



Diploma Thesis Evaluation Form

Author: Mira Strang

Title: An energy-efficient Europe. Securing the energy supply of Finland

Programme/year: MAIN/2018

Author of Evaluation (external assessor): Michal Parížek

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Research question, definition of objectives	10	5
	Theoretical/conceptual framework	30	17
	Methodology, analysis, argument	40	22
<i>Total</i>		80	44
Minor Criteria			
	Sources	10	3
	Style	5	3
	Formal requirements	5	4
<i>Total</i>		20	10
TOTAL		100	54



Evaluation

Major criteria:

Mira Strang has written a thesis on the energy security of Finland, in the light of its extreme dependence on fossil fuels imported from Russia. The thesis has its merits but unfortunately also profound pitfalls. The major merit lies in the relatively comprehensive description of a relevant topic. Clearly, the author is interested in the topic. This should be commended.

Yet, there are several problems, and in the rest of the evaluation I address each of the major ones in turn. First, the theoretical section is very long but not very deep, and hardly connected to the empirical analysis. At points, it is plainly wrong (p 5 and rationalist constructivism). The author provides a long overview of approaches (mostly realist and geopolitical), which is however unstructured and does not serve the purpose of actually guiding the empirical analysis. Most of it is unrelated to the announced method (discourse analysis); the only exception is critical geopolitics, which is described on 4 pages, out of the total of 18 pages dedicated to the discussion of the theoretical background.

Second, as for the empirical analysis, a particular problem lies in that the author does not really apply discourse analysis as such, as her approach really is to keyword-search the relevant textual material and then categorized the thus identified texts to a set of predefined categories. This is classical positivist content analysis, and a typical practitioner of discourse analysis would have a problem with such a mechanic procedure. The author counts articles that according to her reading belong to political, economic, environmental etc. realms. This is a useful first cut, but I think it is not sufficient to carry a meaningful empirical analysis the main source for which is the texts as such (be it discourse analysis or a positivist content analysis, which the author is much closer to anyway). Also, the interpretation of the main results is not convincing. For example, the author states that the majority of articles was concerning politics (which seems to be true) and security (with seems not to be true, from table 5, where security has less hits than economic and environment).



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Later in the work the author does also engage in a selective analysis of the actual texts at least to some extent, although again the analysis is mostly descriptive, outlining the positions of relevant actors on various issues as reported in the media, rather than engaging in an in-depth analysis of the discourse as such. The empirical work (search of relevant texts in media, their reading) should be commended, but the empirical analysis should be more developed.

Third, the work with the existing scholarly literature is not sufficient. The referencing throughout the text is very scarce. Even in broad, often theoretical or generally discussed topics (i.e. not specificities of the empirical case), the author relies a lot eg on EU and ministry websites, not on secondary literature. Relevant existing scholarship on the topics is then missed. This is a very prominent feature of the work – the connection to the discipline of IR and its findings is not developed well.

Minor criteria:

The text is not particularly well written, but not to the degree at which it would become a major problem. At points, the text is quite repetitive (eg describing the Finish newspaper source several times).

Overall evaluation:

My overall evaluation is that the thesis lies just above the border of what is still acceptable as an MA thesis. It does provide a relatively long and in some regards comprehensive account of the Finish energy security problem. This is its relative strength. But it does so not in a particularly deep manner, with weaknesses in research design, theory, work with the existing literature, as well as empirical analysis.

Suggested grade: E

Signature: