

Joint Dissertation Review

Name of the student:	Thomas D. R. Curran
Title of the thesis:	Competition & Transition: Divergent Approaches to Nation Branding in Estonia and Latvia
Reviewer:	Dr hab. Jacek H. Kołodziej, JU prof.

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

(relevance of the research question, research objective, literature review):

The challenging research topic - complexity of nation branding in the CEE Europe - concerns important political and social issues related to the process of transformation of post-Soviet Baltic states. The author narrows the topic down to the causes and characteristics of "active branding" in Estonia and Latvia. The next research questions are logically derived: what is the role of the regional identity of the Baltic states in the branding process and how competitive identity is shaped in the region. The dissertation follows the classic academic thesis structure, combining conceptualization, term definitions and theoretical approach to the problem with a careful analysis of branding paradigms in the studied countries. The author's bibliography focuses on the phenomenon of branding in the global, regional, corporate and political dimensions juxtaposed with publications on national identity consciously built by modern states.

2. ANALYSIS

(methodology, argument, theoretical backing, appropriate work with sources):

The author's argument is based on primary sources - the strategy documents of the Estonian and Latvian nation branding from 2000s and also current materials provided and collected in these two countries. The analytical part itself was carried out in accordance with the rules of qualitative content analysis. The theoretical background of the dissertation are scientific and marketing publications, "professional" on the phenomenon of branding. Perhaps there are fewer strictly scientific works than "professional" ones, but the author manages to synthesize the literature and problematize it in an interesting way, exploring the question to what extent and how countries such as Latvia and Estonia are able to rebrand themselves, "particularly following significant moments in their historical trajectories, in order to meet certain political, social, or economic aspirations" (p. 20).

3. CONCLUSIONS

(persuasiveness, link between data and conclusions, achievement of research objectives):

Chapters III and IV, in which the author manages to take into account the mediating and contextual factors that may have influenced the building of a positive identity after 1990 by Latvia and Estonia, is particularly interesting. In his reasoning, the author combines the knowledge of product marketing with the strategies of the national revival of the country as a brand - all this in the context of the Post-Soviet space - a specific market of rivalry between neo-imperial Russia and reviving small states with strong aspirations of sovereignty. The author's conclusions make it possible to understand why Estonia decided to follow the Nordic and Balticness identity, and why 'monolithic' Latvia had to refer to a significant other - Russia, in order to be able to successfully build a Baltic state brand.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout):

In this respect, the work cannot be faulted.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

(strong and weak point of the dissertation, other issues)

The strength of the dissertation is the freshness and importance of the topic, framed in the context of one of the aspects of transformation in Central and Eastern Europe. The good side is the methodology and correctly conducted content analysis, supported with the detailed interpretation. However, it leaves room for doubt as to the proportion between secondary sources in the field of marketing and individual aspects of branding - which

are dominant - with much less represented sources of high theoretical rank, relating to the process of negotiating collective (social, national) identity and the scientific provenance of marketing tools. Probably because of these proportions, the author's argument is overwhelmingly detailed and exemplifying, devoid of critical discussion on the theoretical level.

Grade (A-F):	B (good plus)
Date:	Signature:
25. 07. 2020	