

Name of the student:	Assem Zhuaspayeva
Title of the thesis:	Revealing narratives on the SDGs implementation in the Scandinavian countries
Reviewer:	Dr Jan Oster

### 1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

(relevance of the research question, research objective, literature review):

The thesis demonstrates impressive knowledge of its subject-matter. Within the limits of my own expertise in the field, I may confirm that primary data has been researched well.

The research question is certainly relevant, but it suffers from the weaknesses of the entire research design (see my comments re 2. Analysis).

The thesis's geographical scope has not been selected well. It is both too broad and too narrow. It is too narrow in the sense that the thesis promises to investigate 'Scandinavia', but omits Finland (although it is a matter of debate whether Finland actually belongs to 'Scandinavia' or not). More importantly, however, by including the remaining three Scandinavian countries—Norway, Sweden and Denmark—the thesis is overly ambitious.

The literature review does not fulfil its purpose. Although it is well-researched, it fails to embed the thesis in existing debates, and thus to address a 'gap' in the literature. Moreover, it does not *review* the literature, but merely quotes sources of some relevance for the topic. The footnotes do not always match the source quoted in the text (see, for example, fn. 7 and 8).

### 2. ANALYSIS

(methodology, argument, theoretical backing, appropriate work with sources):

The thesis's analytical framework, including its underlying theory and research method, suffers from several major weaknesses that operate to the detriment of the entire analysis (see also my comments re 1. Knowledge and re 3, Conclusions). To put it simply, the thesis constantly conflates data and narrative, 'the objective' and 'the subjective'.

To be more specific: the thesis intends to investigate 'narratives', which is a constructivist approach. This is by itself not to be criticised. However, the thesis constantly refers to 'the success story' of Scandinavian countries, that they are 'frontrunners', 'top the charts', and that 'many countries look up to them as a role model'. By doing so, the thesis seems to accept the 'success' of the Scandinavian countries as a given fact. Thus, the argument goes in circles; rather than analysing the narratives, the thesis accepts them as they have been presented by these countries. In other words, the thesis itself has fallen 'victim' to the narratives presented by Scandinavian countries, which it actually intends to analyse.

The theoretical framework has not been properly developed. It lacks references to primary sources (see, in particular, p. 18 and 20). The framework also lacks a proper distinction between 'narratives' and 'the discourse' (see p. 19). In particular, the methodology—and hence the analysis—focuses too much on what has been said (see p. 20), and thus not on what has *not* been said. However, an analysis of what has not been said—such as the lack of references to voices of minorities—is a vital part of any narrative, framing and discourse analysis. As it currently stands, the thesis is thus based on a content analysis rather than a narrative analysis.

The limitations of the analytical framework, presented transparently and candidly on p. 20, are significant. This includes, in particular, the lack of access to primary sources in the original languages, which certainly contribute towards building the narratives.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

(persuasiveness, link between data and conclusions, achievement of research objectives):

The data that underlies the thesis has been well-researched, at least as insofar it relates to sources in English. However, the conclusions suffer from the flaw of the research design (see my comments re 2. Analysis). Since the thesis itself has apparently accepted the 'success story' and 'frontrunner' narratives, it is not at all surprising that 'the data supported the expectations' (p. 35; see also p. 52).

The same can be said of the data concerning the NGOs narratives: these are almost by their very nature more critical and contradict government reports. As the thesis itself concedes, the results of the study 'are not innovative nor surprising' (p. 53). This also applies to the conclusion that 'the state reports seem to have more influence' than NGO reports (p. 53).

#### 4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout):

In principle, the thesis is well-written. However, it contains several grammatical mistakes, particularly concerning punctuation. The writing style is at times too colloquial (see, for example, p. 4: 'The idea of this research is to find out'; p. 23 'No wonder'; p. 23: 'top the charts'). The thesis is often repetitive (for example, in its regular repetition of 'the idea is'; the 'success story', the 'role model', and others), and the writing style is at times awkward (see, for example, p. 4: 'Development is a controversial topic, filled with uncertainties and controversy.').

#### 5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

(strong and weak point of the dissertation, other issues)

The points of criticism included in this evaluation should not conceal the fact that the student submitted a mature, well-researched and, at least in its basic conception, original master thesis. This notwithstanding, major weaknesses in the research design work to the detriment of the thesis's quality.

<b>Grade (A-F):</b>	D [3.5 Krakow, 6.5 Leiden]
Date:	Signature:
22/09/2021	

classification scheme

Percentile	Prague		Krakow		Leiden		Barcelona	
	91-100 %	8,5%	5	6,7%	8,5-10	5,3%	9-10	5,5 %
B (81-90)	81-90 %	16,3%	4,5	11,7%	7,5-8,4	16,4%	8-8,9	11,0 %
C (71-80)	71-80 %	16,3%	4	20%	6,5-7,4	36,2%	7-7,9	18,4 %
D (61-70)	61-70 %	24%	3,5	28,3%			6-6,9	35,2 %
E (51-60)	51-60 %	34,9%	3	33,4 %	6-6,4	42,1 %	5-5,9	30,1 %

**Assessment criteria:**

Excellent (A): 'Outstanding performance with only minor errors';

Very good (B): 'Above the average standard but with some errors';

Good (C): 'Generally sound work but with a number of notable errors';

Satisfactory (D): 'Fair but with significant shortcomings';

Sufficient (E): 'Performance meets the minimum criteria';

Fail: 'Some/considerable more work required before the credit can be awarded'.