based on ISO standards implementation for selected company”, “Analysis of the organization using perspective of Jungian typology”). We consulted the ambiguities regarding the structure of the programme by e-mail with Secretary of Department of Social Policy and Human Resources (MU), Hana Zálešáková. All PPHR theses were accessible on the internet. We also consulted our findings and specifics of the diploma theses with Jiří Winkler.

All the diploma theses from the PP (AAU) were included in analysis. Their list and electronic versions were provided by Tony Ozuna, Associate Dean of the Anglo-American University.

to some extent, because – as our results show – diploma theses have different parameters at different schools.

Our paper aims to describe the development and current state of academic public policy in the Czech Republic in terms of teaching outputs. We use time and institutional comparison of diploma theses to achieve that goal. We use four analytical categories based on Potůček (2007) and Novotný (2012) to describe public policy and identify any differences between 1) time periods (Potůček, 2007) and 2) institutions (Novotný, 2012).

### COMPARISON OF TIME PERIODS – DEVELOPMENT OF ACADEMIC PUBLIC POLICY IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

In accordance with Potůček (2007), we focus on the analysis of the programme Public and Social Policy (CU) that began to be taught in the academic year 1993/1994. The basic population consists of all diploma theses defended in the PSP (CU) full-time programme. It counts 339 diploma theses (DT); we were able to access 336 of them (Table 1).

**Table 1** Numbers of diploma theses included in the analysis according to year of defence

Year	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
N	1	8	7	7	20	28	16	16	19	17
Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	
N	36	23	19	14	16	28	17	25	19	

Source: Authors

For the analysis we divided the theses into six groups according to years of defence: 1995–1998, 1999–2001, 2002–2004, 2005–2007, 2008–2010, 2011–2013. The division is used first of all for the purpose of representativeness, because comparison of nineteen single years would be disorganized (and also confusing with regard to the low number of theses defended in some years). Clustering to six groups allow us to present the data clearly, on the one hand, and to draw a relatively detailed picture of the development, on the other hand. At the same time we can link the groups to the time periods described by Potůček (2007):

1. graduation in 1995–1998 and 1999–2001 corresponds to college study in the 90's (the childhood of Czech public policy in Potůček's terms);

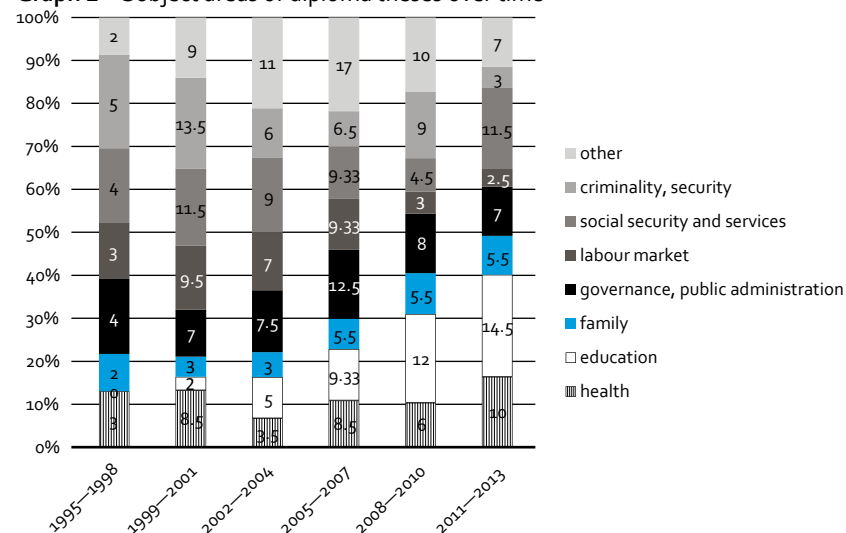
2. graduation in 2002–2004 and 2005–2007 corresponds to study after 2000 (the adolescence of Czech public policy in Potůček's terms);
3. graduation in 2008–2010 corresponds to study at the time when Potůček's paper was written and which he called the early adulthood of Czech public policy;
4. graduation in 2011–2013 corresponds to study after Potůček's paper was written.

### Subject areas of diploma theses

There are six subject areas dominating the diploma theses throughout the history of the PSP programme: social policy, social services, social security (50 DTs); governance and public administration (46 DTs); criminality and security policy (43 DTs); education (43 DTs); health care (40 DTs); labour market, unemployment (34 DTs); and family and family policy (25 DTs).

