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Evaluation of the doctoral dissertation “Self-sufficiency in basic resources as a strategy for resources management in settlements? A critical discussion and conceptual model to guide degrowth-oriented pursuits of self-sufficiency”, presented by Mr Robert Skrzypczynski

As requested, please find herewith my review of the doctoral thesis of Robert Skrzypczynski entitled “Self-sufficiency in basic resources as a strategy for resources management in settlements? A critical discussion and conceptual model to guide degrowth-oriented pursuits of self-sufficiency”, completed and submitted at the Politechnika Wroclawaka in the discipline of “Architecture and Urban Planning”.

The thesis pursues four main research questions:

- (1) What key issues should the conceptualisation of self-sufficiency address to make it operative for research and practise
- (2) Why and what benefits has been self-sufficiency pursued in, or postulated for, settlements and other territorial units?
- (3) To what extent can the pursuit of degrowth-oriented self-sufficiency in ecovillages serve as a model for the management of basic resources in settlements?
- (4) What measures can be implemented in settlements as means to pursue degrowth oriented self-sufficiency in basic resources?

This doctoral thesis is set up as a monograph, consisting of four main chapters, which can be considered to some degree as self-standing units: Chapter (1) introduces in different notions and dimensions of self-sufficiency; chapter (2) where the candidate explicates the reasons or motivations for self-sufficiency; chapter (3) investigates empirically self-sufficiency in ecovillages, with empirical material on (i) global level and (ii) from Poland; chapter 3 is the only chapter in which empirical material is presented; and chapter (4) presenting a conceptual model to guide degrowth-oriented approaches to self-sufficiency in basic resources (water, electricity, food). Chapter 3 is based on/summarizing three publications, where the candidate was presenting his research in (i) two journals of local/polish importance (one of these co-authored), and (ii) a single authored publication in the journal 'European Countryside', which is SCImago Q2 and SCOPUS indexed.

The general guidelines for preparing reviews resulting from the provisions of Polish law stipulate the following review criteria for the doctoral thesis:

- (1) it should be an original solution to a scientific problem, or
- (2) it should be an original solution to a problem, based on design, construction or technological development (...), and
- (3) it should demonstrate the general theoretical knowledge of the candidate in a given scientific discipline, and
- (4) demonstrate the candidate's ability to conduct independent scientific work

Criteria 1/2: Original Solution to scientific problem/problem based on design

The stated objective of the thesis is to make a valuable contribution to the ongoing academic discourses concerning de-growth, self-sufficiency, and planning. The thesis inquires the integration of self-sufficiency within planning frameworks, particularly within the realms of residential and urban development. It seeks to foster a transition away from conventional growth-centric planning paradigms, ushering in a shift towards de-growth and post-growth theories, methodologies and practises. These inquiries are significant from a scholarly vantage point, as they challenge deeply entrenched planning norms, which find their origins in post-World War II growth-centric conceptualizations. The pertinence of these inquiries is not limited to scholarly and theoretical debates; they also present an intricate dilemma for the praxis of planning. This thesis offers a series of conceptual considerations in Chapter 4 that also provides guidance for potential future policy formulation and implementation in addressing this intricate challenge. It is evident that the candidate fulfils the stipulated requirements.

Criterion 3: General theoretical knowledge in a given scientific discipline

The candidate provides an extensive overview of relevant theoretical frameworks and conceptual paradigms, which are currently 'en vogue' within diverse planning and planning-related discourses. These include but are not limited to theoretical concepts such as degrowth, post-growth, transition studies, post/normal - mode2 science, planetary boundaries, urban metabolism/social metabolism, stock-flow analysis/Human appropriation of net primary production (HANPP), and self-sufficiency, among others.

While the candidate showcases a wide array of theoretical concepts, signifying his awareness of ongoing discourses and scholarship, it would have been advantageous to exercise discernment in selecting the concepts for presentation. Moreover, a more deliberate effort towards operationalization and empirical substantiation could have been beneficial. In specific instances, such as in Chapter 3.4.4 addressing transitions, it could have been more prudent to adhere to the original theoretical framework (as in the case of de-growth), adequately interpreting the findings, instead of introducing an additional concept (transition studies). This recurrent concern traverses the entirety of the thesis, wherein numerous concepts are introduced. However, there appears to be an absence of either (i) own robust empirical corroboration for the candidate's theoretical assertions, or (ii) a compelling interconnection forged among these manifold concepts at certain junctures. Such considerations, worthy of reflection, may be discussed during the viva examination.

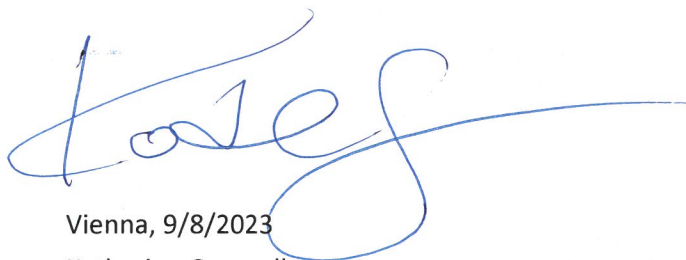
Criterion 4: Ability to conduct independent scientific work

The candidate demonstrates his capacity for conducting independent scientific research and generating scholarly outcomes. Notably, the outcomes presented in Chapter 3 have found their way into academic journals (one article presented in an SCImago Q2/Scopus indexed journal), validating the candidate's capability to generate substantial results fit for publication in peer-reviewed publishing outlets. Chapters 1 and 2, constituting literature-based sections, offer a commendable introduction into contemporary discourses. However, enhancing the review's depth through elaboration on (i) the criteria underpinning literature selection and (ii) the methodologies employed for scrutinizing the collated literature could have yielded greater accountability, transparency, and methodological rigor. Employing more structured analytical approaches, such as PRISMA or bibliometrics, could have further strengthened the study's methodological underpinnings. Chapter 3 showcases the candidate's skill in designing and carrying out empirical research, leading to valuable findings. In Chapter 4, he displays his capacity for conceptual thinking, crafting a model, partly translated into potential policy goals, instruments and practises. Yet, it's not entirely clear whether the typologies introduced in the thesis are drawn from existing knowledge (deductively derived) or from the candidate's own research (bottom-up developed). The candidate highlights the thesis's abstract nature, which is reflected in how he extensively contextualizes existing literature and established research work.

Overall Assessment and Summarising statement

The thesis is a meaningful contribution to the ongoing planning discourses that delve into the realms of de-growth- and post-growth planning. While some empirical limitations and a certain theoretical 'density' (crowdedness) are discernible, the thesis aligns with all prescribed criteria as outlined in the provided guidelines. The doctoral thesis presented by Mr. Robert Skrzypczynski meets essential requisites of a doctoral thesis and satisfactory showcases the candidate's ability to independently conduct research within this specific field of research. Consequently, I advocate for its acceptance for public defense.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Katharina Gugerell', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Vienna, 9/8/2023

Katharina Gugerell