

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Applicant

Habilitation thesis

Reviewer

**Reviewer's home unit,
institution**

Mgr. Ondřej Mulíček, Ph.D.

**Urban Relational Spaces: Spatiotemporal
Patterns of Everyday Life**

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Introduction

The Habilitation thesis "Urban Relational Spaces: Spatiotemporal Patterns of Everyday Life" by Ondřej Mulíček is an impressive collection of high-quality journal articles. The articles are introduced with an exhaustive explanation of the key questions that oriented the author's research, as well as of the main theoretical and methodological issues that this more-than-a-decade long academic activity has addressed. In the following report, I first describe the thesis's composition, structure, and key messages. Second, the originality and the main contributions that the author's work makes to his field of expertise are discussed.

The thesis: structure and key themes

Ondřej Mulíček's *Habilitation thesis* presents eleven articles published in international and Czech academic journals, introduced with an in-depth theoretical and methodological discussion. The articles' publication dates span from 2009 to 2024, thus covering fifteen years of the author's research of urbanity and specifically of the productive interactions between the (relatively) static material environment and the dynamic (albeit cyclical and repetitive) daily routines of urban dwellers and users. All the journals in which articles appeared are registered in the Web of Science (WoS) database and have an impact factor assigned; almost all journals are positioned in the first and second quartiles of relevant categories in the recent Journal Citation Report. Articles published in international journals and written in English dominate in this selection. Their citation count in the WoS database is impressive: 304 citations to date for these eleven articles together.

Three of these articles appeared in journals that represent disciplinary fields other than geography (namely sociology, urban studies or interdisciplinary social sciences). This comes as no surprise. Ondřej Mulíček's research is clearly anchored in the discipline of social and regional geography, and it contributes mainly to its specific areas of research and theory. However, his work has wider relevance, especially for interdisciplinary fields like urban studies. This wider relevance results from the author's focus on everyday life – an important social-

scientific concept in itself – as well as from his orientation towards researching cities and how people use them, an unavoidably interdisciplinary endeavour.

The densely written manuscript that introduces the articles (i.e., PART 1 of the *Habilitation thesis*) poignantly explains which research themes Ondřej Muliček's work contributes to. These are mainly: spatiotemporal dimensions of urban life and the relational character of (urban) space, including variously embedded and interconnected experiences with, and representations of, the urban environment.

The introductory text achieves several objectives. First, it explains key concepts that Ondřej Muliček used, critically discussed, and developed over the fifteen years of his research. These are, specifically, everyday life, relationality of space and time, and rhythm and rhythmicity (and their relation to mobility), or the debatable phenomenon of "centrality". Second, the author formulates broad questions that he addressed in his research (Chapter 1.2), as well as those that stem from his work and that open new pathways for further research (Chapter 5). Third, Chapter 4 debates methodological challenges of "researching everyday spatiotemporal situations" (p 27), discussing the variety of methods and different types of available data, including the cautious approach they require and the possibilities they offer. As a result, this introductory section of the thesis outlines the entire field of inquiry in which the individual articles presented in the thesis are located as pieces of a mosaic.

Journal articles presented in the thesis are then grouped into three sections, each defined by a main research theme. The first group explains "relationality of space" (beyond the city, including regional or national scales) that becomes detectable through analysing data about everyday commuting. The second, and largest group, covers the complex theme of "spatiotemporality of everyday urban life", researched from a variety of perspectives, while using different types of data from the city of Brno. Finally, the third group of articles brings forward individual experiences of space and time (in their relations). Qualitative methodologies are applied to analyse various representations of the city of Brno.

The originality of the thesis and its main contributions

The broadness of the scope of this research, rather than generating an impression of disconnected research endeavours, illustrates the author's enthusiasm for researching and his determination to understand how everyday repetitive practices interact with and shape space. It also shows how the theory of space and the city develops once time, mobility, and social representations are better incorporated into the research. During more than a decade of his research, Ondřej Muliček has sought to theoretically grasp his main subject. The thesis demonstrates his willingness to find theoretical inspirations both in social geographical thought and other disciplines, including philosophy and sociology, to name just a couple. Similarly to this openness to concepts and theories, he explored a wide range of quantitative and qualitative methods and techniques, as well as types of data, to answer the questions that guided his and his colleagues' inquiry. These include analysis of existing data (including retail opening hours, timetables of public transport, or retail statistics), observation, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and studying historical newspapers.

There is a dual benefit in this openness and willingness to apply different methods and explore different concepts and theories. First, it allows the author to critically discuss key concepts in social geography, including space and time, to propose application of new concepts (e.g.,

chronopoles) in theorising the city as a dynamic entity, and to contribute to the fundamental questions of his field, such as how space and human activity are mutually shaped (Harvey 1973). At the same time, this work is inspiring for disciplines beyond human geography, especially by underlining the need to understand the *spatiality of everyday life* and of repetitive practices, a point that may slip out of sight in approaches less sensitive to seeing *space* as a relevant category to understand social life. Moreover, this approach stimulates thinking about the changing spatiotemporality of a city in a *longue-durée* perspective and observing how historical events transform the rhythms, not just the spaces, of urban life.

Finally, one more interesting aspect of this work is discussed only in the margins. Ondřej Muliček often used the city of Brno as a “laboratory” while searching to answer questions about urbanity more generally. Even when the specific history of this city is discussed (like in the Paper 11), the narrative goes beyond explaining this city’s past. Rather, it aims to propose theoretically informed arguments about space, time and urbanity in a historical perspective. In fact, the approach that Muliček thus developed across the years of writing about Brno resonates with Jennifer Robinson’s (2006) suggestion of approaching every city as “ordinary” and using locally embedded research as a possible foundation for developing global urban theory.

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

1) Arguments about modernist urban planning and political discourses neglecting “time” over space when thinking about and intervening into cities, as well as proposing a “static” representation of urbanity, appear across several chapters in the Habilitation thesis (e.g., p. 13, 21, 22). This tendency, according to the author, weakened only at the end of the 20th century, when time and “spatiotemporality” started to be more reflected in planning and policies. The author proposes one explanation of this shift in perspective, which is the necessity to reflect the “the increasing mobility of contemporary society” (p. 22). Are there other possible explanations (new developments in urban theory or other changes in urban life)? And why did urban planning and policy discourses tend to ignore time in the first place? Why did the above-mentioned representation of static urban space prevail for so long? And were there any instances of a different perspective on urban space in the past (i.e., before 1980s)?

2) One of the fascinating lines of analysis presented in the thesis explains the historical transformations of the rhythms of everyday life and patterns of everyday mobility in a city during the 20th century, namely the changes that become apparent when socialist-era everyday trajectories (and their times) are compared with patterns obvious in data from the post-socialist (and post-industrial) Brno (see Papers 5 and 11). Although the concept of the “post-socialist city” is not a key term in this work and the author does not focus on theorising either “socialist” or “post-socialist urbanity”, I wonder if there are any specific patterns (or rhythms) that would be shared by cities in the post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe. Alternatively, in your opinion, did researchers studying the “post-socialist city” also neglect “time” over space when they coined the term and proposed theories about socialist and post-socialist cities?

Conclusion

The habilitation thesis entitled "Urban Relational Spaces: Spatiotemporal Patterns of Everyday Life" by Ondřej Mulíček **fulfils** requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Sociální geografie a regionální rozvoj.

Date: 31 July 2025

Signature: