Appraisal of BA Thesis *Women in Leading Positions int the Fashion Industry: Comparative Study* **by Ľubomíra Bezáková**

In this thesis, Ľubomíra Bezáková examines the experiences of Czech and Swedish women who work in leadership positions in the fashion and beauty products industry. Overall, the thesis is fluently written. A literature review summarises key findings on women in the labour force and significant obstacles and facilitating forces to equal gender participation in leadership positions. While the subject matter is well researched in gender studies (and beyond) in terms of organisational culture, gender bias, networking, mentoring, and work-life balance, this has often not translated into profound changes on the ground. We learn that statistically women's employment rate is similar in the Czech Republic and Sweden (44% and 47%, respectively) – although this is not further contextualised historically or economically in terms of earning power, and data on 'women' are not further broken down, e.g. with respect to social class or age. Curiously, no literature specifically on women in the fashion and beauty products industries or indeed in management positions in the Czech Republic is cited. In other ways, the literature review demonstrates Ľubomíra's critical thinking such as the important observation that existing research puts 'too much action for change on women's shoulders instead of forcing organisational and structural changes' (16).

Given the themes addressed, the leading research question about 'the experience of women in mid-senior and senior leadership positions' (24) is surprisingly vague. Methodologically, eight research participants in the Czech Republic and Sweden were recruited through personal contacts and LinkedIn as the author works in the fashion industry. They were interviewed through video call even when participants resided in the CR. While this curtailed the possibility of additional observational data of face-to-face interaction this was to assure comparability. Yet the sample only encompasses eight research participants which profoundly thwarts the possibility of international comparison. A table that summarises key characterises of the participants (such as industry, age, marital status, number of children, etc.) would have been useful here.

Again, we also find evidence of critical reflexivity for example about cautiousness of possible negative connotations of gender equality measures in phrasing questions in the Czech case.

The empirical analysis identifies 14 themes around work and leadership experiences and beliefs. On the positive side, the author analyses patterns across the whole sample, without starting from a country division and provides quotations that show the diversity of experiences. On a more critical side, it is difficult to follow the relevance of this or that experience without situating it within the context of a specific industry and business (national, multinational…) and socio-institutional context (e.g. the intuitional availability of nurseries or the provision of after school care). It would have been beneficial to ask the research participants what based on their work experiences *they* would consider crucial for change – not only of gender equality but also workplace satisfaction and joy within their company and beyond. Crucially, it is necessary to link the findings to what was established in the literature review.

Given this, in the defence I would like to invite Ľubomíra to state why the specific countries were chosen and tell us more about the differences and similarities of the fashion and beauty products industries in these countries and/or of her research participants.
How could the most significant findings be situated within these contexts and linked to the existing literature?

I recommend the thesis for defence, and depending on oral defence, suggest the grade very good (2) or good (3).

Prague 5.6.2024
Dagmar Lorenz-Meyer, Ph.D. (opponent)