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Thesis evaluation Victoria ten Hulsen

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Programme details

Programme: European Politics and Society

Specialisation:

EC: 30

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Thesis details:

Title: Female perspective on politics: female political representation in The Netherlands and Finland

Is the thesis in your assessment free of plagiarism?

Yes to my knowledge the thesis is free of plagiarism

The thesis is free of plagiarism.

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

by M.G. Palacio Ludena: it can be made public through the repository.

Summary assessment/comments

Very good. The student's capacity for self-reflection is remarkable. The method selected aligns with the research question, and the student was able to execute it with independence. The inductive approach of the thesis returns in the initial puzzle. It presents a somewhat unexpected answer related to social and cultural norms rather than political systems, as it is the case of the low visibility of unpaid care work. The student could have further explained the generalizability of this answer, as the care sector is at the centre of global debates regarding gender equality and seems to play a role even among high-rank officials and elites, thus transcending class issues.

Criteria

Knowledge and insight

The thesis sets to answer the question 'what are the causes for the disparity in female political representation between the Netherlands and Finland from a top-down perspective, and how can this be improved? The question has (practical) political and cultural relevance, though it could have been worded differently to avoid what it reads as a normative formulation. The introduction provides a somewhat clear initial presentation of the research topic and explains its societal relevance. The literature review engages with relevant debates regarding gender equality, patriarchy and female representation as they have emerged in modern Western societies--historicising these processes and reminding the reader that women were not always construed as "different" and positioned at the margins political system. The discussion progresses along the various waves of feminism and situates the struggle for representation within the second wave, something rather contestable. The discussion of the Finish and Dutch cases elaborates on some of the cultural and social differences across these countries but could have been better placed under the empirical section. The conceptual chapter discusses the definition(s) of the crucial concepts used in the thesis and their relationships. Despite a few imprecisions and digressions, the thesis presents a defensible conceptual model about the relationships between gender, political representation, and feminine and masculine.

Assessment: good

Weighing: n/a

Application knowledge and insight

The thesis discusses the methodological choices made, e.g., selecting the sample, design of the interview questions, and coding scheme. Might be an issue of semantics, but top-down to refer to elite interviews reads

confusing. The student makes a compelling case to study Finland but fails to convince the reader about the relevance of including the Dutch case and the comparability. The student mentions similar political systems and socioeconomic levels but could have provided data to back up these claims. The resources used and analytical techniques employed are adequate, though the analysis of data and materials could have been better knitted with the theoretical discussion. Still, the student should be commended for the compelling work locating informants in high-ranking positions despite the pandemic and cultural barriers (as discussed by the author in her methodological section). The analysis is rather inductive, allowing for new insights, e.g. unpaid care work, to help explain the divergence in outcomes regarding female political participation across these countries. The discussion of findings is methodical, albeit reading too procedural at times. The thesis could have benefited from a dialogue between the theoretical and empirical parts of the thesis to ensure consistency, as elements of care work are not sufficiently discussed in the literature review or conclusions despite their prominence in the findings.

Assessment: very good

Weighing: n/a

Reaching conclusions

The thesis addresses the questions and issues identified at the start of the paper, but not enough to argue 1) causality and 2) a road to 'improvement. Further work should look for triangulating quantitative support for the claims made, given the thin sample (again, understandable due to the pandemic restrictions). The conclusions should have touched upon the cultural differences and different historical trajectories discussed in sections 1.4 and 1.5. At times, the student adopts a slightly strong and/or normative view and should have looked harder for ambiguities in perception, ideological differences and positioning of female politicians. .

Assessment: good

Weighing: n/a

Communication

The thesis is written in comprehensible English. Mostly consistent footnoting. The student details data sources for interviews and includes a clear description of the process of data collection and coding. In terms of academic integrity, the student offers the option to access the raw data and full interview transcripts.

Assessment: very good

Weighing: n/a

Learning skills

The student showed the ability to work independently, meet internal and external deadlines and plan her time accordingly. The student also approached the feedback she received with genuine interest, always inquiring about ways to improve her work. Her approach is diligent, and her work ethic remarkable.

Assessment: very good

Weighing: n/a

Formal requirements

The thesis meets the formal requirement in terms of the number of words.

Final assessment

On 16-06-2021 this thesis is graded with a 8.4

Signatures



M.G. Palacio Ludena