



Universiteit
Leiden

Thesis evaluation Megan Killian

Student details:

Name: Megan Killian

Studentnr: 2677954

E-mail: m.l.killian@umail.leidenuniv.nl

Programme details

Programme: International Relations (Master)

Specialisation: European Union Studies

EC: 15

Evaluators:

First: Dr. G. Macaj

E-mail: g.macaj@hum.leidenuniv.nl

Second: Dr. V. Vukov

E-mail: Visnja.vukov@upf.edu

Thesis details:

Title: "We are all living on a big spaceship": A grounded theory study on the lived experience of newly elected MEPs

Is the thesis in your assessment free of plagiarism?

Yes to my knowledge the thesis is free of plagiarism

Dr. G. Macaj: Turnitin gives no indication of plagiarism.

Dr. V. Vukov: No plagiarism was detected in the thesis.

Can the thesis be made publicly available in the Leiden University Repository?

it can be made public through the repository.

Summary assessment/comments

Dr. G. Macaj: This is an interesting thesis with a clear question and interesting methodology but more focused discussion of theory and methodological concerns and with a clearer structure of the analysis, the author would have provided a powerful argument and make a significant contribution to the field.

Dr. V. Vukov: Overall, this is a very strong thesis and an excellent piece of research. With some minor revisions and in particular with greater attention to embedding the research in the existing scholarly debates, it could easily be considered for publication in a high-impact journal.

Criteria

Knowledge and insight

Dr. G. Macaj: This thesis examines the subjective experience of MEPs that enter the EP for the first time. This is a highly interesting topic, although the author does not tell us immediately what the state of the art says about it, what it does not tell us, and what is worth exploring. The study is mainly preoccupied with method – which is the most substantive part of the work, but it does manage to produce interesting insights.

Dr. V. Vukov: The thesis overall reflect an excellent knowledge of the key discussions and methods of the field. The research question and the findings themselves are highly relevant and extremely interesting. It is also very original. Embedding in the existing literature could however be stronger. The student clearly knows the relevant literature, but the thesis is not clear enough on the contribution to this literature. The literature review section provides a great overview of the field, but the introduction to the thesis as well as the discussion of the findings and the conclusion could be stronger in linking the research with current scholarly debates.

Assessment: good

Weighing: n/a

Application knowledge and insight

Dr. G. Macaj: The thesis rests on an elaborate methodology that spells out choices made regarding case selection as well as data collection and analysis. Furthermore, the thesis rests on vital information from interviews, which are properly justified, including challenges such as self-selection bias.

The analysis is aided by NVivo software to classify the information, which makes it possible to link information around specific nodes that emerge from it. But the thesis offers too much detail and too many codes, that though they are useful to support the analysis, they should not be at the centre of the analysis: we need to see the insights that this classification of information yields, not the classification itself; the classification is the scaffolding, not the building. This is something that could have been safely placed at the end of the work as an appendix.

The thesis offers a substantive elaboration of theory and grounded theory suggest that the aim is to build a new theory to offer an answer to the question. But the thesis is engrossed by theory, and it is not always clear whether we are dealing with theory-building or theory-testing--the theory bits are scattered across the analysis, making it difficult to tell the essential parts from details. Various insights are then brought with various other theories (not announced at the outset) such as cognitive dissonance, role theory and socialisation - which point to theory testing, and overshadow the grounded theory exercise.

Dr. V. Vukov: The analysis is of very high quality, with excellent usage of the concepts and secondary sources. The student uses grounded theory approach and interviews as the primarily source of information and she does a fantastic job in the description and justification of the adopted method. She also shows great maturity and excellent insights into the methodological debates. The method is highly appropriate for her research question. The student devotes great attention to the methodological challenges and limitations, while also doing an excellent job with the analysis and interpretation of the results.

Assessment: very good

Weighing: n/a

Reaching conclusions

Dr. G. Macaj: The analysis is full with interesting observations and insights but they are not amalgamated sufficiently to build a powerful explanation. The main point is that the MEPs are shaped by the EP rather than shaping it. This of course points to complex matters relating to agency and structure not explored in the thesis - for who exactly is the EP that shapes the EMPs--senior MEPs, the bureaucracy, some collective force that emerges from individual actions? But it is not an answer to the question. The question is not about the extent to which new MEPs shape the EP - that would require a different design altogether- but rather about their subjective experiences, which is a different animal altogether. One could frame it as the subjective experience of their impact - but that is something that needs to be developed explicitly, not assumed.

Dr. V. Vukov: The conclusions are well founded and follow logically from the presented material. The thesis provides an excellent answer to the research question and states a clear and innovative theory 'grounded' in the appropriate interpretation of the interview findings. The ethical aspects are discussed at length and taken into consideration in reaching a conclusion.

Assessment: very good

Weighing: n/a

Communication

Dr. G. Macaj: The thesis is written fluently and makes good use of secondary sources and interviews. The thesis is carried away by theoretical and methodological concerns and offers a rather unorthodox structure, which makes it hard to follow. We learn the precise question on page 11, and the literature review only after that. It would have been far more effective to state the puzzle, question, and argument, and rival arguments in the first pages – and then explain more in detail what they entail. There is also too much jargon in the text that is not always illuminating.

Dr. V. Vukov: The student shows commendable writing skills. The thesis is very easy to read and even if the student uses complex concepts and deals with very sophisticated and abstract theories, she still conveys the message in a very clear way. The structure of the thesis is appropriate, as well as the use of references.

Assessment: very good

Weighing: n/a

Learning skills

Megan Killian is clearly a capable and hard-working student but she has worked mostly on her own and has developed this research project independently. We've had a meeting at the start of the research project and then a consultation on the complete draft of the thesis before submission.

Assessment: good

Weighing: n/a

Formal requirements

Dr. G. Macaj: Met

Dr. V. Vukov: The thesis complies with the formal requirements.

Final assessment

On 01-08-2020 this thesis is graded with a 8

Signatures

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several horizontal strokes with a central vertical flourish.

Dr. G. Macaj

A handwritten signature in black ink, featuring a large, sweeping initial letter followed by a long horizontal line.

Dr. V. Vukov