

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Faculty

Faculty of Social Studies

Applicant

Mgr. Lucie Galčanová Batista, Ph.D.

Habilitation thesis

Ageing, Change and Belonging: How older people interpret social, cultural and environmental change in the context of post-socialist transformation

Reviewer

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Review report

This habilitation thesis, consisting of an introduction, five journal articles and one book chapter, forms a coherent whole that reflects depth of scholarship across interconnected fields of enquiry. The works span one decade and are testimony to thoughtful development of concepts over time and pursuit of an innovative research agenda.

The included works are consistently and logically grounded within constructivist epistemology which aligns with the conceptualisation of age / ageing as relational, negotiated social categories / practices generating symbolic and social boundaries. The constructivist framework adopted throughout lends the whole body of work methodological and theoretical consistency.

The unifying concept is change – social, cultural and environmental. This combination brings interest and originality to the body of work: it is rare, and a distinct merit of the habilitation thesis, that these different yet interconnected 'types' of change are examined in an integrated manner. The cultural, postcolonial and environmental 'turns' constitute the underpinnings of the author's approach to the study of change. These are clearly and accurately outlined at the outset, and the section outlining the postcolonial turn is particularly lucid and insightful. The decision to organise the theoretical chapter around the three 'turns' is a useful contribution in its own right that gives future researchers in social gerontology a compact map of where the field has been and where it is heading.

The included studies are framed as investigations of cultural and environmental aspects of ageing in the post-socialist context. Studies I, IV and VI relate to the environmental turn in social gerontology, ranging from urban ageing in the post-socialist context to rural ageing and its intersection with climate change. The progression towards an increasingly sophisticated appreciation of the relationship between ageing, 'environment' (variously understood) and the post-socialist context is evident across these three studies. Paper IV yields the valuable and novel concept of *biographical contextualisation*, referring to interpretation of current conditions from the perspective of long-term, spatially anchored, and culturally shaped experiences. The attention paid to the 'satisfaction paradox' whereby older rural residents describe objectively worsening conditions in positive terms, is a good example

of the kind of counter-intuitive, well-evidenced insight this body of work has yielded because of its qualitative, grounded approach.

Study II is closely linked to the 'postcolonial turn' as it investigates the processes of transitioning from third to fourth age, rendering an in-depth analysis of meaning-making during in this transition.

Study III represents an imaginative application of the cultural gerontology lens to a well-known piece of Czech literature that continues to shape imaginaries of grandmotherhood. This is deftly linked to the narrative construction of identities and social performances of grandparenthood, which in most cases reflect resistance to the 'traditional' literary model.

Study V examines the ethics of policies and practices that both rendered older people vulnerable and framed them as a group deserving of protection during the coronavirus pandemic, illustrative of the ambivalences that characterise much of policymaking oriented to the older age groups.

Study VI yields important insights into processes where experiential knowledge of environmental changes plays a central role but does not always lead to heightened climate change awareness. The finding that pre-existing beliefs shape how climate-related events and processes are interpreted is a valuable insight which implies that the volume and proximity of experiences do not automatically produce higher sensitivity to climate change.

This habilitation thesis offers a genuinely coherent scholarly synthesis that reflects the intellectual discipline behind the project: Galčanová Batista does not simply catalogue a decade of research on ageing in post-socialist contexts but builds a sustained argument about how older people actively make sense of change through the lenses of belonging, identity, and boundary-work.

By reading her own six studies against the three 'turns' in the field, Galčanová Batista demonstrates how apparently disparate empirical projects — on urban ageing, the "fourth age," grandmothing archetypes, rural change, pandemic research ethics, and climate perception — in fact triangulate a single underlying phenomenon: understanding of change as a reflection of ongoing, actively negotiated cultural and environmental relationalities.

The commentary is also commendably transparent and reflexive. The explicit breakdown of authorship contribution and funding for each co-authored study reflects intellectual honesty about the collaborative nature of empirical social science, and the discussion of research ethics during the pandemic (Study V) shows a willingness to turn the same critical gaze on the research process itself. This reflexivity extends to the author's positioning as an ageing researcher, which lends the work authenticity.

Taken as a whole, this is a mature and well-integrated piece of scholarship. It succeeds on three fronts: as a synthesis of an important and growing subfield (environmental and cultural gerontology), as a methodological model for constructivist qualitative research on ageing, and as a sustained empirical demonstration that older adults are active interpreters of the social, cultural, and environmental transformations reshaping their worlds. The breadth of contexts covered (urban, rural, institutional, climatic) combined with the consistency of theoretical lens is a strength, and the commentary succeeds in making six independently published papers feel like chapters of one deliberate, cumulative research programme. The six studies reflect remarkably timely and coherent thinking across several interrelated fields. I learned much from reading this thesis and commend its reach, depth and relevance not only within gerontology but extending to several other fields, including rurality research and environmental studies.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence

How would you characterise your methodological learning from the research projects that led to these six publications? What are the strengths and limitations of some of the most common methods used in qualitative research on older people and change? What do you consider to be the most promising (innovative) directions in research methods in the relevant fields of enquiry?

Drawing together findings from these six studies, what are the most general theory-oriented statements that could be formulated, along the lines of “changing environments in old age are interpreted through...”, “understandings of change in old age are framed...” or similar formulations that summarise the potentially transferable insights from this body of work?

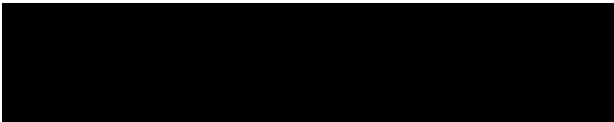
Based on your research, how would you advise policymakers to think about older adults and ageing populations in the era of climate change? What kinds of relatively accessible concepts and frameworks, including ones that you have used and developed, would be useful in moving beyond stereotypical or binary representations of older people as ‘culprits’ and ‘victims’?

Conclusion

The habilitation thesis entitled “Ageing, Change and Belonging: How older people interpret social, cultural and environmental change in the context of post-socialist transformation” by Mgr. Lucie Galčanová Batista, Ph.D., **fulfils** requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of sociology.

Date: 6th of July 2026

Signature:

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the reviewer.

Virpi Timonen