

## HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

<b>Masaryk University</b>	Faculty of social studies
<b>Faculty</b>	Sociology
<b>Procedure field</b>	PhD Adéla Soralová
<b>Applicant</b>	Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social studies, Masaryk University
<b>Applicant's home unit, institution</b>	<i>"Grandchildhood: Practices, meanings, relations"</i>
<b>Habilitation thesis</b>	Professor Haldis Haukanes, PhD
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### *Assessment of habilitation thesis of Adéla Soralová; Masaryk University, Czech Republic*

This habilitation thesis offers a thorough and unique exploration of the phenomena of grandchildhood, as it is perceived by the grandchildren themselves. Based on qualitative interviews with grandchildren living in three-generational households, it explores in great detail intimate daily interaction and relationships between grandparents and grandchildren, and diverse cultural meanings of grandchildhood. The thesis aims both to "contribute to the ongoing research on intergenerational family relationships" ...and to "contribute conceptually by developing the notion of grandchild practices" (p.8). The practice orientation of the work is at its core: the author convincingly argues that only through exploring the daily practices that unfold in the relationship between co-habiting grandparents and grandchildren, can we come understand the substance of the relationship, it's building blocks and the cement that hold it together.

Chapter 1 gives a clear and straight forward introduction to the book, presenting its core aims and its structure. Chapter 2 presents the research context of the study and reviews existing research in the field of grandparent-grandchildren relationships, also pointing out the particularities of researching grandchild practices in a setting where the two generations share a roof. The chapter develops on the concept of grandchild practices introduced in Chapter 1, and poses excellent questions to what such practices may be and how they unfold in daily life (p.39-41). Towards the end of the chapter we learn about the research on

which the thesis is based, and we get some (rather sparse) information about the study participants (gender, age and class background). Ch. 2 demonstrates the author's broad knowledge of the research area and provides useful conceptual tools and distinctions for the empirical analysis carried out in chapters 3-7. Reading this broad and detailed review of literature it is clear that the author has in depth knowledge of field not only from the perspective of sociology, but also social anthropology and social psychology. For this reader, some sections in the chapter appear as unnecessarily detailed, though. A number of different typologies and categorizations are presented (styles of grandparenting, layers of grandparenthood, dimensions of mediation of grandparenthood, predictors of frequency of contact etc.); some useful, but others too detailed and thus less interesting. Another weakness of the chapter is that it is, with some notable exceptions (e.g. page 24-26), is written in what we could call a kind of "present tense", not paying enough attention to the time period when the studies presented were conducted. Studies from the 1970s are juxtaposed with very recent studies, without really making a point out of them being produced in two very different historical periods. This brings me to another point, namely the manifestation of a certain lack of socio-cultural and historical contextualization (see also below). The chapter does not pay a lot of attention to the whereabouts of the different studies presented and I ask myself: are these studies mainly conducted in/based on material from the US or Western Europe? I would think so, but the chapter does not say. More strikingly, however, is the fact that the particular historical and socio-cultural context of the Czech Republic is difficult to detect, both in this chapter and in others (see below). The author cite a wide range of studies in her work, but I only counted some 7-8 publications from the Czech Republic in the reference list (the authors' own publications not counted). This may have to do with the fact that there are a few studies carried out on the particular topic of grandparenthood, but why not mention more of the excellent family-related research produced by a broad range of Czech sociologists ( H. Hašková, H. Maříková, I. Možny, T. Sobotka etc)? I also wonder: how common is intergenerational co-habitation in the Czech Republic as compared to for example the EU average? From my own (anecdotal) experience from ethnographic research in the country (mainly in rural areas, but also in smaller towns) it is not so uncommon as what it may appear from reading the book. In any case: Some statistical data on this would have been useful.

Finally, I miss more discussions of changing norms of parenting and – by implication - grandparenting. I would have liked to see reflections around what has happened/is happening to the role of grandparents with evolving tendencies such as the democratization

of parent-child relations, or with intensive parenthood becoming a norm in many societies, including, I believe, the Czech Republic.

Chapter 3 on *Multigenerational Living as a Context for grandchild practices*, serves as a kind of preamble to the chapters examining grandchild practices in detail, and provides highlighting explorations of the positives and negatives of co-habitation, as expressed by the study participants. Already from this chapter we come to understand one of the major analytical strength of this thesis, namely the ability of the author to explore intimate details, nuances and contrasts in the material, and make them meaningful and comprehensible to the reader through substantive, experience near categorization and analysis. Both in this chapter and the following empirical chapters of the thesis it would have been useful – if the data is available - to get a more detailed presentation of the physical arrangements of the co-habitation which frames the two generations' interaction. How do they live? What does the house look like? Do they generation have separate front doors? Is grandmother living in a room inside a big flat? Etc. In a few instances such physical arrangements are exposed, which is excellent, but I would have loved to see more of it. For example, on page 59: when Charlotte speaks about “going” to her grandmother, what does that involve? Running down the stairs, crossing a garden or just entering her grandmother’s room without knocking?

Chapters 4-7 form the core of the thesis, or its heart, I would say. They give us deep insights into grandchild practices and their meanings. The division of the chapters into the themes of *Daily life practices* (Ch. 4), *Alliance, Gaze and mediation* (Ch. 5), *Learning and teaching grandchildhood* (Ch. 6) and *Reciprocal caring relationships* (Ch. 7) is sound, and provides the ground for an excellent presentation of a most fascinating, unique and moving empirical material, the analysis of which is deep, wise and inspirational.

The richness of the analysis notwithstanding, I still miss the inclusion of what one could call a more ethnographic or “local” contextualization. I understand that the thesis is written with an international readership in mind. Still, for a reader like me (and I guess that the book, when published, will have many of my kind), i.e. a person from “outside” who is quite familiar with Czech society but is eager to learn more, it is a bit frustrating that the findings are so rarely interpreted with reference to particularities of Czech society – its history, cultural specificities and social circumstances. Which particular “conditions of intelligibility” could be operating here? Why this kind of food, these kinds of questions about education, these tensions around politics? The grandchildren belong to the post-communist generation, while the grandparents came of age and have lived a good part of their grown-up lives under state

socialism. With the exception of a brief discussion about avoidance of politics in Chapter 7 (pages 130-32) this fact is barely mentioned; is it not of any importance at all?? If not, why? And why has the author chosen to give the study participants English-sounding names? That does not make sense to me.

Before presenting the book to an international publishing house (which should definitely be done), I would recommend the author to work to include more "local" contextualization and frames of interpretation, both to deepen the analysis and give the reader a better "sense of place".

In conclusion: This is an analytically clear and well written habilitation thesis of high academic quality, and a great contribution to the field of grandchildhood studies. The above mentioned weaknesses taken into consideration, it clearly fulfills the requirements of a habilitation thesis in the field of sociology.

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

As I will not be present during the defence, I will not have any question.

## **Conclusion**

The habilitation thesis entitled "Grandchildhood: Practices, meanings, relations" by Adéla Souralová **fulfils** requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Sociology.

Date:  
Bergen, 25.01.2021

Signature:

