

Oponentský posudek

“Environmentální spravedlnost v Česku: případová studie Romů ve Vsetíně”

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Overall, this is a very good Master's thesis based on a well-developed theoretical foundation and understanding of the literature on environmental justice. The thesis is among the first studies on environmental justice in the Czech Republic, and thus has particular significance for contemporary research in a number of social science fields. While the thesis has a ways to go before it could be publishable in a revised form, it at the same time makes an important contribution to the fields of geography and sociology by introducing the concept of environmental justice in Czech academia.

I believe that the thesis successfully satisfies the requirements for a Master's degree and I thus recommend passage of the thesis during the defense on September 27. However, this positive assessment assumes that the degree candidate is able to satisfactorily address the problems listed below during the defense, particularly the questions raised about the methods, case selection, and analysis of the case study.

Specific comments

1. The **introduction** mentions the objectives and motivations behind the Master's thesis, but does not state what the *main argument* is. What is the argument – that environmental justice is an important concept and applies also to the Czech Republic? How is the argument controversial or refutable? More needs to be said about this.

The **theoretical section** is by far the strongest part of the thesis, as it makes a very good use of the existing English-language literature and clearly explains and elaborates on a number of important concepts relating to distributive and procedural justice, positive and negative freedoms, and environmental justice/injustice. Nonetheless, the section does have a number of significant problems:

2. While the overall interpretation of the discussed scholars (e.g. Harvey, Fraser, Berlin, Smith, etc) is generally correct, *the author fails to actually defend any particular theory which can be applied to the case study he chose*. A Master's thesis needs to not only have a theoretical section, but bring theory and analysis together by elaborating and defending a theory or model that can be applied in practice. But what is the author's theory? Since the author discusses the work of Nancy Fraser at length, perhaps he should have more directly defended her conception of social justice (involving the roles of redistribution, recognition and representation), applied it to the idea of environmental justice, and explained how it illuminates the case of Vsetín.

3. The author does not sufficiently elaborate on the concepts of distributive and procedural justice. The overview of Rawls (p. 16-17) is rather basic and deserves greater

elaboration. The overall discussion in that section defines concepts and their interrelationship, but *does not do a good job of explaining competing theories of justice and what is at stake in those debates*. Further, the discussion of procedural justice is particularly weak, and would have benefited from an overview of, for example, procedural justice in Jurgen Habermas' *Between Facts and Norms*. The author defines procedural justice as "dodržování zastávaných morálních či legálních práv a pozitivních a negativních svobod v sociálních procesech ovlivňujících distributivní spravedlnost (p.15)." But that definition is controversial; many theorists would say that simply protecting people's rights and freedoms is insufficient for achieving procedural justice. Works by Habermas, Ian Shapiro (*Democratic Justice*) or Nancy Fraser emphasize that procedural justice requires that stakeholders to a claim – particularly people who are socially marginalized and thus do not normally make use of their political rights – actually speak out or have their claims defended in decision-making processes that affect them. Isn't that precisely one of the main problems of the Vsetín case?

4. The overview of the concept and literature on environmental justice is quite good. However, the author assumes that the definition of environmental justice used in the US (such as the definition by the EPA on p. 32, is accepted and applied everywhere. In particular, *the author does not discuss how the idea of environmental justice might be understood differently in the European context and how the concept (or related concepts) is applied in European and EU documents and treaties*. For example, the Aarhus Convention ("Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters") can be seen as defending and implementing a European conception of environmental justice that focuses on the role of citizen participation and procedural justice in order to secure the right to a clean environment. That is, European documents seem to focus on procedural issues, not redistributive or substantive ones (as is the case in the US). On a related note, it would also be nice to know what role EU anti-discrimination legislation (and the Czech Parliament's inability to pass the anti-discrimination law) might play in local struggles for environmental justice, including the Vsetín case.

5. In terms of the used **literature**, the citations are overall good, though I am very surprised that the author does not seem to be aware of the work by Benjamin Vail, who is arguably the leading scholar on environmental justice in the Czech Republic ("Illegal Waste Transport and the Czech Republic: An Environmental Sociological Perspective," *Sociologický časopis*, 2007; doctoral dissertation at FSS MU, available at http://is.muni.cz/th/169446/fss_d/Vail_dissertation.doc?lang=cs). I am also surprised that the author does not discuss the literature on environmental values and sustainability in the Czech Republic (quantitative research by Petr Soukup - *ISSP - Životní prostředí*, 2001; or qualitative research by e.g. Hana Librová, others) as a way to understand the social context of environmental debates and how the Vsetín case might fit into that.

6. In the **methodological section**, it is not clear why "critical realism" (section 3.1) is at all necessary. *What exactly does that epistemological theory contribute to the empirical analysis?* This needs to be explained. Furthermore, if the author is to defend critical realism, he should not rely solely on Sayer, but should explain the ideas of critical realism by some of its

leading proponents, particularly Bernard Lonergan (esp. the treatise *Insight*), who developed the generalized empirical method and also applied it to the social sciences.

7. The author generally explained the qualitative methods used, but does not disclose a lot of important methodological information necessary in a Master's thesis. *How many interviews were conducted overall, and how many with different stakeholders (local politicians, Roma, NGOs...)? How did he carry out the interviews and the transcription to ensure the protection of personal information as required by Czech law?*

8. The author's dismissal of extensive research (i.e. quantitative approaches) – "Z vice důvodů (viz kapitola 2.3.3) se zdála být extensivní generalizace z řady událostí nevhodná" (p.51) – is not clearly justified and needs to be defended with specific arguments. I can imagine different ways to do quantitative research on environmental justice in the Czech Republic – why would such approaches be inappropriate?

9. *The author does not sufficiently explain and defend the choice of Vsetín as a case study.* Why was it chosen – simply because it is controversial and received a lot of media hype? Aren't there other localities where Roma live in similar living conditions or have been subject to similar policies, but have received less scholarly and media attention? Couldn't there be other cases that could more clearly elucidate the problems of environmental justice? The selection of a case study must be justified and based on reasons relating to how the concept of environmental justice can be applied in the Czech context.

10. In the **Vsetín case study**, it is not clearly articulated why this is a case of environmental justice, and not simply a case of social exclusion. *What exactly is the concept of environmental justice contributing to the interpretation of the case that the concept of social exclusion cannot provide?* Simply that the Roma in the "Pavlačák" lived in poor environmental conditions, but were then moved next to a sewage plant? There needs to be a more sustained application of environmental justice principles in the analysis.

11. The author claims that "nelze jednoznačně hovořit o procedurální nespravedlnost" (p. 72) without clearly explaining why. Again, theories of procedural justice often claim that injustice occurs when poor residents negatively affected by a decision were not able to be part of the discussion that led to the decision. In Vsetín, couldn't one argue that the local council made decisions and judgments about Roma (in both moving to "Pavlačák" as well as being evicted from it), without taking into account their views and backgrounds? If that is the case, then it is possible to speak about procedural injustice.

12. The overall evaluation of environmental injustice in Vsetín is both short (basically two pages) and vague. *What specific forms of environmental injustice took place, and through what causal mechanisms? Overall, is there sufficient evidence to conclude that an environmental injustice – as opposed to another kind of injustice or grievance – actually took place? Why or why not?*