

## 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

PhDr. Martina Klicperová, CSc.

Institute of Psychology,

Czech Academy of Sciences

The thesis of dr. Šerek is devoted to "Youth civic development from the ecological perspective," it consists of seven empirical studies of consistently outstanding quality which were published in significant psychological journals. The thesis stands out by its strong points:

1. The theme is very socially relevant, especially in the current period of democratic decline.
2. The author poses significant and innovative research questions (he challenged the traditional assumptions, such as directionality of political interest and political protest; he disentangled influences of parents and peers and the role of siblings; he revealed differences between volunteering in the post-revolutionary and consolidated democratic period, etc).
3. Although based solely on questionnaires, his methodology is strong, derived from the comprehensive ecological approach, sometimes using a brief longitudinal perspective and always including advanced data treatment which he performed himself and which includes use of contemporary software, sophisticated modelling, invariance testing, checks of randomness of missings etc.
4. The language is clear and precise, the style is elegant, the articles read very well and the reader can get easily drawn into the process, curious whether the author's hypotheses will or will not be confirmed.
5. The hypotheses are derived from cogent insight into the current literature and the key concepts; correspondingly, the results are soundly interpreted, thoroughly discussed and compared to other relevant findings.
6. The studies make a logical convolute which is mapping the theme of civic development in relation to major factors.
7. The results may well contribute to a better civic education for adolescents

I have a few remarks to the text:

The reader casually flipping through the convolute may erroneously assume that all the studies were written by the single author. The co-authorship is clearly revealed on page 20 and on the next page the author quantitatively specifies his percentage of contribution. Still, the reader might prefer if the authors would be always spelled out under each article title in a customary manner.

The above-mentioned elegant and error-free style of writing applies less to the Introduction. Although the grammar rules are becoming more permissive lately, still in general, in scientific literature 'statistical data' call for a verb in plural.

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

1. I am curious whether some of the results could not have been influenced by social desirability of respondents. E.g., in study II, when students are asked about prosocial parenting, class atmosphere, and their civic identity, one can imagine a falsely increased correlation of these variables as a result of an attempt to provide the „right answers.“ Could that be a concern and if so, are there ways to prevent it?
2. Along a similar line of thought, practically all studies in the thesis are based on questionnaires. Did the author at any point, particularly when he himself designed the project, considered including also some other tasks for the students, such as a simple knowledge quiz or a test of comprehension of a political cartoon to increase validity of such measures as political interest (such as Torney-Purta did in her IEA civic education study)?
3. On page 49 the author mentions “a relatively well-developed pre-1989 informal and dissident civil society...” What is this positive evaluation of the former civil society based on? Civil society (občanská společnost) may be defined in various ways but as I personally remember the pre-1989 situation, there was not much space left between closed family circles and the state which interfered with all activities, including interest clubs, and professional organizations; the Communist Party planted confidants among friends and colleagues, it managed to corrupt even a substantial part of top clergy.
4. When reading in Study VII about shyness undermining political self-efficacy (e.g., on top of page 163), I could not help not to think of President Václav Havel. Did he also come to your mind in this context – a shy president?
5. Can you please explain, how did you proceed in case of “stratified multistage random sampling method (i.e., districts, schools, classes)...used to obtain e-mail contacts of 1.000 young people living in the South Moravian region” (p. 29, beginning of the second half). And when you “employed cluster sampling of schools within four (out of 14) regions,” (p. 164 – the first sentence in the Methods section) does it mean you sampled mostly in the neighbouring regions? Convenience samples are OK but you may want to share the information with the reader.
6. My last comment / suggestion is related to Study VI. I understand that when reanalyzing existing survey data, one has a very limited choice of variables. Your analysis of national and European citizenship based on the ICCS data is very interesting. Still, I think it is a challenge to infer from the data of 14 year olds on various levels of their citizenship which can span from local (parochial) level over national, European to the world citizenship. Based on your knowledge of the data, do you think it would be possible (for example by use of cluster analysis) to learn still something more about the students and their leaning to respective citizenship types? About their „citizenship maturity“ (progress from parochialism) and perhaps about their involvement on multiple levels of citizenship (e.g., to be at the same time a good European and environmentalist)?

### **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: August 13, 2019

Signature: 