

REPORT ON THE MASTER THESIS

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

Title of the thesis:	How Political Geography can Challenge Dubious Socio-Spatial Practices
Author of the thesis:	Niklaas von Gersdorff
Referee (incl. titles):	RNDr. Jan Kofroň, Ph.D.

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):

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Theoretical background (max. 20)</i>	20
<i>Contribution (max. 20)</i>	14
<i>Methods (max. 20)</i>	13
<i>Literature (max. 20)</i>	19
<i>Manuscript form (max. 20)</i>	19
TOTAL POINTS (max. 100)	84
The proposed grade (1-2-3-4)	1,35

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: The thesis is in its core about meta-theoretical approaches – as such it explicitly discusses variety of highly abstract epistemological theories. Essentially the whole book is build up around a very strong theoretical background. Generally, all the theories are described accurately. In this particular aspect the thesis goes well beyond standard master thesis at our institute.

2) Contribution: The thesis has extremely ambitious goal – to present a novel, if synthetic, meta-theoretical stance. Considering this, the author was willing to create extremely high expectations, which is bold and admirable, yet potentially dangerous... The thesis is successful when it comes to providing critical description of current PoS approaches... it is a bit less successful (but still very good) in providing description of the new approach. What is more problematic, I am afraid that the thesis is rather unpersuasive in (explicitly) demonstrating value added of the new approach vis-à-vis some of the classical approaches. Therefore if measured against expectations set by the author himself, the thesis has been half-successful in its main goal. Yet I have to admire boldness of the author who was willing to pursue very risky intellectual path, and I dare to say that other students (even most students at the Ph.D. level) would have not fared any better.

3) Methods: The thesis, given its nature, is organized as an epistemological discussion. Therefore it is not appropriate to talk about "*methods strictu sensu*". Rather, it is better to focus on the structure of the thesis. In this respect I think that too much attention is on the one hand paid to introduction into current PoS debates, while on the other hand final two chapters could have been perhaps longer and more comprehensive. The point is not that the first or second chapter is somehow problematic, it is not and actually they offer an excellent intro to PoS debates and CR respectively. The problem is that they could be 30-50% shorter thus offering the author space and time for deeper elaboration of the final two chapters which ought to be center of gravity of the thesis. In the current form, the manuscript is not fully persuasive in its final parts. One wonders in which aspects is the proposed

approach better than the alternatives when it comes to some empirical problems. An explicit if brief comparison would be very helpful here.

4) Literature: Up to date, truly comprehensive and in addition covering important volumes from several fields (including proper geography, political science, urban studies and philosophy of the social sciences).

5) Manuscript form: The thesis is mostly well written and easy to read, something which is not common in case of epistemological papers. In addition figures included in the text are very helpful for understanding the main arguments of the author. All the thesis has been prepared meticulously, thus all formal requirements have been met.

In sum the thesis has two faces – the first one is excellent and in many aspects superb, going well beyond standards for s M.A. thesis, the second one however is a bit more problematic as it does not provide fully persuasive argument for embracing the new approach.

This criticism however has to be seen in the context of very high expectations the thesis imposed upon itself.

In the light of my previous criticism, I would like to propose a **question**: What is the value added of the new approach vis-a-vis neopositivism or on the other hand say post-structuralism. Please provide the answer in the context of the Cairo case – try to explain where the alternative approaches have to stop, while the new alternative can produce additional (and useful) knowledge.

DATE OF EVALUATION: 20.6.2016

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	1	= excellent	= A
61 – 80	2	= good	= B
51 – 60	3	= satisfactory	= C
41 – 50	3	= satisfactory	= D
0 – 40	4	= fail	= not recommended for defence