

## REPORT ON THE MASTER THESIS

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

<b>Title of the thesis:</b>	<b>How Political Geography Can Challenge Dubious Socio-Spatial Practices</b>
<b>Author of the thesis:</b>	<b>Niklaas Baudet von Gersdorff, B.Sc.</b>
<b>Referee (incl. titles):</b>	<b>Jakub Franěk, Ph.D.</b>

**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>	5
<i>Contribution (max. 20)</i>	5
<i>Methods (max. 20)</i>	3
<i>Literature (max. 20)</i>	20
<i>Manuscript form (max. 20)</i>	8
<b>TOTAL POINTS (max. 100)</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>The proposed grade (1-2-3-4)</b>	<b>1.5</b>

You can even use a decimal point (e.g. giving the grade of 2.5 for 60 points).

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

**1) Theoretical background:**

**2) Contribution:**

**3) Methods:**

**4) Literature:**

**5) Manuscript form:**

The author of the reviewed thesis has selected an interesting, relevant, and definitely very ambitious topic for his Master's thesis. His aim is nothing less than to propose a novel approach to critical political geography entitled *transcendental phronetic political geography*, which is supposed to combine approaches of critical realism, phronetics (or phronetic social science), and the French school of geopolitics.

The thesis is hence largely theoretically or, more precisely, meta-theoretically oriented. Indeed, four out of its five chapters (not counting the Introduction and the Conclusion) are devoted to the discussion about the philosophical or theoretical foundations of the proposed "research programme" (i.e. its ontological and epistemological assumption, as well as its methodology). The fifth chapter then consists of a brief case study about the problems related to slums in Cairo and the largely unsuccessful attempts to resolve these problems.

The thesis is clearly very well researched, as well designed. For the most part, the author also manages to render his ideas in a very precise and clear manner. In spite of some lapses in grammar and syntax, his command of written English is also on a very high level. Nevertheless, the reviewed thesis also suffers from certain noticeable shortcomings and as a whole is not fully persuasive.

As the author explains in the Introduction, his argumentative strategy consists of taking the reader “from the most abstract to the most concrete”. The first chapter is hence devoted to the general discussion of the main concepts and problems of the philosophy of science especially in relation to social sciences in general and political geography in particular. The second chapter then turns attention to the notion of critical realism, the third one discusses the project of phronetic social science, and the fourth chapter contains a brief discussion of the French school of geopolitics, followed by the description of the *transcendental phronetic political geography* itself. As discussed above, the fifth chapter then consists of the case study, which is meant to demonstrate the potential of the novel approach to political geography developed in the previous chapters.

While this general argumentative strategy is certainly sound, its actual implementation suffers from a major flaw: since all four theoretical chapters are of approximately same length, the discussion of the most general and well known issues (Chapter 1 and to some extent Chapter 2) tend to be longer and wordier than would be necessary, while Chapters 3 and especially 4 appear to be a bit underdeveloped. This applies also to the case study contained in Chapter 5, which is only ten pages long and fails to meet its principal goal – i.e. to demonstrate the potential and the virtues of the *transcendental phronetic political geography*. The author fails to explain sufficiently clearly what are the advantages of his novel approach to the study of the problem at hand, or what findings could not be revealed by a different, more traditional approach.

In spite of these shortcomings, this is a very well researched and written thesis on an interesting and original topic which should be admitted to defence with proposed classification between 1 (Excellent) and 2 (Very Good) depending on the defence itself.

**DATE OF EVALUATION: June 20, 2016**

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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	US grading
81 – 100	<b>1</b>	= excellent	= A
61 – 80	<b>2</b>	= good	= B
51 – 60	<b>3</b>	= satisfactory	= C
41 – 50	<b>3</b>	= satisfactory	= D
0 – 40	<b>4</b>	= fail	= not recommended for defence