



## REVIEW OF DIPLOMA THESIS

**Review type:** Opponent's Review

**Author of the diploma thesis:** Veronica Armendariz

**Title:** The effects of the structural inequalities in the tertiary educational system in the rural area in Ecuador.

**Author of the review:** Doc. Jan Kohoutek, PhD.

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The submitted diploma thesis takes up the theme of an unequal access to (tertiary) education in the rural areas of Ecuador. This theme is surely timely and relevant for public policy research investigations. The aim of the thesis is more on the quality aspects (“to discover the factors that damage the quality of tertiary education in rural areas in Ecuador”, p. 8) which is in line with the three research questions. The more concrete thesis goals, however, refer more widely to causes of educational inequality (not necessarily in tertiary education) and policies to reduce them (p. 8). The structure of the thesis overall corresponds to the one to expected from theses set in the public policy field.

From the theoretical perspective, the thesis makes use of the theory of social marginalisation related to the issues of inequity in education. The theory is relevant but, at its meta-level, it contributes little to help explain the actual problems of access to rural (tertiary) education in Ecuador. This is one of the major limitations of the thesis, as theoretical assumptions about inequity of access to (tertiary) education, social marginalisation, limitations of rural regions/parts of the country in institutional development and the like are so obvious and generally valid – and known to be generally valid from educational research for decades – that it is almost impossible to problematize them in a particular case, but they, at the same time, due to their generic nature, contribute very little to any minor advancement of knowledge. This problem is exacerbated by the lack of and low availability of the empirical data base – the statistics are often disparate, available for some year/years only, some dated, other crucial missing such as division of the higher education institutions by the urban/rural regions and others.

This makes me assume that there is no central state Ecuadorian authority collecting and publishing major national data by sectors (such as the national statistical office or bureau). However, the generation of at least some of the relevant data could have been the subject for the field research to be carried out in Ecuador. The disparateness and unavailability of the secondary data is attempted to be compensated by providing additional data on Ecuadorian education, not specifically tertiary education, which, however, suffer the same problem. This results in the text which somewhat confusingly combines points and arguments about Ecuadorian education in general and Ecuadorian tertiary education more specifically but always in such general terms that the reader gets very little new knowledge beyond the generic points about inequity of access repeated over and over.

The qualitative methodology of the thesis is another weakness. As suggested, the secondary data leave much to be desired, also in terms of the order of the information they convey. Their information is little enriched by the primary data obtained via interviews with six key



informants. This is because the utilisation of the corresponding data is severely limited in the text, and the interview excerpts are wrongly used to verify the generic arguments about inequity of access rather than to explore into the specifics of the rural-area contexts and concerns. The potential of the interviews (each of 60 minutes length) thus had been largely unused, which, given the significant other limitations, greatly reduces the overall added value of the thesis (this is even a greater pity as the questions for the interviews are formulated rightly).

In language terms, the thesis is uneven, with some parts totally unproblematic and other full of grammar and syntactic mistakes (incl. unfinished sentences), making the understanding of the text a bit of a challenge. Moreover, there is some illogical in-text referencing as in case of the governmental reforms also covering years 2017-2020, but drawing from the source dated to 2011 (see pp. 50-51). Also the name of the department in which the thesis originated is wrong (p. 1).

Overall, this diploma thesis reads far more like an overview of some relevant major educational issues in Ecuador rather than an organised and orderly treaty on the rural-areas situated tertiary education. Still, given the assumed difficulty of obtaining the data of all sorts in Ecuador under the situation of post-covid societal dilapidation, I consider the thesis to narrowly pass the minimal departmental standards.

**For the above reasons, I recommend the diploma thesis for the defense.**

**My grading is "E".**

Date: August, 21st. 2024

Signature: