OPPONENT'S ASSESSMENT OF A WRITTEN THESIS

Thesis title: The Myth of Žižkov: Searching Underground
Thesis author: Olivia Morris Andersén
Programme of study: Photography
Programme type: continuing Master's

Definition of objectives and their fulfilment:

The thesis of Olivia Morris Andresén focuses on the Žižkov district; the author explores the contradictions between the "underground" image of Žižkov (an image constructed mainly within the selected sets of documentary photographs) and the current socio-economic situation of this district, which is significantly determined by the process of gentrification. The aim of the thesis is thus clearly formulated, and in principle, it can be said that the author has succeeded in fulfilling it.

Topicality of the thesis topic (and relevance of the selected methodology in the case of a Master's thesis):

The thesis deals with the current issue of gentrification of urban space. It is also an interesting probe into the past and present of Žižkov through the perspective of selected authorial photographic documentaries and one set of photographs shared on Instagram. While the theoretical framework is well chosen, and the author works satisfactorily with the selected concepts, the empirical part is somewhat confusing and methodologically inconsistent (see my comments in the Evaluator's overall summary section below).

Scholarly contribution, originality of the thesis, and its utilisation in practice:

In general terms, in addition to the question of gentrification, the author focuses on the transformations of documentary photography and its current position. Specifically, she focuses on mythological and hegemonic discursive structures in photodocumentary depictions of Žižkov, an area that has not been explored.

Logical construction and structuring of the thesis:

The thesis has a logical and clear structure. I especially appreciate the author's ability to conclude each subchapter with a summary of the key arguments.

Formal requirements and requisite contents of the thesis, including its length:

The thesis is of satisfactory quality in terms of formal requirements and requisite contents.

Work with information sources:

The author correctly works with a sufficient number of relevant sources.

Level of language, style and terminology:

The work has a satisfactory linguistic and stylistic quality (in some places, the text would deserve more consistent editing, e.g., typos appear), and the work with terminology is satisfactory. However, in the methodological context, it is sometimes somewhat inaccurate.

Evaluator's overall summary:

Olivia Morris Andersén submitted a thesis on a very interesting topic. The aim of the thesis and the theoretical exposition introducing the concepts of mythological and discursive hegemony and genius loci are satisfactory. I appreciate the author's attempt to apply sociological research techniques and methods in her work! However, it is a pity that she does so with several shortcomings. Below I summarize my methodological comments, which are only marginally reflected in my overall evaluation since the sociological methodology is not part of the FAMU curriculum.

- The analytical part of the work methodologically bears the features of semiotic analysis, discourse analysis, and quantitative content analysis. However, the integration of these approaches is somewhat unconvincing. In my view, writing about selected sets of photographs using a given theoretical framework was possible without the author resorting to quantitative research.

- The selection of the sets of photographs is unconvincing. The author works with different-sized sets of photographs, with images from short or long-term projects, from which she selects relatively different numbers of photographs. These steps make her "quantitative" conclusions unconvincing. In other words, the analyzed sets of photographs are so diverse that their quantitative analysis is meaningless.

- The selection of the sample of photographs bears the features of a random sample selection, albeit methodologically flawed. For example, selecting every 20th photograph from a given set is a good idea, but it needs to be based on a random selection of the first photograph from which every 20th will be counted.

- In the section devoted to analyzing the photographs, the detailed illustrative analyses of the photographic cases are the thesis's most vital and convincing part. In my opinion, this is how the whole empirical part of the thesis should have looked like.

- The very selection of the sets of photographs subjected to analysis is somewhat dubious. Simply put, it is problematic to look for how urban changes are or are not captured in documentary photographs that do not address the issue of changes in the urban environment of Žižkov.

Questions and topics for discussion at the oral defence:

The thesis states: "This paper is a qualitative case study, using mainly deductive tools, to conduct a historical and contemporary content-analysis." (p. 24) This sentence is confusing because qualitative research is, by its nature, mainly inductive. Please explain what "deductive tools in your qualitative research" mean.

Recommendation of the thesis for the oral defence:
I recommend the thesis for defence.

Recommended grade: B

Date of elaboration of this assessment:
1/6/2023

Michal Šimůnek   1/6/2023

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Name of the thesis opponent   (date and signature)