REVIEW OF DIPLOMA THESIS

Review type: Opponent´s Review

Author of the diploma thesis: Anthonate Chiamaka Asiegbunam

Title: Strategies for closing the gender pay gap Case of California, Luxembourg, and the Philippines

Author of the review: Mirna Jusić, M.A., Ph.D.

Evaluate the diploma thesis based on the following considerations (not necessarily in this order):

1) *Factual benefits of work and its added value;*

The author provides an overview of policies and approaches to address the gender pay gap (GPG) in California, Luxembourg, and the Philippines. In her work, the author points to the successes and challenges that all three localities have had in addressing the GPG and gives a comprehensive overview of the tools that have been used to that end. She identifies interactions between different factors that shape the context in which GPG policies are formulated and implemented and stresses the roles of different actors in advancing GPG policies in each locality. She also provides comprehensive policy recommendations as takeaways from these cases that researchers and policy actors may benefit from.

2) *Setting and answering research questions;*

The aim of the thesis is to examine the gender wage disparity in three different geographic areas to cast a light on the distinctive approaches in these localities (p. 1). It aims to advance understanding of successful policies and initiatives to reduce the GPG by looking at these three locations, which have distinct socio-cultural contexts and policy environments (p. 2). It also aims to identify the key actors and advocacy coalitions involved in shaping these policies through the lens of the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) (p. 2) and to examine specific legislative measures that address GPG, as well as compare variations policy frameworks and implementation techniques in the three cases.

The study aims to answer the following research questions:
1. "Who are the primary actors influencing the gender pay gap laws in the Philippines, Luxembourg, and California?"
2. "What specific legislative initiatives, pay transparency programs, and work-life balance rules have been put into place in each region to combat the gender pay gap?"
3. "What are the similarities in the policy frameworks, legal requirements, and implementation methods of California, Luxembourg, and the Philippines?"

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4. "What are the recommended viable policy changes to narrow the gender wage gap for further studies and for policymakers?" (p. 7)

In her work, the author has answered her research questions.

3) Structure of work;

The structure of the work is clear and contains important elements of an academic text. Chapter 1 contains a background and purpose of study, objectives and research questions, significance of study, organization of work, and definition of terms. Chapter 2 includes a justification for the theoretical framework, a section on the ACF, and an analysis of gender pay policies using the ACF. Chapter 3 contains information on the methodology, such as the research design, population, sample and sampling technique, research instrument, validity and reliability of the research instrument, sources of data, data analysis and limitations. Chapter 4 contains information on the historical context for each of the three case studies, the causes and consequences of GPG, information on stakeholder collaboration and conflict in GPG policies in the three localities, as well as policy implementation and its challenges. Chapter 5 contains an identification of common themes for each locality based on the interviews conducted and a discussion of the findings. Chapter 6 ends with a summary of the findings and the policy recommendations, with Chapter 7 concluding the work with final insights from the thesis.

4) The factual accuracy and convincing of the argumentation;

The text is generally well-written and the argumentation flows in a coherent manner. Especially well-written is the comprehensive overview of the history of GPG policies in the three countries in Chapter 4. In general, extensive information on the policies and actors, as well as context, is provided for each case. The thematic analysis of interviews has been performed in a systematic way and important themes have been identified.

Nevertheless, there are some issues with argumentation. In section 1.3., a general account of GPG trends is mixed with information on GPG policies in the three localities (pp. 3-5), making the argumentation somewhat difficult to follow. In Chapter 4, information on policies in each case is mixed with data on GPG in these cases. Some statements need to be supported by further evidence, such as the statement that all three regions participate in policy learning activities to improve their strategies for reducing the GPG (p.17).

In section 4.6, on pages 42-44, some normative statements regarding cooperation are intertwined with accounts of cooperation in these three cases, so that at times, it is unclear what the facts, and what the normative statements are. Moreover, it is not completely clear where the data to support accounts of cooperation is derived from. Insights into collaboration are rather broad – how actors work together more concretely is not elaborated on. In line with ACF, it is not immediately clear whether actors form coalitions and what the coalitions with opposing views may be. The subsequent section (4.7), which discusses policy implementation, also ends with normative arguments on stakeholder cooperation (p. 50).