These topics cover more than 80% of the diploma theses defended. As for the remaining 56 texts, fifteen deal with environmental policy, and the rest covers a fragmented array of subjects including human rights, migration, regional development, development and humanitarian policy, media, transportation or energy policy. The incidence of these subject areas has changed over time (see Graph 1).

**Graph 1** Subject areas of diploma theses over time



Source: Authors

Graph 1 shows that the frequency<sup>9</sup> has increased for some topics (education) while for others it has decreased (labour market), stagnated (governance and public administration, family) or constantly fluctuated (social security and services, criminality and security, health). In the intermediate periods (especially in 2002–2004, 2005–2007), there is higher fragmentation of subject areas, as represented by large numbers of DTs focusing on “other topics”.

Leaving pure content analysis and looking at the topics more closely, one can reveal another trend: an increasing specificity of the topics. Whereas a typical 1990's topics was formulated in general terms (e.g. Situation of handicapped people in society with special respect to the mentally ill [1997] or Households in need of social assistance in the Czech Republic [1999]), more specific topics prevail in the latest time period (e.g. Propensity to government budget deficit: analysis of the influence of political cycle on Czech fiscal policy [2011] or Effectiveness of coeliac disease management in the Czech Republic [2013]). This trend can be interpreted as a consequence of an increasing level of policy expertise in the Czech Republic. Whereas in the 90's, there was a lack of experts and large thematic areas were not mapped, so the students tried to cover the demand in their theses, twenty years later there are plenty of existing analyses students can build on, which leads to more specific topics. This phenomenon is also connected with the theoretical and methodological background of the theses described below.

### Theoretical background

Analysing theoretical background is very difficult because theses may use a wide spectrum of theories and theoretical concepts. Therefore, it was necessary to classify the theories and compose more general categories in order to enable a meaningful comparison of the theses. With regard to the research aims we decided to distinguish between the following theoretical perspectives:

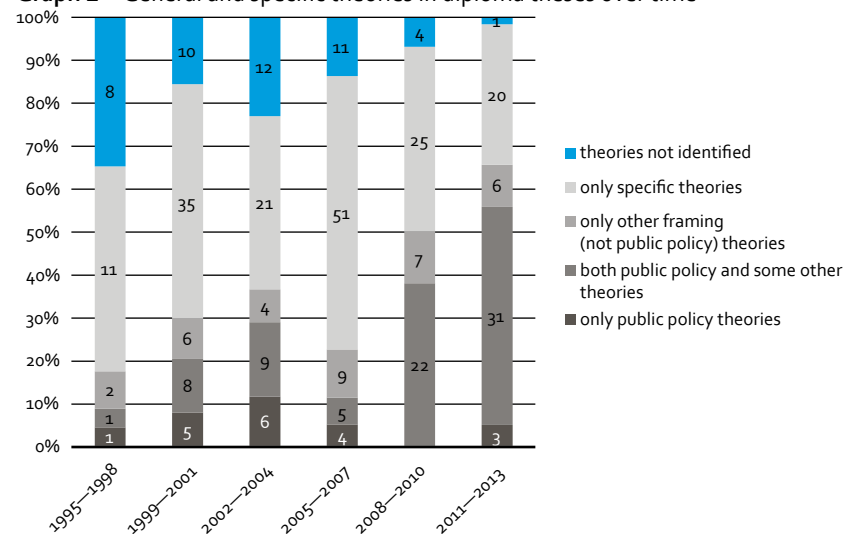
1. general public policy theories and concepts focusing on the policy process and its mechanisms;
2. specific theories and concepts related to policy subfields such as education, healthcare, safety;
3. other framing theories (from disciplines other than public policy such as political sciences, public administration, public economics).

Diploma theses can use theories and concepts from the first group as well as the second one; sometimes they do not use either. Therefore, we distinguish four

<sup>9</sup> Column heights represent relative frequencies while absolute ones are represented by the number. If a DT deals with more than one subject area, we divide the point between them.

types of theoretical foundations of diploma theses: 1) using only public policy theories, 2) using both public policy theories and some other theories (either the other framing or the specific ones), 3) using only theories from different fields (political sciences, public administration, public economics), 4) using only specific theories related to a particular policy subfield. There is also the fifth option, namely that we have not been able to identify any theories in a thesis<sup>10</sup>.

