

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Faculty

Procedure field

Applicant

**Applicant's home unit,
institution**

Habilitation thesis

Reviewer

**Reviewer's home unit,
institution**

Faculty of Social Studies

Social Psychology

Mgr. et Mgr. Jan Šerek, Ph.D.

Faculty of Social Studies,
Masaryk University

Youth civic development from the ecological
perspective

Prof. Elvira Cicognani

Department of Psychology,
University of Bologna

The thesis of Dr. Jan Serek addresses the explanation of civic development during the adolescent period drawing from the theoretical background of the ecological model. It includes seven empirical studies, involving large representative samples of adolescents from Czech Republic as well as other European countries, across two decades, and using a quantitative approach. Each study addresses the explanation of civic development in adolescence focusing on specific factors and processes, though connected within the broader ecological framework.

The ecological perspective is well known and established in the developmental literature, even though its predictions to the specific domain of civic development, including the explanations of the directions of the influences between the variety of influencing factors and processes (at individual level as well as in the different systems), have been so far insufficiently explored. A valuable contribution of the thesis is the convincing attempt to derive and operationalise elements of the model, without neglecting its complexity and interdependencies, by testing a set of novel and original hypotheses on the operation of factors and processes at the different systemic levels, thus offering a “fresh” view that improves our understanding of civic development. Among them, the findings on the impact of adolescent participation experiences (and thus, their agentic role) on the formation of their civic knowledge and attitudes; the role of historical factors and societal changes that impact on generations and cohorts of youth; of macrosocial factors that characterize different national contexts in which young people engage; of a “neglected” component of the family microsystem like siblings; of individual level personality dispositions. Altogether, the seven empirical studies that compose the thesis nicely demonstrate how both environmental and contextual factors and individual differences need to be jointly considered in order to provide explanations of the phenomenon. Moreover, the studies convincingly show the need to address the contents of adolescent participation and the specific activities that young people engage in, including their quality and empowering potential.

The methodological approach is sound and the use of longitudinal data strengthens the validity of the associations among variables, traditionally tested mostly through cross

sectional approaches. The results complement (and even challenge) existing findings, and raise new questions and concerns to be pursued in future research.

Overall, the thesis convincingly demonstrates that the candidate Dr. Jan Serek is a fully mature researcher, with extensive knowledge on the domain of study, capacity to significantly innovate the field by challenging established knowledge and opening up interesting new directions, strong methodological/statistical competences in quantitative research, attention toward the practical implications and impact of the research for improving educational and societal problems.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence (number of questions up to the reviewer)

1.Theory: the ecological model is a useful framework but lacks specificity in the predictions of specific relationships and associations among factors and processes within and across the different systems, thus requiring to refer to other models for interpretations of specific patterns of associations and directions of effects. How (if possible) could we help to elaborate a “mid-level” theory of civic development in adolescence capable to integrate the different specific findings into a broader, and testable, model?

2.Methodology: in several points (e.g. when discussing the differences according to the contents of civic engagement activities, or the nature of family interactions) it appears that the interpretations of findings might benefit from the addition of a qualitative approach, which might help further corroborate them and shed light on unanswered questions by the quantitative approach. Please elaborate on possible ways to pursue this.

Conclusion

The habilitation thesis entitled “Youth civic development from the ecological perspective “ by Jan Šerek **fulfils** requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Social Psychology.

Date:
15 August 2019

Signature:

