



Ústav světových dějin

Master's Thesis Review

Student's name and surname: Ludovic Schlosser

Title of the thesis: Constructing Heimat in the Silesian Giant Mountains, Organization and Discourse 1880-1914

Reviewer's name and surname: Mgr. Jaroslav Ira, Ph.D. (supervisor in Prague, CUNI)

1. Heuristic (please, evaluate by grade 1, 2, 3, 4 – in case of grading 3 and 4 the reviewer is obliged formulate critical points)

1.1 Evaluation of the selection of literature and sources	2
1.2 Complexity of used sources from the perspective of the state of the art	1

Short evaluation:

The heuristics related to the secondary sources is clearly one of the strongest aspects of the thesis. Ludovic Schlosser surveyed exhaustively the vast literature on the *Heimat* theme in Anglophone as well as German scholarship; he gathered substantial literature on the history of his researched region. Many particular aspects (e.g. the history of postcards circulation) are underpinned by relevant titles, not to mention vast theoretical literature. It is praiseworthy that Ludovic has read through the literature in a critical ways and is able to relate his own research to previous scholarship on the theme.

As regards the primary sources, their choice fits well the researched theme and the scope is sufficient for the M.A. thesis. Yet, for analyzing all the indicated questions in a profound way, I would expect larger scope of the source base. Although Ludovic used several volumes of the regional journal, which makes a large amount of text, my impression is that his conclusions and results are actually based on use and interpretation of a few articles and seven poems.



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Also the analysis of postcards has been limited to merely four pieces, although a larger set of postcards is alluded to.

2. Research problem and its solution (please, evaluate by grade 1, 2, 3, 4 – in case of grading 3 and 4 the reviewer is obliged formulate critical points)

2.1 Choice of the formulation of the research issue respects the task given to the student	1
2.2 The relevance of the goal from the perspective of research area methodology	1

Short evaluation:

The theme is well formulated and clearly in accord with the major themes of TEMA program. Although the research on “Heimat”, or more generally, the research on local/regional versus national identity in the modern German nation building is not new, Ludovic has applied this perspective in the hitherto less researched Giant Mountain region. The theme and the research questions are firmly embedded in the debate on German national identity and local/regional identities that gained strong attention already since early 1990's, but there are other sources of inspiration: the new approach to space, the critical history of tourism as a spatial practice that goes beyond the mere description of leisure activity and is linked, among others, to national appropriations of space, to performative acts of (re)establishing collective identities, to issues of environmental history, history of infrastructures, and economic history.

3. Thesis' structure evaluation (please, evaluate by grade 1, 2, 3, 4 – in case of grading 3 and 4 the reviewer is obliged formulate critical points)

3.1 Is the structure of the thesis logical?	1
3.2 Does the thesis' structure work along the methodology and methods declared in the introduction	1



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Short evaluation:

The structure of the thesis is well- and logically designed, the theme is easy to follow. The narrative is coherent and focused.

4. Quality of analysis and interpretation (please, evaluate by grade 1, 2, 3, 4 – in case of grading 3 and 4 the reviewer is obliged formulate critical points)

4.1 Analysis of sources and literature	2
4.2 Interpretation of sources and literature in their interaction	1

Short evaluation:

The analytical part of the thesis follows the making of the regional identity in two levels: the making of institutional infrastructure (especially the emergence, scope and activities of the Giant Mountains Association) and the discourse about the Giant Mountains. It might have been useful in this context to apply the theory of regions by the Finnish geographer Anssi Paasi and his terms “institutional shape” and “symbolic shape” of the region. The major focus of the thesis rests in the representations. Overall the thesis inclines to a culturalist approach, with deep analysis of the meanings, as conveyed in selected poems, postcards, illustrated front pages etc., taking precedence to more systematic and quantifiable analysis of larger data sets. This opens some strong sides, as well as limits of the thesis. The decoding of the meanings, with the use of Barthesian semiotics, provides many interesting insights, connections, and provocative arguments that may stimulate further research. Though the interpreted items are limited in number, they nicely show the semantic field that was evolving around the imagined Giant Mountain Heimat and that reflected the broader contexts of technological changes, rise of tourism and consumerism, growing environmental concerns, or nationalization. On the other hand, the selected approach, in my view, does not allow for appropriately answering some of the questions set in the introduction, such as how far the images shaped the local or national identifications. Also, the somewhat fragmentary way of analysis does not permit



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robust and generalizing conclusions. Some of the interpretations, whilst interesting, seem a bit overstretched or not clearly articulated. At some points I would prefer less theory and more substantial empirical research, as the text seems tilted more to the theoretical dimension at the expense of the latter, and sometimes the theory seems a bit superfluous.

5. Quality of the text (please, evaluate by grade 1, 2, 3, 4 – in case of grading 3 and 4 the reviewer is obliged formulate critical points)

5.1 Style and grammar	2
5.2 Use of terminology	1

Short evaluation:

The English is of reasonable quality and the text has been written in a proper academic style, although in several cases better words should have been used. This sometimes interrupts the flow of reading and makes the reader think about what exactly the author had on his mind. At some points, the text was indeed difficult to comprehend, which is also related to sometimes excessive use of theoretical jargon. At the same time, however, I have to highly appreciate the willingness of Ludovic to write his thesis in English, though he could opt for an easier way of writing in his native language. Besides, the research put enormous demands as regards other language skills, especially the sources in German, but also Czech and Polish literature.

The referencing is largely correct although sometimes the sources are less clear (e.g. on page 75-76 there is no reference as regards the history of the publishing house).

Although Ludovic has decided to use only German names for the localities currently lying in Polish territory (formerly German part of the Giant Mountains), he could have indicated the contemporary Polish equivalents (Hirschberg/Jelenia Góra etc.) at least in some table, or by the first appearance of the names.



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6. Synthetic evaluation (500 signs):

The master thesis by Ludovic Schlosser is based on a well-designed, ambitious and carefully conducted research. The text is based on a strong theoretical background, rarely seen even within the TEMA framework. The thesis reveals a broad knowledge of the author about the researched field and related academic debates. The analysis shows that Ludovic is capable of seeing his researched theme in many connections and contexts and that he can work very creatively with the sources. Yet there are also some drawbacks that may have stemmed from the chronic problem of fitting in the time schedule of the TEMA program: the somewhat limited scope of the empirical analysis, sometimes hasty conclusions, or weakly supported interpretations, and mistakes or imperfections in language and style. Despite some of my critical comments, I would still evaluate the thesis as excellent.

7. Questions and comments which the candidate should answer and discuss during the defense:

What were the motivations of the members of the RGV for entering the Association? What were obligations and benefits stemming from the memberships? Where there any differences between regionally located and more distant (e.g. Berlin) branches of the RGV in terms of members and agenda?

Suggested grade:

1 (excellent) in Czech grading system, 5 in Hungarian grading system, 16 in French grading system

Date: 17.9.2017

Signature: Jaroslav Ira