

## External Examiner's Report on the Dissertation of Tomáš Diviák

### Criminal networks: actors, mechanisms, and structures

Submitted in 2020 at the Department of Sociology

#### I. Brief summary of the dissertation

This is a sophisticated methodology application to a very interesting and actual topic. It demonstrates the appropriate level of independence and critical thinking. It offers both a stimulating interpretation and the methodological reflection of data as well.

#### II. Brief overall evaluation of the dissertation

This dissertation is a fine collection of research on criminal networks. The candidate explores this topic with much enthusiasm. He can be congratulated for the creativity and persistence with which he gained access to data.

#### III. Detailed evaluation of the dissertation and its individual aspects

##### 1. *Structure of the argument*

The argumentation is lucid throughout. It is clear what the author is attempting to express.

##### 2. *Formal aspects of the dissertation*

The formal aspects are all taken care of. Well done.

##### 3. *Use of sources and/or material*

The author works transparently and employs the sources in a methodologically correct as well as innovative manner. The method of data collection and processing is in line with the research questions and hypotheses posed. The interpretation of the results is in line with the results of his empirical research.

##### 4. *Personal contribution to the subject*

This dissertation is very innovative. Again, well done.

#### IV. Questions for the author

I realized that this field is in an embryonical state. For example, in Chapter 5 he tests differences between profit-driven and ideology-driven networks. The density hypothesis comes out of the blue. Given that low density results in insufficient cooperation, coordination, social control among the actors and thus the inability to reach goals, why would ideology-driven networks then be lower on density? I do not

see any argument for that. There is only an indirect argument: "efficiency is associated with a high number of ties and thus with high density as this is supposed to help generate value for profit-driven networks." In addition, throughout the dissertation he tests whether triadic closure plays a role in criminal networks, and just like in all other networks it does (By the way: Renee van der Hulst already wrote about this in 2009, in a Dutch article on the Hofstadgroep, a network with 67 actors, 132 undirected ties, a density of 24%, and a centralization of 25%, and a core-periphery structure).

In chapter 6 he found evidence that pre-existing ties are recruitment pathways, where some of the actors were initially drawn into the network by their friends or neighbors and radicalized afterwards. This sounds as an influence effect to me, but unfortunately the candidate does not have the data to do fine-grained analyses on selection and influence processes. Only in one chapter, he could use longitudinal data but even those data were suboptimal due to a three-year interval between the two time points. In that sense, the field of criminal network research does not have the data yet to do research in line with this claim on p. 142 "without longitudinal data researchers cannot distinguish between the processes of selection and influence and therefore cannot assess whether a particular observed pattern is an outcome or a precondition (Steglich et al., 2010)."

Relatedly, I don't think that the police use such an interval of three years when they think about the influence of central network members (p. 159): "Additional analyses reveal that actors with numerous ties are more likely to dissolve them in the first network, and some other actors become more central. All these findings contradict the information from the police and judicial documents which emphasizes the activity of highly central individuals as the main driver behind the network evolution." So, I am not convinced that the findings of the candidate are better than the thoughts of the police.

This is also something to incorporate in the checklist on p. 153. Point 5 is "What is the temporal span of the network and if multiple periods were distinguished, how were they defined?" Is this about the temporal span of the existence of the network or the temporal span with which we expect influence?

In paragraph, the candidate writes: "It is understandable that SNA has been applied by researchers predominantly from Western countries given that terrorism, gangs, mafias, and trafficking networks present a considerable threat to security in these countries." This claim does not make sense. Western countries dominate science in general. Also in this field. And yes, terrorism and crime present a considerable threat in Western countries, but even more so in non-Western countries. Please correct this.

## V. Conclusion

I recommend the submitted dissertation with the tentative grade of pass.

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