In section 5.1, the thematic analysis is said to involve "an evaluation of dominant themes within a discussion and utilizing these themes as the basis of discussion and subsequent recommendations" (p. 51), but it is not clear what this discussion refers to. Section 5.5.,

Discussion, is somewhat repetitive, as most of the policies have already been introduced in previous chapters; moreover, findings from interviews are generally not referred to here. While there is a brief comparison of the cases in in Chapter 5, a further and more nuanced comparison of the similarities and differences between California, Luxembourg and the Philippines and their strategies to address GPG, in line with the research aims, would have been welcome.

Moreover, while actors and their work in this policy realm are elaborated on for each of the cases, the ACF and its individual components are not applied in the analytical part (but rather, a brief analysis is included in the theoretical chapter – see more below). It would have been good to have a more detailed and nuanced application of the framework, relying on the evidence gathered through interviews and secondary data.

5) *Sophistication and application of theoretical approaches;*

The study aims to apply the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) to analyze the complex problem of closing the GPG and especially the actors driving the policy agenda. The theoretical chapter contains an extensive elaboration of the framework (as well as its assumptions and critiques) and justification of its use in this study. *Inter alia*, the thesis notes that "by using this paradigm, it has been possible to gain a clearer understanding of the difficulties involved in forging coalitions and crafting policies, revealing the complex networks of alliances and partnerships that shape policy in each area." (p. 66) However, the study falls somewhat short of applying the framework, as mentioned above.

First, it is unclear how the author has operationalized the ACF and its elements. There should have been some information on how she aims to identify and measure individual elements of the framework.

The theoretical section includes elements of the ACF in a table (pp. 14-15), followed by an elaboration. However, this table is better suited for subsequent chapters. It is difficult to discern from the table which actors belong to which coalition, and what the differences in their beliefs are. Moreover, it is unclear what information / sources the table is derived from (e.g. whether based on the interviews, or secondary data) and how it has been identified. The elaboration following the table is somewhat general (e.g. that many advocacy groups are fighting for GPG in each locality, or that all three localities engage in policy learning).

6) *Methodological approach and application of particular methods and approaches;*

The methodological approach is sufficiently elaborated. The author makes use of open-ended interviews with experts, policymakers and advocates, and uses purposive sampling to that end, with a total of eight interviews. Another source of data are secondary sources, including policies; those that have been analyzed have been listed in the methodological chapter.

To analyze the interview data, the author has applied thematic analysis, which entails searching for patterns in meanings to identify themes in the data collected. (p. 24)

It is helpful that the author has pointed to the limitations of her study and that the interview guide has been included in the Annex.

A few comments: The part on research validity is unclear, as it is written in future tense (p.22). The list of interviewees includes some "pseudo names." It would have been sufficient to write "Respondent 1; 2…" instead. The author states that "applying the ACF elements to analyze policy processes, stakeholder interactions, and policy results will be the primary data analytic technique" (p. 24). At the same time, it is unclear how the ACF has been operationalized and what data it has been applied to.

Lastly, it would have been beneficial to provide information of how the three cases have been selected and why these three cases have been chosen in the methodological section. While there is some information on why the cases are compared in the introduction of the thesis, this could have been elaborated on further in the methodological section. It appears that the author has chosen the three cases because they have placed a lot of emphasis in their policies on reducing the GPG (with relative success) and are thus similar, but this is not entirely clear.

7) *Use of literature and data;*

Sufficient theoretical and empirical literature has been relied upon and is referred to in a satisfactory way.

Turnitin shows a 22% similarity score. The text shows similarity with all sources to the extent of less than 1%. While references are, for the most part, consistently provided, there are a few sentences that could have been paraphrased better as to not rely on original formulation (e.g. page 17, pertaining to gender equality; p. 20 – pertaining to purposive sampling, p. 24 – pertaining to thematic analysis; or p. 26 – on measurement of GPG).

8) *Stylistic and text editing (quote, text layout, etc.).*

This is a well-written academic text with no major stylistic or text editing issues. There are a few sentence fragments and some small stylistic mistakes.

9) *Question for defense (not obligatory)*

The author may refer to my comments / suggestions above and make clarifications, where relevant.

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

My grading suggestion would be "B" if the author convincingly addresses some of my comments above. Otherwise, I would recommend "C."

Date: 4/9/2023   Signature:

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