



Ústav světových dějin FFUK

Master's Thesis Review

Student's name and surname: *João Pedro Rocha Joaquim*

Title of the thesis:

Museums and Agriculture in Cold War Europe: The establishment of the Association Internationale de Musées d'Agriculture

Reviewer's name and surname: Jiří Janáč, PhD

1. Heuristic (please, evaluate by grade 1, 2, 3, 4 – in case of grading 3 and 4 the reviewer is obliged to formulate critical points)

1.1 Evaluation of the selection of literature and sources	1
1.2 Complexity of used sources from the perspective of the state of the art	1

Short evaluation:

In order to fully analyse and explain formation of AIMA and the role of individual experts and institutions in the process, additional research in archival records of involved institutions would be necessary. However, that would either result in narrowing of the topic (and making it less interesting) or in exceeding the scope of MA thesis.

2. Research problem and its solution (please, evaluate by grade 1, 2, 3, 4 – in case of grading 3 and 4 the reviewer is obliged to formulate critical points)

2.1 Choice of the formulation of the research issue respects the task given to the student	1
2.2 The relevance of the goal from the perspective of research area methodology	1

Short evaluation:

This highly original synthetic thesis successfully combines several strands of literature not usually communicating with other – namely museology, cold war studies and history of



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agriculture. Mastering of three subject areas (and their vocabularies, perspectives and discourses) and linking them into a coherent narrative stretching a period of almost a century would in itself represent a major achievement rarely observable in MA theses.

3. Thesis' structure evaluation (please, evaluate by grade 1, 2, 3, 4 – in case of grading 3 and 4 the reviewer is obliged to formulate critical points)

3.1 Is the structure of the thesis logical?	1
3.2 Does the thesis' structure work along the methodology and methods declared in the introduction	2b

Short evaluation:

This otherwise neatly crafted thesis suffers from the decision to limit the chronological scope for investigation to the formation of transnational network of agricultural museums in the Cold War Europe – i.e. to the first two decades of the conflict. While such a decision is fully legitimate (AIMA entered 1970s as fully formed and successfully institutionalized platform for knowledge exchange in the field), by including also 1970s and 1980s the author would be able to identify and explained (in retrospect) trends emerging already in late 1960s (globalization of the cold war debate; arrival of environmentalism; emergence of neo-liberalism and its attitude to agriculture etc.).

4. Quality of analysis and interpretation (please, evaluate by grade 1, 2, 3, 4 – in case of grading 3 and 4 the reviewer is obliged to formulate critical points)

4.1 Analysis of sources and literature	1
4.2 Interpretation of sources and literature in their interaction	1

Short evaluation:

The author have successfully avoided all the classic traps of thesis writing and showed his ability to critically approach and interpret historical records and other resources. He has managed to integrate his analysis of institutional history of AIMA within broader cultural, social and political context and performed high above average.



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5. Quality of the text (please, evaluate by grade 1, 2, 3, 4 – in case of grading 3 and 4 the reviewer is obliged to formulate critical points)

5.1 Style and grammar	1
5.2 Use of terminology	1

Short evaluation:

The thesis meets all the required standards regarding language, stylistic and formatting. Concerning terminology, some of the notions not central to the argument of the thesis could have been more clearly explained and delimited (typically the notion of “socialist agriculture” – as hinted upon in a reference to confusion experienced by British expert on collectivization on page 140).



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6. Synthetic evaluation (minimum 500 signs):

The thesis deals with the current issue of shaping and management of cultural heritage on the European level. By focusing on formation of transnational knowledge network in the field of agricultural museology, it analyses both the emergence of agriculture as heritage and the political and social changes influencing the shaping of representations of agriculture in museums. Chosen chronological and territorial scope reflects major turns and changes in valuation and understanding of agriculture as heritage in Europe on the transnational level from late 19th century till the arrival of environmentalism.

Focusing on expert discourses, the author clearly documents the contested shaping of agriculture as national and European heritage, torn between two dominant approaches – one focused on premodern, traditional and often romanticized image of peasant culture and the other, highlighting “modernising” role of agricultural science and technology. The tension, clearly visible since the late 19th century, took a more political character in the context of cold war ideological dispute and also concerned the question of the character and societal role of the museum in socialist and capitalist societies (education and research vs memory). In some socialist countries, agriculture enjoyed the position of privileged technology of display (cattlebreeding, agroindustry) and received favourable attention as a tool of social and economic progress, while in the West it had been marginalized (not only in museum expositions). In effect, only a few agricultural museums covering the entire field survived, notably in Prague and Budapest, while many other national institutions had been either disbanded or integrated into larger museums focusing predominantly on ethnography, science and technology or regional history. In attempt to reverse such a trend and revive the concept of “universal agricultural museum” as a forward looking research institution, experts from Prague and Budapest launched an initiative to form International Association of Agricultural Museums (AIMA).

The central argument is clear and well crafted, the narrative is however under the strong influence of historical sources– being it Šach and his typology of agricultural museums or AIMA proceedings and debates on museum practice (content and form of exhibitions etc).



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Sometimes bits of texts seems redundant or not enough integrated in the interpretation framework, Nonetheless, overall the thesis clearly ranks above average.

7. Questions and comments which should the candidate answer and discuss during the defence:

- 1) The entire tension between ethnographic and technological approach to representation of agriculture in museums seems to reflect the major social cleavage of European modernity – that between rural and urban – which soviet Marxist tried to overcome by forging an alliance between the workers and the peasants (known in Marxist thinking as smychka). Could it be, that the claim for “universality” in representation of agriculture in museums has been closely linked to this effort?
- 2) Your discussion of formation of AIMA relies heavily on published sources. Have you tried to consult also unpublished materials and records?
- 3) The thesis does not discuss that explicitly, but since museums are nowadays primarily considered to be memory institutions guarding and managing cultural heritage, I was wondering what does your research tell us about the position of agriculture in 20th century European identity? Whose heritage it represents?

Suggested grade: 1

Date: 28.5.2020

Signature: