Thesis evaluation Davide Pandiani

Student details:

Name: Davide Pandiani

Studentnr: 4080246

E-mail: d.a.pandiani@umail.leidenuniv.nl

Programme details

Programme: European Politics and Society

Specialisation:

EC: 30

Evaluators:

First: A.Hofmann

E-mail: a.hofmann@hum.leidenuniv.nl

Second: J. Miró

E-mail: joanmiroartigas@gmail.com

Thesis details:

Title: Between Recognition and Exclusion: Investigating Structural Biases in the Cultural Routes Certification Process

Is the thesis in your assessment free of plagiarism?

Yes to my knowledge the thesis is free of plagiarism

No red flags in Turnitin report.

Can the thesis be made publicly available in the Leiden University Repository?

by A.Hofmann: it can be made public throught the repository.

Summary assessment/comments

I enjoyed reading this interesting thesis on an unusual but very worthwhile topic. It is well conceived, but some methodological decisions seem a little rushed.

Criteria

Knowledge and insight

Davide Pandiani's thesis addresses a very interesting research topic: biases in the disbursement of international resources (certifications, funds) to regions and municipalities, or more broadly the interaction of the local with the international. He focusses on a lesser known international programme: the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes. He embeds his work in the broader literature on biases in World Heritage certifications and the disbursement of EU structural funds. This embedding works very well. The literature review is comprehensive and covers many facets of the issue in question. In particular, he identifies three factors that have been highlighted as contributing to success or failure: local administrative capacity, literacy in programme language, and internal politics of the disbursing body. The literature review could have been more thorough in systematically extracting the mechanisms by which these factors operate. Administrative capacity is a local given and fairly stable over time. Literacy is a question of learning, but also prior proximity to the "culture" of the disbursing body. The internal politics of that body are largely out of reach of the applicants, unless they can forge ties with allies in central government or the institution itself. The factors could therefore be abbreviated as capacity, culture and network.

The thesis only goes on to explore the impact of one of these factors: capacity. That is fine but could have been discussed. Overall, the introduction is a bit long and does not end with a summary of the next steps, and the literature review could have benefited from a conclusion that summarised the main points to be carried over into the methodology.

Assessment: very good **Weighing:** n/a

Application of knowledge and insight

The three-phase methodology is well conceived: a quantitative coding of the dependent and independent variables, and a qualitative analysis of two cases to establish causal mechanisms. Data collection on the first phase is very well done; the interactive maps are a great way to visualise the disparities in certifications. I think some descriptive takeaways from the maps could have been worked out more succinctly. The clustering of certifications in Galicia and Northern Portugal, Tuscany, Lazio and Sicily, together with the near absence of certifications in, say, the Netherlands, already indicate that capacity arguments alone will not explain the distribution. The rich history of the Dutch region and its manifold connections to the rest of Europe speak against a lack of stories to tell as an explanatory factor. This points perhaps to a lack of interest in many of the more affluent North-Western European regions. This is certainly speculation, but it is already a good indication that there are missing explanations. The fact that the map of failed applications largely corresponds to the map of successful applications suggests that looking at failed applications may not offer much additional information to an explanation based on regional variation. The takeaway for

me from both maps is that there are some regions that apply and some that do not, and applications are sometimes successful, sometimes not (as can be expected). I am not sure I would have attempted a systematic explanation of success vs. failure based on this data.

The second phase is also an ambitious data collection effort and in principle well-conceived, but the execution seems a bit rushed. From the description, I did not quite understand how values were averaged across countries. Was this the case for all countries or only those where no QoG data was available? Averaging all scores to the national level removes all leverage from the model and would be a terrible strategy. The most sensible way to run the analysis would have been to do so based only on regions with both unique EQI scores and information on the dependent variable. A second model could have included the averaged data, but running only one model on not-so-good data is not a good strategy. I am also not sure why the EQI score should include rule of law and voice components.

Earlier in the thesis, Mr. Pandiani spoke of running a regression model, which does not seem to have happened. Correlations are similar, but a regression has the advantage of modelling a causal direction. Nonetheless, the correlation coefficient largely supports the initial observation: the absence of interest in the programme in North-West European regions cannot be explained by capacity deficits. I am a little sceptical whether the correlation between capacity and failed attempts is substantively meaningful. I wonder what the model was – it would have to exclude regions that never applied to yield interpretable results.
The presentation of the statistical results could have been nicer. This, too, seems rushed.

The inclusion of a third, qualitative phase is interesting, but the selection of two cases with similar administrative capacity makes it impossible to address the results of the first two phases. It does allow for an exploration of the other factors discussed in the literature review – the analysis shows some evidence that “cultural literacy” and experience may be important factors. These are skills that can be learned, and the failed project may be successful in its second attempt.

Assessment: good **Weighing:** n/a

Reaching conclusions

The conclusions are well supported by the data. It would have been interesting to hear more about possible factors that lead rich regions in the European North-West not to apply to the programme, but Mr. Pandiani is correct in pointing out that this would require a different approach. As said, I am unsure if much can be learned by attempting to explain failed applications – failed applications largely come from regions that have previously succeeded and there is always an element of chance.
Overall, my impression is that the thesis could have been streamlined. The last two sections, in particular, largely tell the same thing twice. More space could have been given to the qualitative studies, where I would have been interested to learn more about the involved consortia, their degree of prior experience, how the partners found one another etc.

Assessment: good **Weighing:** n/a

Communication

The thesis is well written and easy to read. Some redundancies could have been streamlined.

Assessment: good **Weighing:** n/a

Learning skills

The student worked independently on this thesis and incorporated feedback well.

Assessment: very good **Weighing:** n/a

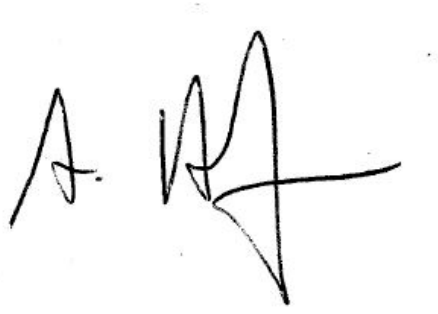
Formal requirements

All formal requirements are met.

Final assessment

On 16-06-2025 this thesis is graded with a 7.7

Signatures



A.Hofmann