

A Supervisor Review of Anna Bezhanova's B. A. Thesis „ Political Squatting as Alternative Commons: The Case of Post-Socialist Cities“

Anna Bezhanova presents a thesis based on a comparative and thematic analysis of political squatting in a post-socialist urban milieu of the Visegrad countries (Czechia, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary). There are many things to appreciate in Bezhanova's work as the thesis is overall compact and with clearly stated set of problems, articulated and answered research questions, methods, analytical procedures and even possible avenues for future research. The thesis is a theoretical type of work – that is no new empirical material was collected. Anna is capable of successfully navigating the work through risks connected to this type of thesis as she reflects on its limits, including limits connected to her lack of knowledge of local languages (see page 29). Bezhanova excels in finding resources and secondary materials as well as in a level and an extension of her comprehension and juxtaposition of the literature. What is more, Bezhanova manages smoothly to zoom in from theories to the researched cases – be it from squatting to political squatting or from global level to Central and Eastern Europe. Lastly, Bezhanova's attitude is an engaged one, but she does properly reflect that and this positionality does not affect analytical rigour of her work with only minor exceptions here and there - such as seeing police as being part of a pool of „other hate groups“ (see page 49). Simply and overall put, there is a high quality erudition in her thesis which is of no surprise to me as Anna was curious, independent and organized person during the whole process of working on the topic.

However, the thesis do have some problems – two minor ones and one more major one. Starting with the minor issues, I consider the conclusion to be quite short. Bezhanova could spend more paragraphs with returning to the main concepts of her work and discuss them again, but this time over her main conclusions. Sure, it is a bachelor thesis, so I do not consider it to be a big problem – yet. Second minor issue deals with her contextualization work – Bezhanova do provide contexts and it does work well mostly, but not always. I do miss a better capture of post-socialist specifics of commons presented for instance in a work of Petr Jehlička. Besides, I am not that sure why the Prague Spring context is accentuated as for her topic the normalization of 1970s and 1980s played a bigger role although not mentioned by the author whatsoever (with the phenomenon of so called cultural underground escaping to so called *baráky* – homesteads).

The only major issue I have with the work relates to the art of comparison. The good comparison is the one with as symmetric and similar cases as possible. But that is not often the case in the thesis. First of all, the four analyzed squatts did and do exist in different times (Zelený dvor 1994 – 2000, Rozbrat 1994 – nowadays, Centrum 2004 – 2006, Klinika 2014 – 2019). These are very different timeframes of postsocialist development and as each squatt accentuates its position proper to problems of its times, one has to ask why not to compare squatts from the same period. In Czech case this would be the squatt Ladronka (1993-2000) or Milada (1998-2009). The second and related issue with this is incompatibility of available material on each squatts with the Slovak case of Zeleny dvor being the example with very sporadic and almost non-existing information about it. Anna Bezhanova reflects on that explicitly: „*the analysis of Zelený Dvor was problematic due to a significant research gap of squatting in Slovakia.*“ (page 31) But I think that is not enough. A more proper solution would be to leave the Slovak case out of the comparison for the lack of data and articulate the need of researching squatts in Slovakia only in the future research section (which the author does anyway – see page 51). Although there is some high-standard work in the comparison section, some parts are very brief and in other parts, for instance, only two squatts out of four are compared.

Writing all that, I recommend the thesis for a defense and suggest the grade 1-2.



Rožnov pod Radhoštěm, 26th of August
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