

IMESS DISSERTATION


Note: Please email the completed mark sheet to Year 2 coordinator

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Please note that IMESS students are not required to use a particular set of methods (e.g. qualitative, quantitative, or comparative) in their dissertation.

Student:	Fei Song
Dissertation title:	Social Determinants of Life Expectancy in Transition Economies

	Excellent	Satisfactory	Poor
Knowledge <i>Knowledge of problems involved, e.g. historical and social context, specialist literature on the topic. Evidence of capacity to gather information through a wide and appropriate range of reading, and to digest and process knowledge.</i>		x	
Analysis & Interpretation <i>Demonstrates a clear grasp of concepts. Application of appropriate methodology and understanding; willingness to apply an independent approach or interpretation recognition of alternative interpretations; Use of precise terminology and avoidance of ambiguity; avoidance of excessive generalisations or gross oversimplifications.</i>			x
Structure & Argument <i>Demonstrates ability to structure work with clarity, relevance and coherence. Ability to argue a case; clear evidence of analysis and logical thought; recognition of an arguments limitation or alternative views; Ability to use other evidence to support arguments and structure appropriately.</i>		x	
Presentation & Documentation <i>Accurate and consistently presented footnotes and bibliographic references; accuracy of grammar and spelling; correct and clear presentation of charts/graphs/tables or other data. Appropriate and correct referencing throughout. Correct and contextually correct handling of quotations.</i>		x	

ECTS Mark:	C	UCL Mark:	62	Marker:	Lucie Bryndová
<i>Deducted for late submission:</i>				Signed:	
<i>Deducted for inadequate referencing:</i>				Date:	June 10, 2018

MARKING GUIDELINES

A (UCL mark 70+): Note: marks of over 80 are given rarely and only for truly exceptional pieces of work.

Distinctively sophisticated and focused analysis, critical use of sources and insightful interpretation. Comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to the chosen field of research, showing an ability to engage in sustained independent research.

B/C (UCL mark 60-69):

A high level of analysis, critical use of sources and insightful interpretation. Good understanding of techniques applicable to the chosen field of research, showing an ability to engage in sustained independent research. 65 or over equates to a B grade.

D/E (UCL mark 50-59):

D/E (UCL mark 50-59):

Demonstration of a critical use of sources and ability to engage in systematic inquiry. An ability to engage in sustained research work, demonstrating methodological awareness. 55 or over equates to a D grade.

F (UCL mark less than 50):

Demonstrates failure to use sources and an inadequate ability to engage in systematic inquiry. Inadequate evidence of ability to engage in sustained research work and poor understanding of appropriate research techniques.

CONTINUES OVERLEAF

Comments, explaining strengths and weaknesses (*at least 300 words*):

The author showed an ability to gather information through a wide range of reading. The author also demonstrates good knowledge of historical and social context, though I may personally disagree on her choice of “similar” countries for the research purposes of this thesis.

In general, the thesis suffers from some unfinished research intentions that the author originally planned to explore. This is for sure partly due to the fact that when final decision on the thesis content was finally made, the time didn't allow to make the best possible of what I believe the author would otherwise be able to demonstrate.

The author recognizes well the limitations of chosen methods, time span, and data sample (ch 6.1, pages 67-68), however the ability to use other evidence to support arguments is less sufficient. In some parts, the author applies too excessive generalisations or oversimplifications.

The structure of the thesis is clear when it comes to the main chapters. The subchapters are sometimes confusing. Chapter 2 Literature review doesn't describe anything on existing research on social determinants of health. Instead, some of that can be found in chapter 4 Variables and methodology, precisely in chapter 4.1 Meta-analysis. Chapter 6 Discussion doesn't contain discussion on model results regarding its sensitivity towards inclusion of another variable or dropping the insignificant ones. Also, it does not discuss the results as compared to other research done on the same topic. Nor is there any connection to previous chapters, such as 5.2.2 Analysis of line plots or 5.2.3 Analysis of scatter graphs – face to face these analyses, it is quite clear how important it is to choose the right variables and that too simplified regressions may result in a nonsense.

Chapter 3.2 seems unfinished regarding only some of the analysed countries are included. Maybe the difference in health systems organization and efficiency could explain the LE differences? The HS organization difference is tackled in the first half of thesis (page 21), but discussion on it in chapter 6 Discussion, i.e. in the second half of the thesis, is missing.

The literature presented in the reference list is properly cited. However, many sources cited in chapters 1 and 2 are missing in the reference list. Chapter 3.1 doesn't contain any reference, though obviously it should.

The logic diagram of chapter 4.2 Explanation of health determinants is useful for a reader and is one of the strengths of the thesis. It describes author's train of thought, though it contains some simplifications.

One thesis inconsistency relates to China. China is in most parts of the thesis presented as part of the researched countries, at the beginning of thesis argued for by being similarly influenced by Soviet collapse. Then it is dropped from the key regression with an explanation of “being an outlier”, and shortly after again in the central attention of the thesis.

Overall, the author demonstrates ability to conduct an independent research, to work with literature sources, and to perform an econometric analysis that can satisfy master thesis criteria. I recommend the thesis for defence and suggest the grade C.

Specific questions you would like addressing at the oral defence (*at least 2 questions*):

- 1) What kind of health expenditures did you finally use in the model regression of chapter 5.5, results presented in chapter 6.1 (page 56)? First, I miss explanation why is this variable included in the model when it is omitted in chapter 4.3. Second, table 4 (page 36) presents total expenditure per capita, but table 5 (page 37-38) describes data source for public healthcare expenditure, and as % of GDP. Further, on pages 43-44 health expenditure per capita are used, but without knowing whether total or public only. Then, on page 67 you talk about public healthcare expenditures only. Could you clarify this at the oral presentation?
- 2) I miss any kind of reflection of your model results regarding previous research done on the same topic, as summarized in chapter 4.1 Meta-analysis. Could you reflect on these, and especially on the OECD study (page 24), at the oral defence?
- 3) The thesis talks a lot about China. But then, surprisingly for the reader, China is omitted from the data set – regression results on page 56. The explanation that China is an outlier in the dataset is rather weak regarding that after one page of model results there are another 6 pages talking about China. However, without China in the dataset of the regression, it is complicated to argue for application of regression results to China. Why should your results hold for China, i.e. based on what you draw the conclusions for China as for example on page 66? Also, in my opinion the thesis simplifies too much the research process and train of thought that led you to the final choice of model. Could you clarify at the oral defence what the model results would be if China was included, and what the model results would be for each group of countries as you introduce these groups in your research (Baltic, CE, CIS, SE, Non-European)?
- 4) It seems as if chapters 6.3-6.5 (pages 58-67) stand alone, are not associated with the argumentation (and structure) of previous pages. Lifestyle factors are introduced, but only as “thoughts”. It is not related to the research outcome as presented in 6.1, though it directly follows that short chapter. Could you explain at the oral presentation whether you thought of including the lifestyle factors (such as smoking prevalence, alcohol consumption, obesity rates) in your model when you believe this is the crucial for explaining the health status differences among these countries?
- 5) Why unemployment rate is not included in the model regression when it is on the author’s list of potential significant factors?