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Gdańsk, 2018-02-01

**Opinion on habilitation thesis**  
**entitled *Politická participácia. Dimenzie a empirická typológia mládežníckeho aktivizmu na Slovensku* by PhDr. Jaroslav Mihálik, PhD.**

**(1) Scientific and Academic Profile of the Candidate**

PhDr. Jaroslav Mihálik, PhD. belongs to the outstanding and very active scholars of young generation. However, he obtained his doctoral degree less than four years ago, he has been an academic teacher since 2009. He is an official in many academic and scientific bodies, e.g. he is a vice dean of Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia, he was a reviewer of scientific writings and projects as well as he has been a deputy editor of *European Journal of Transformation Studies* that is currently indexed in many international databases, among them especially in ERIH Plus and Emerging Sources Citation Index being a part of Web of Science, since 2016. The Candidate is an author of various valuable works published in the Slovak Republic and abroad. He is an author or co-author of two monographs (one of them written in English), student handbook as well as many articles; five of them are published in journals indexed in Scopus (Baltic Journal of Law and Politics, Journal of Local Self-Government). His works are appreciated nation-wide and also in European scientific societies. Numerous quotations of his works, also of indexed works (in Scopus and Web of Science – totally 17 quotations as well as non-indexed works – totally 29), prove it. The Candidate is a well-recognized scholar in his own country and abroad, especially in other Central and Eastern European countries (the Czech Rep., Poland, Hungary, Romania, Lithuania, etc.). He has participated in many scientific conferences and other events, he has delivered lectures at foreign universities as well as he has realised research and educational projects, also international ones (e.g. funded by

International Visegrad Fund and the European Commission). His habilitation dissertation was prepared as a part of a research project (MYPLACE).

His scientific and academic specialisation oscillates around the issues of political science and public policy. Generally, it could be said that he is deeply rooted in the intellectual tradition of political research and reflection. His pieces of research are clearly oriented to the political issues and based on political theories as well as meta-theories. The core of his researches concerns topics which can be defined as a subject of public policy. Youth policy, local and regional policy or minority policy are good exemplifications of his research inclinations. Thus, his habilitation thesis is a result of his long-term research activity and his interests in the sphere of public policy. It can testify the consequent process of his scientific maturation which habilitation is its final objective and culmination.

## **(2) General Assessment of the Habilitation Thesis**

The thesis entitled *Politická participácia. Dimenzie a empirická typológia mládežníckeho aktivizmu na Slovensku* is not a huge size work. It has got only 140 pages. But the value of the scientific dissertation cannot be evaluated referring to its size. The research goal defined by the Author has been satisfactory, however not excellent, realized in rather not extensive work. Although, I have got some critical remarks. Taking them into account would need surely to extend the size of the thesis. I will present them in the next part of the opinion.

The thesis is of interdisciplinary character. Generally, it can be viewed as a work of political science and its sub-discipline - public policy (youth policy) but comprising some elements of sociology, ethnography, and social anthropology. However, the Author used sociological methods, his narration is typical for political science. It is an original work and gives a new input in the development of public policy research or even of political research at all. A choice of the topic of the thesis is very current and important, especially in the face of radicalization of young people and their fascination of different kinds of populism and nationalism. The thesis proves also practical dimension. Its conclusions could be implemented by decision-makers creating a proper model of youth and educational policy.

In fact, the thesis could be viewed as a final research report. It is not a typical dissertation with an expanded theoretical base. A reference to the theory is rather modest – however theoretical frames are outlined in the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter – and reference to

the meta-theory is only indirect. The Author does not directly indicate his methodological orientation but it can be clearly noticed that the thesis is written from the behaviorist standpoint. This kind of research has a long and deep-rooted tradition in political science and in social sciences generally. The thesis proves implementation of principles of behavioralism, e.g. endeavour to generalize and explain regularities as well as using of empirical techniques. The Author uses both kinds of methods, i.e. quantitative and qualitative ones. He rather does not favour quantitative researches as behaviorists used to do. This attitude was characteristic for classics of behavioralism (e.g. David Easton) but the Author avoids this preference, even more he seems to prefer qualitative methods. He gives a voice of concrete individuals in his work trying to understand the core of the issue. However, in fact triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods could be identified in the thesis. In my opinion, it is an optimal methodological strategy which helps us to avoid premature generalizations from one hand and superficial operating of numbers from the other hand.

