

CHARLES UNIVERSITY
Faculty of Social Sciences
Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism

MA THESIS REVIEW

Review type:

Review by thesis supervisor Review by opponent

Thesis author:

Surname and given name: Helena Elizabeth Minsky

Thesis title: Constructions of Coastal Conservation in Ireland

Reviewer:

Surname and given name: Nicoletta Gerardo Costabile

Affiliation: Charles University, CULCORC

1. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND THESIS (mark one box for each row)

		Conforms to approved research proposal	Changes are well explained and appropriate	Changes are explained but are inappropriate	Changes are not explained and are inappropriate	Does not conform to approved research proposal
1.1	Research objective(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.2	Methodology	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.3	Thesis structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

COMMENTARY:

The thesis matches the research proposal submitted. The initial research proposal has been fully developed in the thesis, with promising outcomes and interesting results. The student has also integrated suggested literature in the proposal, which has helped to develop a more robust argument.

2. EVALUATION OF THE THESIS CONTENT

Use letters A – B – C – D – E – F (A=best, F= failed)

		Grade
2.1	Quality and appropriateness of the theoretical framework	A
2.2	Ability to critically evaluate and apply the literature	B
2.3	Quality and soundness of the empirical research	B
2.4	Ability to select the appropriate methods and to use them correctly	A
2.5	Quality of the conclusion	A
2.6	Thesis originality and its contribution to academic knowledge production	A

COMMENTARY:

The thesis is a fascinating and promising research that applies discourse theory and discourse-material approach to study the construction of conservation discourses sustaining national and international policies in the context of Ireland. The work has combined selected literature streams that help further develop a discursive approach to conservation policies in coastal areas of Ireland. In fact, constructivist approaches to natural conservation policies are among the newest social sciences and humanities research fields that try to overcome the traditional and consolidated positivist approach to environmental studies. From this point of view, it is very remarkable how the student has combined a study of an often complicated matter, such as national and international policy-making on natural conservation, with a current post-structuralist and post-colonial understanding of the discursive construction of nature. The value of the thesis resides in its very attempt to reflect on different dimensions of coastal conservation, namely the cultural and linguistic dimension with the political economy, the political ecology and the postcolonial dimension, in order to offer an original and promising argument about the anthropocentric and economic articulation of conservation policies. Due to the thesis's complexity and ambition, it is appreciable how the student can maintain a clear line of argument throughout the work, highlighting how the multidimensionality of conservationist ideology

entangles cultural, material and geopolitical issues while underlying how global environmental governance reproduces local-international power asymmetries. The thesis, in fact, clearly highlights how conservationist discourse embedded in policy documents implies a discursive construction of spaces, socio-political conflicts and human-nature relationships in the context of broader conflicts over sovereignty and the distribution of wealth and power in global colonial capitalism. Highlighting the socio-ecological complexity behind the mainstream deliberations about nature conservation, the thesis fully acknowledges the necessity for a democratic approach to conservation policy, following current posthuman and ecocentric approaches towards ecosystems, human and non-human actors. The development of the argument shows a full grasp of the student of the current problematics linked to the predicament of the Anthropocene and signal the needs of empirical sounding research able to unravel anthropocentric and instrumentalist articulation of nature while highlighting the needs to strength local and non-human voices in the construction of more just ecological policies.

3. EVALUATION OF THE THESIS FORM

Use letters A – B – C – D – E – F (A=best, F= failed)

		Grade
3.1	Quality of the structure	A
3.2	Quality of the argumentation	A
3.3	Appropriate use of academic terminology	A
3.4	Quality, quantity and appropriateness of the citations (both in the theory part and in the empirical part)	A
3.5	Conformity to quotation standards (*)	A
3.6	Use of an academic writing style, and correct use of language (both grammar and spelling)	A
3.6	Quality of the textual lay-outing and appendices	B

(*) in case the text contains quotations without references, the grade is F; in case the text contains plagiarised parts, do not recommend the thesis for defence and suggest disciplinary action against the author instead.

COMMENTARY

The thesis has a clear and well-structured form that sustains all the lines of argumentation. The literature review is on point and helps construct the research questions' background, guiding the reader in navigating the complex issue of coastal conservation in a specific national context. It clearly presents a selection of debates in the literature and discusses them concisely and precisely, with a wise and appropriate use of academic terminology. Both the theoretical framework and methodology chapters have a clear structure, present the concepts that structure the empirical analysis, and show a robust mastery of the conceptual apparatus used in the development of the argument. The organisation of the analysed materials helps the reader follow the evolution of conservation policy documents at the national and international levels. Finally, each section of the discussion is able to present a clear answer to each research question proposed by the thesis. The student shows a proper capacity for academic writing, with a precise and enjoyable use of language. Quotations are properly used both in the discussion of the literature and the construction of the theoretical framework and are very well distributed in the proper empirical analysis of the policy texts. The conclusion summarizes the whole thesis and reconnects to the introduction. The textual layout is good even though no page interruption is present at the end of each chapter. The only minor problem worth highlighting is a missing outline of the thesis in the introduction with a bullet point summary of each chapter. Despite that, formally speaking, the thesis is a good work that could be potentially submitted for publication in specialized journals after very minor revisions. Overall, the thesis form fulfils the requirements of a robust and rigorous presentation of the argument.

4. OVERALL EVALUATION (provide a summarizing list of the thesis's strengths and weaknesses):

The thesis offers a valuable effort to develop a post-structuralist and post-colonial discourse theoretical approach to environmental policy, more specifically to coastal conservation as developed within and through national and international governance. Furthermore, it has the merit of integrating a broader discussion about the continuity of power asymmetries both at local and international dimensions, underlying the colonial roots and continuity of conservationist and economic articulation of environmental protection policy. Given the current development of ascending transdisciplinary fields of research such as environmental humanities, environmental communication, decolonial studies and political ecology, the thesis represents an appreciable effort to reflect through sounding empirical analysis of urgent issues of the predicament of the Anthropocene. The merit of the thesis is way higher than the minor formal weakness mentioned in the previous comments. Overall, the thesis represents a more than satisfactory outcome of the combination of different disciplinary fields, such as discourse studies, postcolonialism and decolonial studies and critical policy studies, that the

student successfully grasped throughout her MARS Master's. My overall evaluation of the thesis is more than positive, and it should be considered worth being awarded as a promising groundwork able to set a robust and solid investigation of the discursive construction of nature in our postcolonial global society.

5. QUESTIONS OR TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED DURING THE THESIS DEFENSE:

5.1	Why can conservation policies be considered anthropocentric?
5.2	How does international environmental governance reproduce the colonial framing of nature?
5.3	How can discourse theory help us disentangle environmental ideologies?
5.4	What could be a democratic approach to conservation policy?

6. ANTIPLAGIARISM CHECK

The reviewer is familiar with the thesis' URKUND score.

If the score is above 5%, please evaluate and indicate problems:

6.1	
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6. SUGGESTED GRADE OF THE THESIS AS A WHOLE (choose one or two)

- A** excellent
B very good (above average but with some weaknesses)
C good (average with some important weaknesses)
D satisfactory (below average with significant weaknesses)
E marginal pass (meeting minimal requirements)
F not recommended for defence

If the mark is an "F", please provide your reasons for not recommending the thesis for defence:

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Date: 17 May 2024

Signature: 

A finalised review should be printed, signed and submitted in two copies to the secretary of the Department of Media Studies. The electronic version of the review should be converted into a PDF and uploaded to SIS, or sent to the Department of Media Studies secretary who will upload it to SIS on the reviewer's behalf.

Do not upload PDFs with a scanned signature, the review uploaded to SIS must be without signature.