**Graph 2** General and specific theories in diploma theses over time



Source: Authors

Graph 2 presents relative and absolute frequencies of theses with different theoretical backgrounds and shows some differences between periods or, more precisely, some trends.

The first trend is growing prevalence of theoretical background in diploma theses. In the early years many diploma theses did not have a separate theoretical chapter and focused strongly on applied research. A typical theoretical chapter in the 90's consists of an overview of relevant literature or definition of key concepts – e.g. in a thesis from 1997 named “Drug policy in the Czech

<sup>10</sup> We would like to stress the fact that we all are nowadays either students or teachers in the PSP (CU) programme. As a result, we and the latest graduates of the programme share a notion of what is and what is not a theory. The “discourse” may have changed over time but our methodological approach does not allow us to capture any such changes. We are aware of these limitations and therefore we talk about unidentified, rather than missing theories.

Republic after 1989 (comparison with Germany)” the theoretical chapter consisted of sections on drugs drug addiction and drug policy; similarly, in a thesis “Evaluation of tools of active employment policy in the Ostrava region’s labour market” the so-called theory consists of sections on unemployment, labour market and applicable laws. A typical diploma thesis from the 10’s is exemplified by the text from 2013 named “Development of Czech social inclusion policies” whose theory chapter works with the concepts of new social risks, social exclusion, new institutionalism and changes in the welfare state.

The assumption of expanding theoretical background is also supported by a decreasing number of diploma theses in which theoretical concepts were not identified at all. Whereas in the first period (1995–1998) we were not able to identify either theory or literature background in one-third of the theses, in the intermediate periods (1999–2001, 2002–2004 and also 2005–2007) the number of DTs with unidentified theoretical background varied from 15% to 25%, and in the last period there was only a single thesis of that kind. Although there can be methodological reasons for that phenomenon (see footnote 8), we suppose that the trend reflects better access to appropriate literature and also a change of requirements on the students (which concerns both the required form of the diploma theses and the provision of courses focusing exclusively on theories of the policy process).

Second, there is an increase of general theories of the policy process in the DTs. The frequency of general theories of the policy process rose from less than 10% in the late 90’s to more than 50% in the last period (the increase is steady, with the only exception of 2005–2007). This supports the argument that the discipline has been building and strengthening its own theoretical tools. At the same time, the relatively stable number of DTs which used “only other framing theories” indicates that the strengthening of the disciplinary theoretical background does not lead to the hegemony of public policy theory. Still, there are DTs in the programme which lean towards theories of other disciplines (e.g. public economics, political sciences).

Looking more closely at these theories (and following the “internationalisation hypothesis”), there was a rapid increase in the usage of international “canonical” concepts and theories, especially in the last time period<sup>11</sup>. However, such a development is not only the case in the Czech Republic but also in the international context because many theories and concepts did not exist or had just arisen in the 90’s and their usage in diploma theses at that time was not possible or at least could not be expected. On the other hand, there is another interesting phenomenon – stagnating occurrence of Czech theories and concepts especially from

11 These are theories and concepts included in central textbooks on public policy, namely Sabatier, 2007; and Howlett, Ramesh & Pearl, 2012 (and previous editions of each).

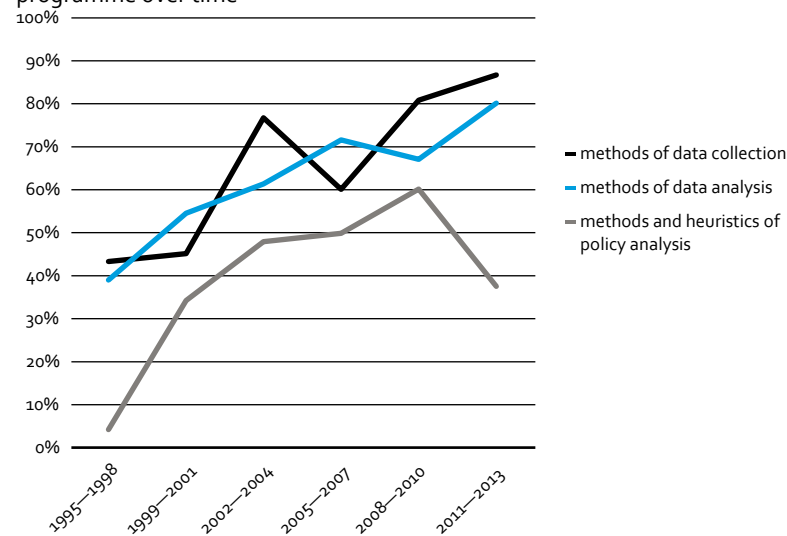
the “the founding fathers” of Czech public policy and the PSP programme in particular (these are, according to Novotný [2012], for example Potůček, Purkrábek and Vavroušek). That shows that that international co-operation does not make the programme oblivious to its roots. But there are more pragmatic explanations as well – there are original Czech textbooks students are used to working with.<sup>12</sup>

