

## REPORT ON THE MASTER THESIS

GPS – Geopolitical Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

<b>Title of the thesis:</b>	Conceptualizing Location – One Term, Many Meanings, a Lot of Problems
<b>Author of the thesis:</b>	Mihajlo Kopanja
<b>Referee (incl. titles):</b>	Nuno Morgado, Ph.D.

**Remark:** It is a standard at the FSV UK that the Referee's Report is at least 500 words long. In case you will assess the thesis as "non-defendable", please explain the concrete reasons for that in detail.

### **SUMMARY OF POINTS AWARDED** (for details, see below):

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>POINTS</b>
<i>Theoretical background (max. 20)</i>	18
<i>Contribution (max. 20)</i>	20
<i>Methods (max. 20)</i>	19
<i>Literature (max. 20)</i>	20
<i>Manuscript form (max. 20)</i>	20
<b>TOTAL POINTS (max. 100)</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>The proposed grade (A-B-C-D-E-F)</b>	<b>A</b>

### **Comments of the referee on the thesis highlights and shortcomings (following the 5 numbered aspects of your assessment indicated below).**

#### **1) Theoretical background:**

From my perspective, Mihajlo's thesis was written in the domain of soft positivism. Although he stretched his work to include critical geopolitics' view, which I find pertinent if the purpose is to overcome that postmodernist intrusion in the discipline, he did not move away from the tools of the scientific method. For example, in his effort of accomplishing a literature review with all rigors, the objective of tracing causes and consequences between location and geopolitical outcomes is certainly an endeavor of the positivist sphere. I am pleased that Mihajlo looked for inclusion in Neoclassical Geopolitics, which category I do not doubt in including his work in.

Nevertheless, I had the chance to express to Mihajlo several times my skepticism about the objective of "reconciliation" of classical and critical geopolitics. And I added that Phil Kelly, on his latest book, corrected himself and also stated that he now thinks that is not possible. I agree. Critical geopolitics gave appropriate assessment criticizing mysticism or determinism that cannot have a place in the scientific approach. Apart from that, and the role of certain type of *ideas* that shape politics and thus geopolitics, I see the contributions of critical geopolitics in general rather intellectually poor, uninteresting, and sometimes even ridiculous (*vide* some of Ó Tuathail's writings, for example).

#### **2) Contribution:**

The thesis dissertates about the idea of location, both as concept and variable. Although in my research I have been applying the concept of location as a geopolitical *factor*, included in the independent variable "systemic stimuli" framed by the neoclassical geopolitics' model, I find the author's methodological choice of isolating location and observing it as *variable* extremely pertinent since more accurate tests of the impact of location on political reality become possible. Not only the methodological approach seems to be appropriate for the examination of the literature, but it also improved the body of the literature in this respect, trying to systematize a matrix for the understanding of *how exactly can location as a concept be applied in the geopolitical scholarship*. The exercise is of utmost importance taking into consideration that, in my view, if a discipline does not review and revisit its own concept and theoretico-methodological framework over and over again, then the discipline is destined to be either eventually useless or to disappear. This is a part of the demands of the scientific method. Mihajlo's thesis is an effort for this review and revisit, thus its relevance.

#### **3) Methods:**

The final thesis diverged from the master thesis proposal, particularly concerning the empirical study. However, I consider this as a regular episode while adapting the demands of the scientific method to the study of (political) reality. The methodological structure of the thesis is excellent, once again, inscribed in the logic of careful soft positivism. Qualitative content analysis and single case study were among the most relevant methodological instruments, a necessity that came from the type of questions formulated and the type of objectives established. The author did not fall in the “mistake” of producing a mere piece of literature review but went much further, and the methodological approach was undoubtedly a pivotal guideline to be so.

#### **4) Literature:**

I was glad that Mihajlo went promptly through all literature I have suggested to him (including in Human Geography). And also for his own initiative to get in touch with Gerring’s ideas on concept formation that constitute a milestone in his methodological framework.

The list of references is complete and I do not recall a major work on geopolitics about location that is not mentioned in the thesis (given Mihajlo’s language capabilities).

#### **5) Manuscript form:**

The structure of the work is rational, thus coherent. Its skeleton is the analysis of the concept of location, what makes the work an excellent example of a monograph and a solid bloc in terms of textual construction. The questions formulated at the beginning are answered in the body of text and summarized at the conclusion. I did not see significant issues to be finalized, although the thesis raises other current questions/issues (e.g. the emergence of the Neoclassical Geopolitics approach, problematizing and relativizing the concept of location *per se*) to push forward other investigations, as a research actually has the obligation to generally do.

The last note is to praise Mihajlo’s originality, his extensive footnotes, and also his excellent command of language that makes reading his text an enjoyable assignment.

**DATE OF EVALUATION:** 12.09.2018



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**Referee Signature**

**The referee should give comments to the following requirements:**

**1) THEORETICAL BACKGROUND:** Can you recognize that the thesis was guided by some **theoretical fundamentals** relevant for this thesis topic? Were some important theoretical concepts omitted? Was the theory used in the thesis consistently incorporated with the topic and hypotheses tested?

Strong                      Average                      Weak  
20                              10                              0                      points

**2) CONTRIBUTION:** Evaluate if the author presents **original ideas** on the topic and aims at demonstrating **critical thinking** and ability to draw conclusions based on the knowledge of relevant theory and relevant empirical material. Is there a distinct **value added** of the thesis (relative to knowledge of a university-educated person interested in given topic)? Did the author explain **why** the observed phenomena occurred? Were the policy implications well founded?

Strong                      Average                      Weak  
20                              10                              0                      points

**3) METHODS:** Are the **hypotheses** for this study clearly stated, allowing their further verification and testing? Are the theoretical explanations, empirical material and **analytical tools** used in the thesis relevant to the research question being investigated, and adequate to the aspiration level of the study? Is the thesis **topic comprehensively analyzed** and does the thesis not make trivial or irrelevant detours off the main body stated in the thesis proposal? More than 10 points signal an exceptional work, **which requires your explanation "why" it is so**.

Strong                      Average                      Weak  
20                              10                              0                      points

**4) LITERATURE REVIEW:** The thesis demonstrates author's full understanding and **command of recent literature**. The author quotes relevant literature in a proper way and disposes with a representative bibliography. (Remark: references to Wikipedia, websites and newspaper articles are a sign of **poor research**). If they dominate you cannot give more than 8 points. References to books published by prestigious publishers and articles in renowned journals give much better impression.

Strong                      Average                      Weak  
20                              10                              0                      points

**5) MANUSCRIPT FORM:** The thesis is **clear and well structured**. The author uses appropriate language and style, including academic **format** for quotations, graphs and tables. The text effectively refers to graphs and tables, is easily readable and **stimulates thinking**.

Strong                      Average                      Weak  
20                              10                              0                      points

**Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:**

TOTAL POINTS	GRADE	Czech grading
91 – 100	<b>A</b>	= excellent
81 - 90	<b>B</b>	= good
71 – 80	<b>C</b>	= satisfactory
61 - 70	<b>D</b>	= satisfactory
51 - 60	<b>E</b>	
0	<b>F</b>	= fail (not recommended for defence)