

Template Dissertation Report EPS



Joint Dissertation Review

Name of the student:	Lukasz Ignacy Poloczeck
Title of the thesis:	Cooperating or Bypassing the Member State? The Paradiplomacy of the Visegrad Regions in Brussels
Reviewer:	Dr. Javier Arregui

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

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

The master thesis scrutinizes a relevant and unexplored research question in the literature: To what extent the representatives of the Visegrad regions in Brussels cooperate with their respective permanent representations? The author focuses on the Visegrad regions due to the fact that these regions are under researched in the literature. Thus, while the research question is rather innovative in terms of exploring Eastern European regions, the scope of the question is rather descriptive. The research question lacks ambition that goes beyond describing how cooperation takes place and explaining why it takes place in this way. An overarching theoretical framework, which includes what the literature has said so far on Western European regions, is absent in the thesis.

The aims of the research thesis are nicely developed insofar as the author explains that paradiplomacy of the Central and Eastern European regions constitute a gap in the literature, even if those regions meaningfully benefit from EU cohesion policy. Thus, this research helps to better understand decision making in Brussels as well as the role of subnational actors and the interactions between sub-national and national actors operating in Brussels.

In relation to the theoretical framework and literature review, it is worthy insofar as it reviews the main concepts, theories and mechanisms that may help to understand paradiplomacy, which is the object of study. Perhaps what the theoretical framework lacks is a deeper development of the link between the main concepts (for example, multilevel governance) with the main theories that try to explain EU policy and decision-making: the intergovernmental theory and the neo-functionalist theory. This would have given a more solid ground to the research.

Furthermore, the paper argues correctly that so far there have not been many studies on the roles of Central and Eastern European regions in comparison to Western regions. However, the author has not referenced any of the studies concerning Western European regions in the literature review and/or the theory section. This would have been useful in order to identify the main patterns of cooperation (or non-cooperation) between Western regions and their member states. This would have been useful in order to understand whether Eastern regions work in a similar way and why.

2. ANALYSIS

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

Chapter 2 transitions to the research design. Yet, this is done without having previously formulated hypotheses or mechanisms that could explain cooperation (or non-cooperation) between Eastern regions and their national governments in Brussels. This research would have benefited from the formulation of tentative hypotheses trying to test alternative explanations to those relationships.

The research design is quite convincing. First, the selections of Visegrad regions are justified. Second, the author shows that even within the Visegrad group, there is variation between regions and within the selected countries. Third, the selection of cases for interviews includes just a sample of regions, but covers three of the four member states of the Visegrad group and there is no data of Slovakia although it is well explained and justified why it has been the case. Finally, the data collection was done through semi-structured interviews which is the best way to collect the type of data needed for this research. Perhaps what was missing here are interviews from top officials in Brussels, particularly from the Council Secretariat since they have clear views of what it is occurring in the EU overall, whether in Eastern or Western MS. This would have also reinforced the reliability and validity of the data collected.

The analysis was made according to the data collected. The analysis relied on arguments and justifications. This it is fine, but the research would have benefited from specific measurements of concepts, for example, cooperation between a region and the permanent representation of a MS through policy scales. For instance, asking experts to estimate on a scale from 0 to 100, the level of cooperation between their national representation in Brussels in EU decision-making, with 0 meaning no cooperation at all and 100 meaning the most possible cooperation. This way, you would have had a more accurate measure of a central research concept. This would have facilitated hypotheses testing under different conditions. However, this data collection was not developed and thus the analysis relies mainly on arguments.

3. CONCLUSIONS

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

The conclusions are well written, and they are well connected to the evidence provided in the analysis section. Perhaps the weakest part of the conclusions, as previously suggested, are that the exploratory ideas developed in the paper are not rooted in theory. This offers a sense of exploratory rather than an explanatory analysis. Conclusions are always a good place to advance the theories we already have. Although the findings in this research paper have rich descriptive interest, they are however not directly linked to theory. In order to better understand the scope and reinforce the implications of the descriptive findings, it would have been helpful to them with the arguments used in Western regions.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

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

The thesis is very nicely written. The language and the style show high standards of scholarship. The citation style is consistent throughout the paper. The structure of the research paper is also consistent with academic standards and every important section is clearly specified in the paper.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

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

This thesis is a good thesis overall. It has a good structure, it is well written, it has a rather innovative research question. The analysis is rather descriptive but it is novel and interesting, and it offers new insights on how Central and Eastern European regions operate in policy and decision-making in Brussels.

The weakest point lies in the theoretical contribution of the paper and the disconnect with previous research about the operation of Western regions.

Grade (A-F)	8 (B)
Date	Signature
27/08/2021	