## Methodological background

In the early time periods the average methods chapter in a typical diploma thesis had two pages, which accounted for about 2% of the total number of pages; in the last two periods it had about 4 pages, which equals 5% of the total number of pages. The length of methods chapters increased dramatically especially in 2013 (to almost 7 pages or 10%, on average).

Methods chapters are devoted to various areas of methodology (general methodology, research design, data collection and selection, data analysis, public policy methods and heuristics related to policy analysis and problem delimitation). Three most frequently represented categories are displayed in Graph 3.

**Graph 3** Frequencies of methodology types in diploma theses in the PSP programme over time



Source: Authors

12 E.g. Potůček et al., 2005; Veselý & Nekola, 2007.

Whereas the occurrence of information about data collection (or selection) and data analysis has been increasing till present day, emphasis on policy analysis methods and heuristics has rapidly decreased in the last time period. That shows a shift in the diploma theses from an applied approach to a more purely academic one during the last couple of years.

About 80% of the diploma theses present methods of data analysis and almost 90% methods of data collection. Simultaneously, an overwhelming majority of the diploma theses defended in 2008–2010 and 2011–2013 worked, among other sources, with primary data collected by the students themselves (mostly through semi-structured interviews). Nevertheless, our data do not provide information about the extent of student data collection, ranging from a single interview to large surveys with hundreds of respondents.

Despite only a slight increase of the occurrence of data collection there was significant diversification of analytical procedures and methodological terminologies used in the last time period. In the early periods most text analyses were called just “analysis of documents” (if they focused on policy documents) or “content analysis” (mostly of the qualitative kind), whereas in the last period other terms and types of text analysis (such as discursive analysis, frame analysis or thematic analysis) occurred. Both are probably impacts of new Czech textbooks and changing curricula.<sup>13</sup>

## Foreign sources

Finally, we also took account of the use of foreign sources and literature. This along with using international theories may be another indicator of internationalisation (see Potůček, 2007) of academic public policy. On the contrary, we are aware of the fact that total number of foreign sources does not depend solely on the author's relation to the international community of public policy and academic maturity but also on the subject matter of the diploma thesis.

In all the periods the median number of items in the list of references was about 80 sources and did not fluctuate much over time. In the late 90's and early 00's the median thesis used six foreign sources (which represented 9% of all its sources). Between 2003 and 2007 there was a sharp increase in the use of foreign literature and sources, with these presenting about 25% of the total number of sources. This confirms Potůček's proposition about the internation-

alisation of the discipline and also may correlate with the development of internet and better access to journal databases. It is remarkable that the growth did not continue in the last periods; instead in the period of 2008–2011 the median number of foreign sources decreased to 15%<sup>14</sup>, and in last two years it increased to above 20% again. We are not able to explain the phenomenon – it may be a consequence of a thematic shift towards “Czech” topics and problems or a result of larger coverage of the topics by Czech sources.

Summing up the findings of the time-based comparison of diploma theses, we can conclude that Potůček's differentiation of the time periods is justified and the assumed differences can be found (see Table 2). Undoubtedly, the academic discipline is developing – in the early years the diploma theses emphasized the subject, they covered “white spots” on the proverbial public policy maps in the Czech Republic, borrowed theoretical and methodological tools from other disciplines or simply did not use them at all; gradually the discipline became established and more specific public policy theories and methods came to be applied to a larger extent. The Department of Public and Social Policy (DPSP) became more specialized while the variety of areas on which diploma theses focus remained wide.