But unfortunately, the Author did not avoid the excessive generalization. I mean the title of the thesis. Probably, it is only an oversight or language blunder. The title suggests that the research concerns youth activism in the Slovak Rep. as a whole but in fact the Author conducted his research in two sub-regional territorial structures (*okres* Trnava in Western Slovakia, and Rimavská Sobota located in the southern part of the Slovak Rep.). Obviously he clarifies it in the text but the title can mislead. The noun "Slovakia" should be changed to adjective "Slovak". Young people from Trnava and Rimavská Sobota can be defined as Slovak youth but we cannot treat both sub-regions as whole Slovakia. The Author could also use the phrase "na príklade..." (as often used in Slovak scientific works) in the title and then the noun "Slovakia" would be more acceptable. Of course, we notice that there are references to the general condition of Slovak youth in the thesis but the core of the considerations and analysis concerns social and political attitudes of young people living in both sub-regional administration structures. The Author is aware of cultural, social, economic and political differences between Slovak regions which imply various attitudes of Slovak youth. He underlined them many times in his thesis. That is why I treat this misconstruction of the title as a simple mistake which every researcher could do. It is a role of reviewer to pay attention on some shortcuts to eliminate them in a final version of scientific work. The thesis has not been published, so the Author could not consider any advice of reviewer(s). I am sure in case he decides to publish his thesis as a monograph, he will modify the title.

We have to appreciate that the research activities comprising a base for the thesis, were

led within an international scientific project funded by the European Commission. It reveals a real potential of the Author as a scholar who is open for the new trends in science, who is able to compete with scientists from other countries as well as ready to cooperate with foreign researchers. Reviewed thesis is a part of the research conducted in different European countries. In my opinion, it gives the thesis its added value. It is an evidence of a great potential of the Author as a scholar who obtained an international level of research activity and recognition in the international academic community.

### **(3) Detailed Remarks and Suggestions**

In this part of my opinion I would like to present some suggestions and detailed remarks in points. One of them pertains to the title as given above because of its specific general nature, so I will concentrate here more on detailed issues.

1. In my opinion, the literature used in the thesis is too modest. The Author indicates only 82 positions in the list of the used publications. Of course, the thesis is the research report as I wrote above and the Author referred to many Slovak works dedicated to the relevant topics but he should have referred also to the world literature in larger scope than he did in the thesis. Due to that he could clearer observe Slovak phenomena as a part of universal tendencies; he could notice regularities in researched attitudes of Slovak youth as well as indicate on Slovak specifics. Of course, he tried to do it in the thesis, however embedding it to the universal context, referring to the world literature, would be more reliable and also it would make the thesis/research seen in the comparative perspective.
2. He should consider changing the construction of the thesis. In this form I find it a little bit chaotic and unclear. That is why the thesis contains some repetitions of the same phrases (Author repeats methodological remarks in the Introduction and the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter), he would not do so if he made construction of the work better considered. In my opinion, a methodological reflection and description of the research project should be presented in one introductory chapter. Here, the Author should formulate his methodological procedure as well as indicate methodological orientation of his research. It would be an evidence of methodological awareness and maturity.
3. In my opinion, the Author could pay more attention to the role of cultural factors as well as a role of the Catholic Church, and generally of religion in the process of

formatting the attitudes of young Slovaks. In fact, he signalled these issues but they would require some more explication. I would like to remind here the significance of culture and the Church in national identification in Slovakia. The idea of Slovak nation is closer to a cultural or even ethnic paradigm of nation than to a political one, so the influence of culture as well as of the Church, that is an important subject of Slovak identity, should be required in an extensive part of reflection dedicated to the social and political participation of youth.

