

Report on Bachelor / Master Thesis

Institute of Economic Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague

Student:	Bc. Barbora Žďárská
Advisor:	doc. Petr Janský, Ph.D.
Title of the thesis:	The effect of EU Structural Funds on regional performance

OVERALL ASSESSMENT *(provided in English, Czech, or Slovak):*

Contribution

Barbora Žďárská wrote a policy-relevant empirical thesis on the effects of EU funds on economic performance across European regions. With discussions of new budget and new cohesion policy high on the media and policy agenda at the EU and its member states' levels, Barbora has written a thesis on a very topical issue – and there is thus also a relatively good chance of policy makers and others being interested in the results of her work. The specific focus of her thesis – estimating the effects for as many countries and years as possible - has not been studied much until recently and this focus alone would make her thesis a worthwhile contribution. She compares her results well with the few other similar existing studies, which have mostly not covered the most recent concluded financing period in contrast with the most recent data Barbora employs in her thesis.

Methods

Barbora selection of methodology and her application seem appropriate for the question at hand. Barbora has based her methods and results on the basis of the state-of-the-art literature and the best available data. Kudos to Barbora for chasing the best available data from Eurostat and researchers. I appreciate that Barbora dealt with all the methodological, data and statistical (the lack of statistical significance) challenges with stamina and willingness to learn. I wish the data was even more readily available and more consistent across the sources - Barbora faced these challenges well (perhaps if she had more time before the submission, she could have provided a clear exposition of the differences between the two data sets – one provided by the below mentioned researcher, but it was not to be, at least for the time being). I like the graphs Barbora prepared and the way she explained fuzzy regression discontinuity design. She discusses well her methodological differences with other studies.

Literature

Barbora demonstrates a good command of the relevant academic literature to which she contributes. In her thesis Barbora discusses the most relevant papers from both academic and policy points of view. Barbora does a good job of discussing the relevance of her results to the existing literature at the end of her results section.

I also appreciate that Barbora tried to engage actively with some of the most important researchers in the field during her work on the thesis. What is more, she has been successful in her attempts to get further data and other clarifications from Sascha Becker, currently a professor of economics at the University of Warwick. This has benefited her understanding of some of the technical and data issues and improved the quality and relevance of her thesis. That she has not had the time to fully reflect on the comparison between her and the "Going NUTS..." paper by Becker et al is all right given the scope of the thesis, but might be interesting to work further on in case Barbora decided to follow up on her thesis with a reworked version for a wider academic audience and an academic journal.

Manuscript form

The manuscript form of Barbora's thesis is OK, the layout is clear and the use of English is proficient.

Let me provide one more general comment. The thesis is written in a style similar to other student thesis, but the structure of the thesis and the way it is written would not fare well in comparison with good journal articles and might be less accessible by researchers working in the field. For example,

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section 2 is too descriptive and lengthy; it would help if it was more explicitly interlinked with the empirical analysis. Another example is literature section that covers a good selection of the relevant papers, but it discusses them in a way as if it was a literature review paper rather than an empirical paper (thesis) – for most part the section does not related to the thesis and only describes the relevant papers (without focusing on their relationship with the thesis). Also, parts of the empirical sections are written as a description of a journey of how Barbora worked on the thesis and her thinking rather than a clear and straightforward exposition of

Many, perhaps most, theses suffer from similar characteristics and Barbora's thesis is written likely in a better way than most (and so it is not necessarily fair that I am discussing it here, on the occasion of a review of her thesis). These characteristics are mostly not mistakes, but they do lower the quality of the thesis especially if we view them as potential contributors to the relevant research agenda. This is more of a lament, if I may: Barbora's thesis is interesting and promising and, in case it was written or re-written in a more journal/research-friendly way, its value to researchers working on the topic would be even higher than can currently be the case.

Suggested questions for the committee

You have faced difficulties with access to and preparation of the data. In the end you used the best available data for your research question. What specific other data would enable you to answer the question in a better and more confident way and who and how should the data be collected?

A hypothetical question. If you were a European Commission official working on EU Cohesion policy plans for the 2021-2027 programming period and you came across this thesis (perhaps the student would send it to you), would the thesis be relevant to you and what you should take from it - both in the framework of the existing body of evidence (already rich with mixed results) and for set-up of structural funds for the forthcoming period?

Summary

In short, Barbora did a very good job of empirically answering an important and policy-relevant question with the best available data and methods and, depending on her performance in front of the committee, I recommend a grade of A or B.

SUMMARY OF POINTS AWARDED (for details, see below):

CATEGORY	POINTS
<i>Contribution (max. 30 points)</i>	25
<i>Methods (max. 30 points)</i>	25
<i>Literature (max. 20 points)</i>	20
<i>Manuscript Form (max. 20 points)</i>	20
TOTAL POINTS (max. 100 points)	90
GRADE (A – B – C – D – E – F)	A-B

NAME OF THE REFEREE: Petr Janský, Ph.D.

DATE OF EVALUATION: 27 May 2019


Referee Signature

EXPLANATION OF CATEGORIES AND SCALE:

CONTRIBUTION: *The author presents original ideas on the topic demonstrating critical thinking and ability to draw conclusions based on the knowledge of relevant theory and empirics. There is a distinct value added of the thesis.*

Strong	Average	Weak
30	15	0

METHODS: *The tools used are relevant to the research question being investigated, and adequate to the author's level of studies. The thesis topic is comprehensively analyzed.*

Strong	Average	Weak
30	15	0

LITERATURE REVIEW: *The thesis demonstrates author's full understanding and command of recent literature. The author quotes relevant literature in a proper way.*

Strong	Average	Weak
20	10	0

MANUSCRIPT FORM: *The thesis is well structured. The student uses appropriate language and style, including academic format for graphs and tables. The text effectively refers to graphs and tables and disposes with a complete bibliography.*

Strong	Average	Weak
20	10	0

Overall grading:

TOTAL	GRADE
91 – 100	A
81 - 90	B
71 - 80	C
61 – 70	D
51 – 60	E
0 – 50	F