13 A textbook on *Selected methodological issues of public policy* (in Czech, *Vybrané metodologické otázky veřejné politiky* – Nekola, Geissler & Mouralová 2011) was published in 2011; frame analysis and discourse analysis are discussed there. In 2013, thematic analysis was integrated in the Diploma Seminar's curriculum.

14 If one used means, the differences would be even more significant. In this case we prefer to work with medians as they are more resistant to various deviations.



**Table 2** Summary of the differences between diploma theses in the PSP programme over time

	2011 2012 2013		2008 2009 2010			
Topics of diploma theses	Lower range of topics			Wide range of topics ("other" category is the most frequent)		Narrower range of topics
	Criminality & security (22%)		Other topics (22%)		Education (23%)	
	Social security & services (18%)		Governance (16%)		Other topics (17%)	
	Social security & services (19%)		Governance (14%)		Security (16%)	
	Health care (16%)		Theoretical background is a standard part of diploma theses		Use of foreign canonical works on public policy	
Theoretical background	Theoretical background often not identified		Theoretical background sometimes not identified		Theoretical background is a standard part of diploma theses	
	Specific theories and background in scientific literature prevail		More accent on framing theories		Usage of specific theories persists	
Using also framing theories rooted in public economics, public administration or political science						

	1996 1997 1998	1999 2000 2001	2002 2003 2004	2005 2006 2007	2008 2009 2010	2011 2012 2013		
Methodology	Small space dedicated to methodology			Increased space dedicated to methodology				
	Focus on data collection			Focus on data collection				
	Mild increase of attention to data analysis.			Focus both on data collection and data analysis				
	Statistical analysis, content analysis and "analysis of documents" (unspecified)			Wider range of data analysis methods; type of text analysis is specified				
	No methods or heuristics of policy analysis			Methods and heuristics of policy analysis are used in one half of theses				
Literature/ sources in foreign languages	Infrequent usage of foreign literature/ sources			90% of diploma theses use their own data				
	Sharp increase in the usage of foreign literature/sources			Declined usage of foreign sources				
	8%			15%				
			27%			20%		

Source: Authors

The development of theoretical and methodological background described above may be related to the composition of DPSP staff. This would correspond with Novotný's statement about two generations of teachers. We tried to verify the statement and compared the diploma theses supervised by members of both generations as well as diploma theses supervised by each generation in various years. The aim was to find out whether the development of the diploma theses was more influenced by periods or by people (generations). Due to such multivariate classification the numbers of diploma theses in individual categories are very low and the comparison does not support a strong argument. We can thus state that the diploma theses differ more in time than between individual supervisors (the diploma theses supervised by the same person do not differ significantly within years but do differ between years). However, it is impossible to tell if this is a consequence of the supervisors' professional growth or of the changes in curriculum.

### THE STATE OF THE ART OF PUBLIC POLICY: COMPARISON OF SCHOOLS

This chapter will be dedicated to the comparison of the three institutions where public policy is taught and studied. Our aim is to answer the question whether academic public policy differs between these three institutions and whether various traditions of public policy may be identified (Novotný, 2012).<sup>15</sup>

We analysed diploma theses defended at these institutions in 2011–2013 as part of a full-time programme. We excluded such diploma theses from the programme in Public Policy and Human Resources which focus on human resources management in organizations and are outside the scope of public policy (typically they focus on the HR policy of a selected private company). An overview of the diploma theses covered by the analysis is provided in Table 3.

<sup>15</sup> Compared to Novotný who worked with the DPSP (CU) and the Department of Political Sciences (MU), our sample consists of the programmes of PSP (CU), PPHR (MU) and PP (AAU).

**Table 3** Number of diploma theses included in the analysis according to institutions and years

	2011	2012	2013	Total
Public and Social Policy (CU)	18	24	19	61
Public Policy and Human Resources (MU)	1	13	29	43
Public Policy (AAU)	2	0	3	5

Source: Authors

Diploma theses from each institution are characterized by a brief "portrait", in which specific features are stressed. We also present the median values of some indicators for PSP (CU) and PPHR (MU). Then the summary of comparison is performed in Table 4. In the table only two programmes are mentioned there as the limited number of PP (AAU) DTs did not allow us to compare it properly.

### Public and Social Policy (Charles University in Prague)

The diploma theses in the Public and Social Policy programme are the most numerous and diverse and cover a wide range of subject areas.

