Review of the Ph.D. Dissertation

NEW URBAN WORLD:

Economic-Geographical Studies on the Performance of Urban System

by Karima Kourtit, Ph.D. Candidate

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A. GENERAL COMMENTS

1. The author of the New Urban World – Ph.D. Candidate Karima Kourtit – took an ambitious topic in her study to analyze and assess unprecedented in human civilization acceleration of urbanization processes often described as a century of cities phenomenon. This phenomenon reached recently a significant threshold when the urban population passed 50 percent of the total population and did not show any signs of slowing down. The global scale of the phenomenon and its tremendous dynamics indicate the relevance of the topic for – academia, policymakers, business and civic leaders, and society at large.
2. The goal of her research is: *identification of the critical success factors for the competitive performance of urban actors and/or cities in the “New Urban World,” through the application of quantitative evaluation.*

3. In a comprehensive and well developed dissertation structure combining 15 chapters on 383 page, the Ph.D. Candidate investigates the main hypothesis weather... *worldwide, cities tend to become engines (or even power plants) of knowledge, innovation and technology, with a multiplicity of far-reaching socio-economic impacts in a global context.*

4. In order to complete her hypothesis verification, she introduce detailed concept of her research including the objectives and scope (chapter 1), and her original *Urban Piazza Model*, as an integrated methodology (chapter 2). These two chapters contain her main research *toolbox.*

5. The next 12 chapters present different cases - from global to local levels – where the Ph.D. Candidate applied a great variety of quantitative analytical methods. The cases are grouped in the following four domains: *dynamic cities, innovative sectors, creative districts and finally new entrepreneurs.* Each of the domains demonstrates three cases.

6. The first domain starts with a breaking through article in urban economics and regional studies (chapter 3) committed jointly with Professor Peter Nijkamp on the role of megacities in global world. It follows by two other chapters explaining the nature of cities competition (chapter 4) and introducing a comprehensive multi actor analysis of metropolitan performance indicators based on application of four different analytical tools (chapter 5).

7. The second domain describes the role of innovative sectors in urban development beginning with impact assessment of the spatial capital resources on business performance based on application of six different methodological tools (chapter 6).
The second article in this domain (chapter 7) focuses on the role of creativity and diversity in strategic performance management (SPM) of the Dutch small and medium enterprises (SMEs) working in high-tech sectors. The final part of this domain (chapter 8) touches a very complex and sensitive issues such as the relationship between completeness of SPM and perceived advantages and disadvantages.

8. In the third domain Ph.D. Candidate introduces three cases of creative districts, starting with old ports (chapter 9), then she moves to planning for historical heritage districts (chapter 10), and at the end presents a trendy topic - creative buzz districts in smart cities (chapter 11).

9. Finally the last domain moved her analysis to microeconomics - to the local level - focusing on new entrepreneurs starting with ethic entrepreneurs bringing change to the urban landscape (chapter 12), followed by a comparative analyzes of high performing entrepreneurs (chapter 13), and finalizing with interesting analysis of the creativity of the urban diaspora economy (chapter 14).

10. The last, 15th chapter summarizes the Ph.D. Candidate’s main research conclusions and outlining some prospect for the New Urban World. This chapter, as the previous chapter characterizes high level sophistication, including interesting visual interpretation of the key concepts in forms of content clouds. The final conclusions and policy recommendations presented at the end of this chapter well synthetized the research conducted and contributed to the verification of her research hypothesis. They also show her professional maturity of judgments and recommendations.

B. SPECIFIC COMMENTS

1. The dissertation is a living testimony of professional development of the Ph.D. Candidate. Both - her development path and its scope – are impressive.
2. This academic thesis is also a tribute to a team work to cope with complex problems.

3. The Ph.D. Candidate demonstrated impressive number of methodological tools applied to variety of the analyzed cases.

4. She also was innovative in presenting results of her research in rich graphical design forms. It significantly increased effectiveness of communication with the potential readers.

5. The language of the dissertation is excellent.

6. The thesis would benefit from adding an acronym lists at the beginning of the work.

7. Although graphical side is generally impressive and innovative, correcting some colors to make better contrasts for the inscription would improve further communication of the main messages. Some of the figures could be enlarged for easier reading.

C. NOVELTY

The path-breaking strength of this dissertation lies in two aspects:

1. The conceptual framing and coherence of the study of urban developments through the integrative notion of the Urban Piazza.

2. The applied nature and testing of various important propositions through the use of a multi-method quantitative analysis, based in most cases on a novel and original toolbox.

The validity of various propositions is illustrated by various applications put together in an impressive collection of essays around different topics related to urban geography,
economics and planning which highlight the dynamics of urban environments. The dissertation makes an important and ambitious contribution to the question of how issues such as creativity or diversity blend together in cities in the Netherlands and elsewhere, in order to make them social and economically dynamic areas. This thesis clearly masters a wide range of existing literature, comes up with new and challenging research questions, and uses advanced methods in order to push the boundaries of our knowledge on this topic.

The broad range and depth of the dissertation places it as a very mature study, based on a mix of conceptual –methodological and applied studies on important issues related to modern cities. The fact that most chapters have been accepted for publication or have been published in refereed journals confirms the high quality of the work. This is indeed impressive.

D. ORIGINALITY OF THE THESIS

1. The candidate has set the ambitious task to produce a wide range of quantitative studies on the *New Urban World*. From reading the thesis, it is evident that the methodological and conceptual framework and foundation is her own original contribution, as is illustrated by the systematic literature overview, the development of the *Urban Piazza* structure as an integrated foundation for her study, and the translation of the ‘strategic performance management’ concept from business economics and organizational theory.

2. Several empirical chapters have been co-authored with others; the candidate was always the lead another, but has worked together with other authors on the application side (e.g., on the use of software). Co-authorship of chapters in a dissertation is nowadays quite common and almost standard practice in the U.S.

3. At least 3 chapters in the dissertation are exclusively her own contribution, while in all other cases – being the main authors – she has provided a very significant and substantial contribution and is mainly responsible for the study concerned.
4. The fact that she has presented all her work at major international conferences confirms once more her independent scientific stature.

5. Her work demonstrates full and independent command of both the vast literature and the quantitative research techniques in modern urban research. This is clearly illustrated in her systematic design of the research into: exploration, explanation and decision support. She has been responsible for the design, conceptual framing, data collection, statistical and econometric analysis, and policy conclusions in all chapters.

6. The candidate has in a mature way accomplished an exceptional study and has managed to identify conceptually and empirically the core drivers of the new urban growth. There is no doubt that she has managed to write on her own an original study with a great depth, breadth and quality.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The Ph.D. Dissertation on NEW URBAN WORLD: Economic-Geographical Studies on the Performance of Urban System by Karima Kourtit, Ph.D. Candidate at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan meet all necessary criteria of academic thesis for that degree. It is an innovative and mature work of the promising researcher. The Ph.D. Candidate successfully defined the research problem, introduced complex methodology, including pioneering Urban Piazza Model, and conducted rigorous investigation with application a great variety proposed methodological tools leading to verification of her hypothesis and final conclusions.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into account all of the abovementioned general and specific comments, the novelty and originality of her academic thesis, I confirm that Karima Kourtit, Ph.D. Candidate prepared her dissertation according to all criteria listed by the Polish Law: Ustawa z dnia
14 marca 2013 r. „O stopniach i tytule naukowym oraz stopniach i tytule w zakresie sztuki”. (Dz.U. Nr 65, poz. 595, z późn. zm.) and recommend her for public dissertation defense.

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