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Young Third-country Immigrant's Transition to Work and Activation Policies in Austria, Finland, and the Czech Republic.

Opponent's Review of the Dissertation Thesis

The submitted thesis has a very unusual structure. The thesis is based mainly on summaries of sixteen published and non-published articles by the author (and not all the published articles were published in high-quality journals). The author tries to interconnect these texts to other chapters but it is obvious that the connection is too artificial, or the connection is not clear. As a result, the thesis has the following shortcomings:

Relevance of the topic:

The author deals with young third-country immigrant's transition to work and activation policies in Austria, Finland, and the Czech Republic. But the topic is not based on any stated research problem. How many young third-country immigrants are (in a long-term period) unemployed in these countries? How many of them receive social benefits (the author addressed targeting of social benefits, and dependence on benefits and activation but only in conceptual framework)? What is the cause and consequence of unemployment of young third-country immigrants (why is their unemployment a problem in these countries, i.e. in Austria, Finland, and the Czech Republic)? Due to the absence of the problem definition, the author cannot expect that his thesis will have any contribution to the public policy, especially as at least in the Czech Republic young third-country immigrant's unemployment is not a problem given the quantitative level of the number of young third-country immigrants.

Terminology:

The usage of terminology is one of my major complaints. The author uses terminology inconsistently with different meanings. E.g. it is not clear what he means when he writes about private agencies – does he talk about profit or non-profit agencies? Very often he does not distinguish between the two, or rather he connects the term private agency only with non-profit agencies. Simultaneously, sometimes he links a non-profit organization with public employment services, e.g. when he writes about non-profit organizations as “municipalities”. The same applies to the terms government and public employment services which he does not

define (in the Czech Republic case study he does not include into public employment services the labour offices although these are the main actors in the activation process).

Major comments for the theoretical part:

I miss an in-depth activation theory. The activation process is very complex and includes a lot of topics to be discussed (as the author correctly states; nevertheless, he talks about individual issues as e.g. contracting-out, work-related incentives, targeting benefits in the chapter “conceptual framework” which he does not interconnect with the activation theory description – one paragraph only – and which he does not see as a whole. Furthermore, he does not link this theoretical framework to the thesis results.

Major comments for the methodological part:

The methodology part of the thesis is very weak, in my opinion, insufficient even for a diploma thesis. The author states that his thesis (and the presented published/nonpublished articles) is “based on a qualitative cross-national comparative fewer case study approach where primary and secondary data were collected for analysis.” (p. 51).

I miss all the particular and apparent features of a comparative approach. How could the author make a comparison of the three countries without clear criteria? The problem is related to the above-mentioned lack of activation theory (e.g. operationalization of activation measures).

The primary data were based (only) on nine interviews. I think that for a more detailed and in-depth comparison of the three countries, the number of respondents is too small, especially because the author uses a case study research strategy. However, the main problem and my fundamental complaint is that the selection of respondents is very one-sided and does not cover all groups of actors related to the thesis research questions (government, public employment services, and private agencies). For example in the Czech Republic case study, the author carried out interviews only in two non-profit organizations (no government, no public employment services – no labour offices, and no private profit agencies).

The secondary data consisted of “legislative employment-related Acts and authorized official employment reports and an overview of existing academic literature...” (p. 62). However, despite this proclamation, the author uses mostly the academic literature as the main type of secondary data. He does not analyse the Acts in any great detail and the same applies to the employment reports. Resulting in the thesis being based to a large extent on the statements and findings of other experts, rather than on primary data and author’s analysis of the secondary data, i.e. the analysis of the Acts and the employment reports. As far as legislative documents

are concerned, the Czech Republic case study lacks minimally one more important Act, i.e. Act No. 111/2006, on assistance in material need.

The method of data analysis and processing is debatable and not clear. The analysis is based on the “thematic content analysis (Mayring, 2002; Yen, 2003¹).” (p. 70). I miss working with fundamental texts on thematic content analysis (e.g. Braun and Clarke, 2006), and secondly (and mainly) I think that the thesis does not describe in any specific detail how the author used and processed the data.

Major comments for the results and contribution of the thesis:

As I mentioned above, I do not know which particular criteria the author uses for the comparison, therefore it is very difficult to recognize in which aspects the countries are different and why (e.g. Do the results differ due to the welfare-state status?). From the abstract, the reader can find out that the countries are very similar, and that there are no big differences between them. In chapter 5 (findings and conclusions) the author lists some differences between the three countries, but very generally, and in my opinion, it is unstructured. I recommend creating a table with the criteria and the findings.

The author cannot be denied an effort, activity and ambition during the dissertation writing but a thesis that is based on the case study research strategy (and represents a comparison between countries) should be more specific, more detailed and in-depth. Without research problem definition and using correct methodological procedure the thesis cannot have any contribution to public policy (which, unfortunately, this thesis does not have in my opinion).

For this reason, I cannot assess the work positively. **Unfortunately, from my point of view, the given thesis does not meet the dissertation thesis requirements.** I recommend reworking and incorporating the thesis, especially on the usage of terminology and the method of data collection and analysis.

PhDr. Michaela Hiekischová, Ph.D.

¹ I suppose Yen, 2003 is Yin, 2003. If that is, Yin is a specialist for case studies but I am afraid that in his book (from 2003) he does not write about using thematic analysis (as an analytical technique, there is no description of the particular procedure).