The diversity of topics is at least partly caused by the custom of not restricting students in their interest. Personal preferences of students are supported and teachers do not push them to choose from a list of suggested topics. Nevertheless, strong representation of several subject areas, including social policy, family policy, educational policy and health care policy, shows that the effect of teachers' specializations is also obvious.

A typical diploma thesis does not pay much attention to its general methodological background, but it refers to a wide variety of data, methods and heuristics. Such an approach evokes applied policy analysis rather than "pure" policy research. The majority of students perform their own survey, which mostly consist of semi-structured interviews. However, expert interviews are a widespread research strategy, when they are used as a source of information rather than as data for analysis. The methods chapter is on average shorter and constitutes about 6% of the whole text. There are big differences between individual theses in the features of the chapter.

A typical diploma thesis refers to more theories and concepts – both general ones focusing on the policy process and policy mechanisms and specific ones referring to a concrete policy area (family, education, labour market, secu-

rity etc.). With regard to the number, we are not certain to what extent the theories are really used and to what extent their role is rather ornamental.

The references of a typical diploma thesis consist of 85 items of literature or other sources, 15 of which are in foreign languages.

### Public Policy and Human Resources (Masaryk University, Brno)

The diploma theses in the PPHR programme are – compared to theses from CU and AAU) the most homogenous, showing many common features, and a strict approach to thesis advisory is apparent. The topics of the diploma theses are more specific than those at CU and encompass a narrower thematic scope. The majority of the theses focus on labour market and social policy, but education is covered, too.

The narrower scope of the diploma theses is also evident in lower average (and median) number of pages and sources. Apart from that, the theoretical background is not robust – most of the diploma theses (37 of the 43 texts analysed) have a background only in specific theories relating to the subject area of the thesis (for example, family, labour market). In a large number of the theses, the chapter serves more to introduce the reader to the context and circumstances of the topic than to presenting theories in order to provide an explanation of certain phenomena.<sup>16</sup> Only a small part of the diploma theses (the remaining six) contains a combination of a specific theory with some general theory. The general theories presented in the theses do not indicate any preferred theoretical stream. The diversity rather implies that theory choice is influenced by the students' individual preferences<sup>17</sup>.

A strong accent put on methodology is typical for the diploma theses of PPHR (MU) – the average methods chapter has six pages and comprises more than 8% of the text. The methods chapters are very similar: considerable attention is paid to the general methodological background of the thesis; data and their collection are described afterwards. On the contrary, almost no attention is paid to the methods of data analysis and there are very few specific methods of policy research or policy analysis.

A typical diploma thesis consists of 50 items of literature or other sources, 7 of which are in foreign languages.

### Public Policy (Anglo-American University)

Describing a typical diploma thesis of Public Policy programme (AAU) is very hard for two reasons. First, the total number of texts is very low; second, they are extremely diverse (both in topics and quality). There are theses with a purely theoretical scope, lacking any empirical evidence at all, and theses with no theoretical background that are purely descriptive. The methods section may constitute 10% of the text, but there can also be none at all. The topics originate from a wide range of social sciences but some are unrelated to any public policy problem or public intervention, or fail to work with public policy concepts (from our perspective, these are hardly relevant for public policy). The only feature that is common to all the theses is a large amount of foreign literature/sources, which is understandable, as English is the language of the study programme, the diploma theses are written in English and the structure of students is international (two of five theses use only foreign literature since their authors are foreigners). The AAU diploma theses appear to be more individualized (this appearance may be caused by their low number). No specific style or tradition of academic public policy can be identified here.

Table 4 summarizes the typical features of all three study programmes and characterises academic public policy in the Czech Republic across the institutions.

16 Significantly, the "theoretical" chapters in PPHR theses are mostly called "Context and legitimacy of the problem". A similar phenomenon was typical for PSP in the early years (late 90's). The situation cannot be explained simply by a possible delay but rather by different expectations of diploma theses.

17 Namely, the concepts of welfare state, New Public Management, rational choice, policy cycle and Advocacy Coalition Framework were mentioned in the theoretical background.