4. Finally, the Author would have to formulate more extensive conclusions summarizing his research and analysis given. Here, he should interlink the results of the empirical research and theoretical knowledge presented in the initial chapter(s). Of course, the thesis contains the *Discussion* (7. *Diskusia*) and *Conclusions* (*Záver*) in the final part of the thesis but the current form of both paragraphs is not too extensive. It is rather characteristic for minor forms of academic writings, e.g. articles or papers. But the reviewed work is the habilitation thesis that testifies research maturity of candidate. I do not have any doubts about the Author's (and Candidate's) a great potential and his ability to present himself as the high class scientist and researcher. I therefore consider it to be a problem that he has not revealed that potential in the final part of his thesis. I know his works and I am aware of his intellectual potential which should be expressed also in the extensive *Conclusions*.

#### **(4) Questions to the Candidate**

1. To what extent the ethnographical methods are useful and helpful for political research and analysis conducted on the ground of public policy?
2. What are cultural factors determining different social and political attitudes of youth in Slovakia and other countries, especially in those ones which were a subject of the research within the project MYPLACE? For instance, what is a correlation between the place of life with its cultural background and the level of social and political participation of youth or populist and nationalist tendencies among young people?
3. What is the role of the Church, especially the Catholic Church and generally role of religion in formation of the social and political attitudes of young people in Slovakia?

## **(5) Conclusions**

Despite some critical remarks, I would like to recommend the habilitation thesis *Politická participácia. Dimenzie a empirická typológia mládežníckeho aktivizmu na Slovensku* to be a base for awarding PhDr. Jaroslav Mihálik, PhD. a scientific and pedagogical title *docent*. I find the Candidate as a mature scholar of young generation. He obtained a proper methodological and theoretical knowledge. His books, articles and other contributions represent a high scientific level. He has proved that he can independently conduct research and cooperate with other scholars, also foreign ones, in realization of research projects or other academic and scientific tasks. I mean his engagement in the work of faculty administration, editorial board, organization of conferences, etc. It is also very important part of work of mature scholar. Of course, publications are the most important part of his scientific activity. My task could be limited only to review the habilitation thesis but I have to and I would like to evaluate the Candidate in a complex way. Undoubtedly, the habilitation thesis is its essential element. It is not an outstanding dissertation but quite satisfactory one. However, in the context of whole scientific merit of Jaroslav Mihálik, he can be found as a good scholar and researcher at least. His scientific activity has a real international potential and the habilitation thesis as a result of the international research project is its evidence, too. That is why my recommendation is unequivocal despite my aforementioned suggestions and even critical remarks. Because in the holistic context, the habilitation thesis as well as whole scientific achievement of the Candidate fulfil the given habilitation criteria.

## **(6) Final Evaluation**

Finally, I note that the submitted habilitation thesis meets the criteria required for work of this type. At the same time, I add that other requirements for habilitation have been met and several criteria have been even exceeded. Therefore, I suggest to accept the work and continue the habilitation process and, after successful defence, to award the author the scientific and pedagogical title of *docent* (associate professor) in the field 3.1.7 Public Policy and Public Administration.

## **Záverečné hodnotenie**

Na záver konštatujem, že predložená habilitačná práca vyhovuje kritériám, ktoré sú požadované na práce tohto druhu. Zároveň dodávam, že aj ostatné požiadavky kladené

na habilitačné konanie boli splnené a viaceré kritéria prekročené. Navrhujem preto prijať prácu a pokračovať v habilitačnom konaní a po úspešnej obhajobe udeliť autorovi vedecko-pedagogický titul *docent* v odbore 3.1.7 verejná politika a verejná správa.