

Tutor's report of M.A. thesis:

Sofia Victoria PÉREZ HERRERA, *Aménagement du territoire et justice spatiale: Le paradoxe de la décentralisation régionale et son impact sur la région d'Aysen (Patagonie, Chili)*, 2014, 78 pp.

Sofia Pérez decided to focus her research on one of the pressing issues of contemporary world: that of the dual problem of centrifugal and centripetal pressures on the level of regional units in relation to the superior structures of the state. Concretely, she paid attention to one of the regions of Chile, Aysén; she studied its role within the Chilean state, the posture of the highest political representation towards the region and follows up the politics of decentralization of the state that was pursued throughout the second half of the 20th century, its methods and justifications (the top-down strategies of spatial planning), as well as the impacts upon the regions and, on the example of the region of Aysen, analysis the gradual process of the rise of self-consciousness of its inhabitants and their opinion of the political action imposed upon them (the bottom-up political action).

The topic of the thesis fits appropriately to the TEMA program, as it aims at studying the problems of regions vs. national states as well as the problems of identities, ascribed and acquired.

The theme of the region as a meaningful unit of social analysis has risen into prominence in social sciences of the last decade. Still, being the case from the non-European milieu, it renders useful comparative material for comparison and challenging of interpretive schemes based upon the European material. However, there is also visible clear political stance of the author, who advocates the bottom-up actions described. Although the text presents the studied problem in a chronological perspective, the actual interest of the author clearly rests in an effort to contribute to the “vindication of Aysén as a historically forgotten region by the central government“, to help remedy the „spatial injustices“ by whose suffer the inhabitants of the peripheral regions of Chile. This personal approach prevented the realization of thoroughly impartial study.

The sensation of reading a political polemics, even though grounded in historical narration, is further corroborated by the fact that there is no explanation of conceptual framework, methodology (the theoretical embedding of the analysis as well as the methods and techniques of the field research), evaluation of sources and secondary literature used. There is also no specification of the actual method of the field research, besides the statement in the introduction that the research took place in January 2014, there were semis-structured interviews going on as well as participant observation (p. 20), and the list of the respondents in the annexes (p. 132). There is no clarification of the choice of reference group and of the way the interviews were conducted.

The story starts outright, with the first chapter offering the overview of territorial politics of Chilean government throughout the 19th and the 20th century and the second one detailed description of the region of Aysén, its history. The third chapter resumes the recent events and explores the declared motivations of social action groups involved in the movement of protest.

There are some inspiring ideas scattered throughout this part of the text – for example, the analysis of how the concept of the frontier was applied to the region of Aysén by the authors of the politics of regional development and how this concept could be used in analyzing the causes and outcomes of the present-day movement (chap. 2.1.2 *Le rôle de la frontière dans la configuration territoriale d'Aysén*, pp. 59-63) – but most of them are only cursory remarks, without going in depth. Besides, a close look on the footnotes reveals second-hand knowledge of many problems. F.e. on pp. 43-44 is mentioned “certain influence

de l'ouvrage *Politische Geographie* (1897) du géographe allemand Friederich Ratzel” in Chile throughout the 20th century, giving various names of those who propagated the theory, but without actually specifying the contents of the “théorie de Ratzel” as well as the way it was adopted and presented by the elites of the state to its inhabitants. It appears that the student read one article on the influence of Ratzel and then was content with reading one selected chapter from the work of this author. Of course, the whole problem is marginal as to the main theme of the thesis, but reveals a certain superficiality and shallowness of approach of the author.

Similarly, there are several blogs named in the list of sources, but these were actually not used in the analysis (or, if were, they were not quoted by the author). The same is true of the documentary *Chile se moviliza. Capítulo Aysén: tu problema es mi problema*, also listed in the final overview of sources, but not mentioned, or even explored in depth, in the text itself. As a result, what the reader gets – and this is no doubt valuable – is a factual, albeit slightly partial overview of recent developments, based on sources more limited than those listed in the final bibliography, but nevertheless offering a good basis for other scholars interested in the problem.

The thesis is well arranged, written in good French. However, probably the haste that marked the final phase of work caused certain imperfections (for example, on pp. 111-112 two paragraphs are repeated two times). Even though these mistakes do not lower strikingly the quality of the academic achievements presented in the thesis, they certainly complicate its reception by readers.

The thesis is not flawless. But it must be stated as a way of conclusion that Sofia Pérez produced a text based on written and electronic sources as well as her own original research, text meeting all the formal standards that can contribute to the ongoing academic debates. Given my partial criticisms listed above, I propose the evaluation **bien (2 in the Czech grading, 14 in the French)**.

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