**Table 4** Comparison of the CU and MU academic programmes in public policy in the Czech Republic

Programme	Public and Social Policy (CU)	Public Policy and Human Resources (MU)
General characteristic	Broad approach, combination of methods, several theories Texts have around 90 pages	More strict form Texts have around 70 pages
Subject area	Large variety and diversity The most represented subjects are: education, social affairs, family and health Focusing on social problems	Specific topics, more homogenous The most represented subjects are: labour market, education, social policy, EU cohesion policy Focusing on organizations
Theoretical background	Both specific and general theories Use of theories of public policy – foreign and Czech Theories and concepts of different types in one DT Often ornamental usage	Form of literature review Specific theories and concepts dominate Often ornamental usage
Methodology	About 6% of the text Heterogeneous forms and emphases General methodology: very rarely Designs: Expert interviews Case studies (30%) Comparative studies (20%) Mostly not specified Data: primary data in 90% of DTs; semi-structured interviews predominate Analysis: Many DTs without explicitly mentioned type of analysis General “analysis of documents” very frequent Qualitative analysis (content, discourse, thematic, frame analysis) Methods and heuristics of policy analysis (stakeholder analysis, problem tree, cognitive maps, SWOT)	About 8% of the text Form very similar in all DTs General methodology: yes Designs: Evaluation Case studies Data: Mostly primary data Both structured and semi-structured interviews Analysis Many DTs without explicitly mentioned type of analysis General “analysis of documents” very frequent Both quantitative and qualitative analysis Methods and heuristics of policy analysis not used

Sources	Around 85 sources per DT, around 15 foreign.	Around 50 sources per DT, around 7 foreign.
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Source: Authors

## CONCLUSION

We have compared diploma theses defended at full-time Master's programmes in public policy across the past twenty years and three academic institutions in order to describe the current state and development of academic public policy in the Czech Republic specifically in terms of teaching outputs.

The time-based comparison shows evident development of the discipline of public policy in the Czech Republic, which is manifested by the theoretical and methodological empowerment of the diploma theses. However, the development is rather gradual and there are no distinct periods. Some features, such as the broad range of topics and approaches, still persist. At the same time, the shift of approach from public policy as an “umbrella” to an established discipline is evident.

The institutional comparison confirms the existence of two distinct streams of academic public policy, as represented by the Public and Social Policy programme at the Charles University and by the Public Policy and Human Resources programme at the Masaryk University. The third programme analysed, Public Policy at the Anglo-American University, has not crystallized yet, and therefore, it is sufficient to distinguish between only two streams of academic public policy in the Czech Republic.

The approach applied in Prague (CU) includes plenty of theoretical views, methods and topics, while the approach applied in Brno (MU) produces much more profiled, specifically focused and concrete outputs. As we verified in the interviews, there are different functions of diploma theses pursued by each institution. Diploma theses at the PSP (CU) are implicitly seen as an imaginary peak of the students' instruction and their topic tends to respond to the interests of the individual students. On contrary, the diploma thesis at the PPHR (MU) aims to verify whether the student is able to approach a certain area in an academic way, it should be practical, and it is supervised mostly by Ph.D. students (whereas the majority of theses at the PSP are supervised by the Department's academic employees).

These conclusions are similar to Novotný's (2012) distinction between the “Prague” and the “Brno” approach represented by Charles University and Masaryk University, respectively. In contrast, though, Novotný links the “Brno”

approach with political science represented by *Department of Political Science* and *The International Institute of Political Science* while we find the *Department of Social Policy and Social Work* and *The Institute for Public Policy and Social Work* to be its key players.

We have to point out again that the research study is limited and covers only programmes explicitly affiliated to public policy. Therefore, there may be other programmes teaching public policy not included in our research.

To conclude, the situation has changed since 2007 when Potůček wrote his paper. The Charles University has not been hegemonic in the field of academic public policy. There is at least one more centre, namely at the Masaryk University in Brno. We cannot say if they are distinct schools in the sense of independent paradigms or research approaches (and to be honest we do not think so; the problems of such distinction are shown in a paper of Janák [2013]). But we found evidence of differences in instruction approaches and study outputs of the Prague and Brno schools of public policy.

We consider the paper as useful not only for presenting new descriptive data on public policy in the Czech Republic, but also for facilitating reflection in the community and providing potential support for progress. The relatively easy research design invites other researchers to conduct comparison with other institutions, study programmes and forms both in the Czech Republic and in other countries. We suggest focusing on comparison within Central and Eastern Europe, which might answer the question of the existence (or emergence) of specific public policy traditions in the region, or reveal what traditions are followed in these countries.

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