

Report on Doctoral Thesis

Doctoral student:	Gentjan Çera
Title of Doctoral Thesis:	The Effects of Institutions, Internal Resources, and External Knowledge Acquisition on Competitive Advantage
Reviewer:	doc. Ing. Aleksandr Ključnikov, Ph.D.
Place of Doctoral Examination:	Faculty of Management and Economics, Tomas Bata University in Zlín, the Check Republic

Evaluation of the actuality of the topic of the Doctoral Thesis

The doctoral thesis studies the impact of institutional constraints and internal resources on the firms' competitive advantage in the case of three selected transition countries from the region of Western Balkan. The author claims that institutional theory does not offer a complete picture of the determinants of competitive advantage since it works from an institutional perspective. The author also identified the limits of the resource-based and knowledge-based views and proposed a combined view from three perspectives to explain the competitive advantage.

The research topic is generally attractive for enterprises operating in dynamically changing environments. Moreover, the selected regions are passing the transformation period, and the results may attract the special attention of local entrepreneurs and policymakers in this vulnerable time. The selected research perspective represents a unique approach that can be considered current.

Evaluation of the fulfillment of the objectives set out in the dissertation thesis.

The main goal of the Dissertation Thesis is to develop a comprehensive model to investigate the effects of the institutional environment, internal resources, and external knowledge acquisition on competitive advantages.

The formulation of the research problem and the main research question limits the scope of the research to the firms operating in transition countries. Therefore, the author formulated six partial research questions and six partial research objectives (chapter 1.3) and further developed seven research hypotheses and a conceptual framework in chapter 2.

The results of the research are gradually presented in Chapters 4 and 5. The author evaluated all presented hypotheses in chapter 4 and provided the discussion related to the research questions in chapter 5. The conceptual framework presented in chapter 2.4 may be considered as the fulfillment of the main research goal of developing a comprehensive model.

The author applied appropriate scientific methods for the hypotheses evaluation and shortly described the results.

The author has chosen a relatively compact approach to present his work's results, where the evaluation of 7 scientific hypotheses is described on only seven pages of the thesis. The complete evaluation of research questions is presented briefly, supplemented by a short discussion. However, the research results deserved more attention from the author, and a better-structured summary of the main findings is missing.

Therefore, I consider the objectives of the Dissertation Thesis to be fulfilled. However, the presentation of the results has some objective shortcomings in terms of the scope of the presentation.

Evaluation of the procedure of research objectives solvation, results of Doctoral Thesis and the contribution of the student

The doctoral thesis has a classic structure of a research paper. In the introductory part, the author describes the research background and defines the research problem, research questions, and objectives, shortly describes entrepreneurship in the selected region and the thesis's structure. Next, a well-structured literature review (chapter 2), reasonably linked to formulating the research hypotheses, is presented. Finally, the author thoughtfully reviews almost 200 mostly current research papers from reputable sources in the scope of the research.

The description of the data collection has some shortcomings. For example, in chapter 3.2, the author states the plan to perform a structured interview of each company's executive team's representative. In chapter 3.3, the author describes a questionnaire survey focused on two focus groups to verify the research model. In one fragmented sentence, he defines the research group of 2 professors, 4 businessmen, and 1 business chamber representative. In the next text, the author described a pilot testing process on the focus group of 2 professors, 2 businessmen, and one business chamber representative. Unfortunately, the numbers do not match. A better explanation of these phases is needed.

In chapter 3.4 the author describes the data collection from 819 companies in Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia. Unfortunately, the statement about the representativeness of the sample is missing. The author only states that a minimum sample size of 10 observations for each independent variable is needed and that there are 11 independent variables. In fact, the author used 19 independent variables (Table 6). Further, he works with the number of 200 responses per country as the target set. The numbers do not evidently match.

The structure of the variables used in the research is based on the research of other authors. The statistical methods of hypothesis testing and evaluation are robust and appropriate, but their description is again very brief.

Chapter 4 presents the results of the data analysis and hypotheses evaluation. Finally, chapter 5 summarizes the main results and briefly discusses the main findings, including the answers to the research questions.

I can conclude that procedure of research objectives solvation is adequate, all the research questions were solved, and hypotheses were evaluated. The students showed a capability to conduct independent research and fulfilled all objectives. The only concerns are related to the data collection procedure during the initial stages, the sample's validity, and the scope of the presentation of the results.

Evaluation of the contribution to the development of the field of study and the practice

The student's contribution can be identified in formulating the combined research approach to explain the competitive advantage from three perspectives, extensive and well-structured literature review, and comparing the results from an international perspective of three Western Balkan countries.

From a practical point of view, the finding may be helpful to policymakers in the selected countries by presenting the ways of better shaping the business environment in this region, less covered by scientific research activities in this field.

Evaluation of formal and language issues of the Doctoral Thesis

The Doctoral Thesis fulfills all formal requirements for this type of scientific work. The language is at the appropriate level. Some minor shortcomings (weird numbers in Figure 3, use of black and white scale in Figures) do not spoil the overall positive impression.

Evaluation of the publications of the doctoral candidate

The doctoral candidate presented a list of 30 articles published in peer-reviewed international scientific journals in the Web of Science and/or Scopus database and 16 conference papers. The value of the h-index of the author is between 7 (WOS) and 9 (Scopus). All presented publications are related to the field of research. Therefore, the number and the quality of publications are outstanding for the doctoral student.

Questions for the student for further discussion

1. Please describe all stages of the data collection, from the face-to-face interviews (chapter 3.2), focus groups interviews, and pilot tests to the questionnaire samplings.
2. Please describe what database was used in case of the data collection in Kosovo and North Macedonia? Who performed the selection of the respondents?
3. Is the data sample statistically valid and reliable?

Definite statement of the reviewer of the fulfilment of Doctoral Thesis evaluation

Based on a comprehensive assessment of the topic, the degree of achievement of goals, results, and benefits of work for the practice and the development of the scientific field, I recommend the Dissertation thesis for the defense, and in case the defense will be

successful I propose to grant the doctoral candidate an academic title of "Doctor" (abbreviated as "Ph.D.").

In Ostrava, 21.06.2022

doc. Ing. Aleksandr Ključnikov, Ph.D.