Evaluation of thesis Jan Kleňha

I have read Jan Kleňha's thesis with pleasure and appreciation. The work is well-written, well-structured, and addresses an academically relevant and practically urgent and important topic.

> In my opinion, the candidate has demonstrated the ability to conduct independent research and has produced a thesis that meets the applicable standards and requirements. I see no objection to granting permission for the defense and am happy to approve the thesis.

The thesis has several strong points.
Firstly, I believe the thesis offers an impressive and well-embedded overview of the literature on foresight as a tool or technique to be employed in policymaking processes. The author not only presents a conceptual overview, but also illustrates its practical applications through a large number of cases. He clearly demonstrates a strong understanding of developments in the field.
Secondly, I think the thesis investigates two very interesting hypotheses. This provides an highly relevant and interesting continuation of Tedlock's work, with a focus on the public sector. The empirical study that brings this to life is well executed and yields convincing results.
Thirdly, I appreciate how the candidate concludes the study with a clear discussion of the lessons learned from this research and the practical recommendations for policymakers. Notably, the thesis addresses not only specific projects but also institutional implications, which is commendable.

Are there no criticisms of this study? Of course, there are. I believe the candidate has, in a sense, taken an easier path by limiting the study of foresight to what he calls policymaking processes. This framing seems to suggest almost neutral policy processes with a highly technical or at least objective character. This is also evident in the frequent references to the term "strategies," which, in my view, overly reduce public administration to an "ordinary organization" working strategically toward a defined goal. But this is not how the public sector works: political direction and democratic processes render the concept of strategy in a governmental context highly contested, especially regarding policy content – which is exactly what foresight focuses on. In the thesis, such political conflicts, irrationalities, and changes in direction are almost entirely overlooked. The discussion of foresight in policy is presented in a way nearly identical to its use in business. Yet they are fundamentally different types of organizations, with fundamentally different processes and guiding principles. While this is a significant shortcoming, it does not hinder the chosen research design. It only becomes problematic when viewed from a broader perspective. This is a critical and somewhat fundamental point, but it pertains more to the thesis's scope than its execution. Nevertheless, it would be valuable for the candidate to address this issue in greater depth during the defense.

The absence of political and democratic dimensions is also evident when critically examining some examples/cases in the discussion in thesis (not in the empirical study itself!). For instance, the author states that the U.S. is one of the few countries to systematically engage in foresight, which is presented as a good quality trait. This claim is questionable in two ways. In my own country (the Netherlands), systematic foresight is limited, but long-term explorations and similar activities are indeed carried out within specific policy projects. They are simply labeled differently. Furthermore, in countries where foresight – according to the author - is explicitly practiced, such as the U.S. and the UK, the quality of public administration is abysmal. The U.S. is an exceptionally poorly organized and governed country in terms of government functioning. Leaving aside political direction, even in terms of policy content, bureaucracy, and technical competence, there is no indicator of public value on which it scores positively. The same applies to the UK. The NHS (which is mentioned positively) is among the worst healthcare systems in Europe. That the UK has (or had) a unit systematically practicing foresight appears to have had no positive impact whatsoever on the way the country is run. The only two countries where foresight has been successfully applied, in my opinion, are Finland and Singapore. The author also mentions these as positive cases. However, Singapore operates more like a company and lacks true democracy, while Finland's success lies in institutional embedding, particularly in its connection with parliament. This is an interesting conclusion that could have been further explored but remains underdeveloped because the political and democratic dimensions are

not central to the thesis. As a result, this aspect receives less attention, which is, in a sense, a missed opportunity.

In summary, there is room for debate about whether this thesis adequately captures the inherently political, turbulent, and sometimes irrational nature of policymaking processes in a democratic system of government. I believe this dimension is underrepresented in the study. However, and this is important for the evaluation of the thesis, the author is transparent about this and has designed the research accordingly. Therefore, this is no objection to the thesis itself, but an invitation for further discussion.

I congratulate the candidate and the supervisors on this achievement and wish them a successful defense.

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