

# IMESS DISSERTATION



Note: Please email the completed mark sheet to Year 2 coordinator  
(cc Allan Sikk [a.sikk@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:a.sikk@ucl.ac.uk) and Alexa Stewart [alexa.stewart@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:alexa.stewart@ucl.ac.uk))

Please note that IMESS students are not required to use a particular set of methods (e.g. qualitative, quantitative, or comparative) in their dissertation.

<b>Student:</b>	Andrei-Cosmin Macsut
<b>Dissertation title:</b>	Civic Engagement in Romania: Testing the Applicability of Mainstream Theories on the Winter Protests of 2012

	Excellent	Satisfactory	Poor
<b>Knowledge</b> <i>Knowledge of problems involved, e.g. historical and social context, specialist literature on the topic. Evidence of capacity to gather information through a wide and appropriate range of reading, and to digest and process knowledge.</i>	X		
<b>Analysis &amp; Interpretation</b> <i>Demonstrates a clear grasp of concepts. Application of appropriate methodology and understanding; willingness to apply an independent approach or interpretation recognition of alternative interpretations; Use of precise terminology and avoidance of ambiguity; avoidance of excessive generalisations or gross oversimplifications.</i>	X		
<b>Structure &amp; Argument</b> <i>Demonstrates ability to structure work with clarity, relevance and coherence. Ability to argue a case; clear evidence of analysis and logical thought; recognition of an arguments limitation or alternative views; Ability to use other evidence to support arguments and structure appropriately.</i>	X		
<b>Presentation &amp; Documentation</b> <i>Accurate and consistently presented footnotes and bibliographic references; accuracy of grammar and spelling; correct and clear presentation of charts/graphs/tables or other data. Appropriate and correct referencing throughout. Correct and contextually correct handling of quotations.</i>		X	

<b>ECTS Mark:</b>	A	<b>Charles Mark:</b>	1	<b>Marker:</b>	75
<i>Deducted for late submission:</i>				<b>Signed:</b>	František Šístek
<i>Deducted for inadequate referencing:</i>				<b>Date:</b>	June 10, 2013

## MARKING GUIDELINES

**A (UCL mark 70+):** Note: marks of over 80 are given rarely and only for truly exceptional pieces of work.

Distinctively sophisticated and focused analysis, critical use of sources and insightful interpretation. Comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to the chosen field of research, showing an ability to engage in sustained independent research.

**A = výborně = 1**

**B/C (UCL mark 60-69):**

A high level of analysis, critical use of sources and insightful interpretation. Good understanding of techniques applicable to the chosen field of research, showing an ability to engage in sustained independent research. 65 or over equates to a B grade.

**B/C = velmi dobře = 2**

**D/E (UCL mark 50-59):**

**D/E (UCL mark 50-59):**

Demonstration of a critical use of sources and ability to engage in systematic inquiry. An ability to engage in sustained research work, demonstrating methodological awareness. 55 or over equates to a D grade.

**D/E = dobře = 3**

**F (UCL mark less than 50):**

Demonstrates failure to use sources and an inadequate ability to engage in systematic inquiry. Inadequate evidence of ability to engage in sustained research work and poor understanding of appropriate research techniques.

**F = neprospěl = 4**

CONTINUES OVERLEAF

**PLEASE PROVIDE SUBSTANTIVE AND  
DETAILED FEEDBACK!**

**Constructive comments, explaining strengths and weaknesses (*at least 300 words*):**

The M. A. thesis of Andrei Macsut represents a case study, focusing on the winter protests of 2012 in Romania. His main goal is a revision of established theories of social mobilization (especially resource mobilization theory + framing theory) in the light of new evidence, based on his analysis of the recent Romanian material.

The work is well-written and well-structured, main arguments are carefully presented. The handling of the sources, quoting etc. is satisfactory. In the absence of scholarly works, Macsut had to rely mostly on journalistic sources in his analysis of the 2012 winter protests (he did not witness the events personally). However, his overall reconstruction of the course of the protests is sufficient for the given purposes.

The goal of the work – revision of mainstream theories – is certainly an ambitious one. In the end, Macsut does not offer a new or revised theory. His conclusion is more modest: he points to a number of issues that have been largely overlooked or should be newly considered by anyone who attempts to theorize about social mobilization.

In his modest criticism of existing theories of social mobilization, Macsut does acknowledge that they are based on “ideal models” which obviously do not reflect the diverse national environments, different traditions and, last but not least, the increasing influence of the internet on changing patterns of social mobilization which now allows a far greater degree of non-hierarchic self-organization. I believe that the criticism could be more direct in this particular section of his work: both the resource mobilization theory and framing theory obviously contain an ethnocentric bias, with a tendency to overlook and disregard the much more diverse realities of areas beyond Western Europe and North America. East European nations such as Romania, let alone the post-colonial world, do not easily fit the established patterns of explanation. Even in quite a few EU member states, the mainstream media, for example, is largely biased and controlled by the government, while the tradition of civil society is relatively weak. It is, therefore, no wonder that theories based on “ideal conditions” in idealized Western societies contain obvious flaws and inconsistencies.

One obvious weakness of Macsut’s work is his reliance on the single case of protests in a single national environment. It is quite acceptable for the purposes of an M. A. thesis that he limited his focus to a case study and he has certainly succeeded in presenting a credible analysis of the 2012 winter protests. However, the work would have been more convincing (especially from the theoretical point of view) if it included a concise overview of comparable cases from other countries. He does indeed mention a few other cases in passing (“the Arab Spring”, Bulgarian protests of 2013), but fails to present a more detailed, comparative analysis which would situate his own material in a wider context.

Despite some criticism, the general impression from the M. A. thesis of Andrei Macsut is certainly a positive one. He has demonstrated a great potential for conducting independent research, both in the field of theory as well as in the yet largely uncharted territory of media sources connected to the course of the recent protests. After critically applying his particular evidence to established theories, he pointed to several weak points which should be taken into account by future researchers in the field, such as the diverse nature of protest movements, the “elusive nature” of factors that have the potential to actually trigger a protest movement, different levels of development (or rather underdevelopment) of civil society, different local and national traditions of civic engagement and the frequently overlooked factors that discourage engagement, such as weather conditions, biased media or criminalization of the protests. It would probably be overambitious if Andrei Macsut tried to provide a wholly new theory of his own. In fact, his conclusion can rather be understood as a plea against all encompassing theories that fall apart when applied to particular evidence. Overall, it is an excellent thesis.

**Specific questions you would like addressing at the oral defence (at least 3 questions):**

Could you try to situate your case study into a wider context of similar protest movements in recent years? How would you describe the similarities and differences of the 2012 Romanian protests and, for example, the Bulgarian protests against the entire political class in 2013, the protests following the “Gorilla Scandal” in Slovakia in 2012, protests in Turkey in the spring of 2013, “the Arab Spring”? Do you think that your criticism of established theories would be equally relevant in some of these cases?

In the conclusion of your thesis, you have highlighted a number of factors which should be taken into account by future researchers in the field of protest movements and civic engagement in general. However, you did not provide a new theory yourself. Do you think that an all-encompassing theory of social mobilization is indeed possible? If not, do you believe that such a theory might be created in order to suit at least a more limited (national, regional) level? Could we perhaps formulate a theory that would be applicable, for example, to post-communist countries of Central, Eastern and South-eastern Europe, which share a number of structural similarities (relative weakness of civil society, tradition of state paternalism and limited grass-roots engagement in formulating new policies)?

You have focused on the national case of Romania. How specific is Romanian political culture, civil society, historical tradition of engagement? Could you compare it to some neighbouring countries, stressing the similarities and differences (Hungary, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Moldova)? Could you compare Romania to other European countries you might be more familiar with – Czech Republic, Britain, Germany?