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**Review of dissertation entitled “*The impact of return migration on entrepreneurial propensity and sustainability of related entrepreneurial activity in Poland (2007-2015)*” by Ms. Anke Lasek**

**Research Area and Aim of the Dissertation**

Ms. Anke Lasek's doctoral dissertation investigates the impact of return migration on entrepreneurial propensity and business sustainability in Poland between 2007 and 2015. The study focuses on return migration and its influence on the entrepreneurial activities of returnees.

This research area is exceptionally compelling. Historically, Poland has been a country of emigration since World War II. However, over the past decade, Poland has transitioned into a net immigration country, partly due to return migrations. In the 21st century, return migrations to Poland have significantly increased, especially following the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union. This, combined with Poland's continuously improving economy, has led to a rise in return migrations. Thus, return migration is a relatively new and significant topic for Poland, and any dissertation focusing on this subject adds substantial value.

The importance of entrepreneurship in Poland must also be emphasized. After decades of communism, which stifled individual entrepreneurship, Poles have enjoyed economic freedom since 1989. This has resulted in approximately 5 million micro-enterprises registered in Poland by the end of 2023. Ms. Lasek's dissertation sheds light on the entrepreneurship of return migrants to Poland, filling an existing research gap which can lead to valuable policy recommendations. Therefore, the choice of this topic is both interesting and useful.

The aim of the dissertation is articulated as "to contribute to the study of entrepreneurship in the context of return migration. (...)" explaining further that "this thesis investigates the economic impact of voluntary return migration on entrepreneurial propensity and the sustainability of entrepreneurial activities upon return to a developed economy, using Poland as an example."

To achieve the above aim, author has formulated three following research questions

- Research question 1: *To which extent return migrants enter into entrepreneurial activities upon remigration?*
- Research question 2: *In what way do survival rates of enterprises founded by returnees differ from the firms started by non-migrants?*
- Research question 3: *To which extend do these entrepreneurial activities generate a sustained economic growth?*

Based on these research questions, the author proposes three research hypotheses:

- H1: *Return migrants exhibit higher entrepreneurial propensity than individuals without migration experience.*
- H2: *Enterprises started by return migrants have higher survival rates than enterprises started by individuals without migration experience.*
- H3: *Return migrant entrepreneurs attain higher income than entrepreneurs without migration experience.*

While the aim, research questions, and hypotheses are well-formulated, there is a minor inconsistency. Hypothesis 3, which claims that return migrant entrepreneurs attain higher incomes than those without migration experience, does not directly relate to Research question 3, which concerns sustained economic growth generated by entrepreneurial activities. This discrepancy becomes evident when the author tests Hypothesis 3 later in the dissertation, concluding that the impact of returnee entrepreneurship on the Polish economy is limited due to the small scale of businesses and high failure rates (see Table 14). This conclusion is related to

Research Question 3 (and not the H3), suggesting that Hypothesis 3 may have undergone several revisions during the dissertation's preparation.

## Research Methods

To test the hypotheses, the author employs the following equations, estimated using statistical methods:

- Entrepreneurial propensity equation (probability of an individual starting a business)
- Entrepreneurial survival equation (survival rates of enterprises founded by individuals)
- Income equation (economic performance of individuals, including entrepreneurs)

The research adopts a quantitative approach, utilizing data from the Polish longitudinal survey "Social Diagnosis" (Diagnoza Społeczna). This dataset encompasses five consecutive waves from 2007, 2009, 2011, 2013, and 2015, enabling a detailed analysis of the economic activities and entrepreneurial performance of returnees versus non-migrants.

The choice of the "Diagnoza Społeczna" dataset is highly appropriate for several reasons. First, it is a comprehensive, longitudinal survey that provides extensive data on various aspects of Polish society, including economic conditions, social behaviors, and demographic information. This richness of data, which is uncommon in migration studies, allows for a thorough analysis of social phenomena over time, making it particularly suitable for studies on return migration and entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the dataset's longitudinal nature enables tracking individual changes and long-term trends, which is essential for understanding the dynamics of return migration and its impacts. In my opinion, the use of "Diagnoza Społeczna" ensures robust and reliable findings due to its large sample size and methodological rigor. **Overall, the selection of this dataset aligns well with the study's objectives, providing a solid foundation for examining the relationships between return migration and entrepreneurial activities in Poland.**

The dissertation is based on numerous sources: the bibliography includes over 750 entries, which, while comprehensive, is extensive to the point of being excessive (see further comments in the General Assessment section).

## Structure

Apart from Introduction and Conclusions, the dissertation is divided into 4 chapters:

Chapter 2 *Theoretical aspects on international and return migration*, where the author discusses theories and theoretical approaches related to international migration, as well as its subsequent return migration.

In Chapter 3, *Theoretical aspects to entrepreneurship in context of return* the discussion broadens to encompass entrepreneurship, including general, immigrant, and returnee entrepreneurship. This expansion is essential because, as emphasized by the author, there is no singular economic theory that adequately explains the impact of return migration on entrepreneurial tendencies and the sustainability of businesses established by returnees in their home country's economy.

Chapter 4 *Developments of international migration from and return migration to Poland* focuses on the inclination towards and sustainability of returnee entrepreneurship in Poland. To comprehend the current trends in Polish return migration and associated entrepreneurial behavior, the author presented their historical developments, from the 1772 to the present.

Chapter 5 *Empirical analysis of Polish returnee business development (2007 to 2015)* presents the empirical analysis by introducing the materials and methods used in the study. It discusses the findings from the statistical inquiry, which is based on large-scale longitudinal survey data, as opposed to many existing studies that rely on case studies or cross-sectional research designs.

The structure itself seems clear and logical. However, there are a few remarks:

- Chapter 3 is significantly longer than the other chapters; it might have been worth dividing it into two chapters. However, this is not necessarily a shortcoming.
- In some cases, the content of subsequent sections is loosely related not only to the aim of the dissertation but also to the title of the section itself.
- Although including the abstract, acknowledgments, and formal declarations at the beginning of the table of contents is acceptable, it should not include the table of contents

itself (!), nor the lists of figures, tables, and appendices/abbreviations. These elements should be placed at the end of the table of contents.

- The role of the appendix is unclear. It includes various images copied and pasted from different web pages, which is not appreciated in doctoral dissertation. These images relate to various aspects of the dissertation but bring little value or even detract from it.

## General Assessment

The dissertation exhibits several **positive aspects** that underscore its academic rigor and the author's expertise in the research field.

Firstly, the extensive bibliography, comprising over 750 sources, reflects a familiarity with existing literature, ensuring that the research is well-grounded. This abundance of references indicates the author's deep understanding and thorough investigation into the subject matter.

Additionally, as already mentioned, the selection of the "Diagnoza Społeczna" dataset for conducting analyses demonstrates the right judgment, as this dataset provides a robust foundation for analyzing return migration and entrepreneurship in Poland. The author's choice of research methods further highlights the dissertation's strengths; by employing quantitative approach, the study ensures a detailed examination of the research questions. The combination of large-scale longitudinal survey data with statistical analysis undoubtedly brings added value to this research area.

The dissertation yields several interesting results that significantly contribute to the understanding of return migration and entrepreneurship. One of the most interesting findings is the identification of distinct patterns in entrepreneurial propensity among return migrants compared to non-migrants.

Author's findings allow for positively testing Hypothesis 1 (Polish returnees entered more into entrepreneurial activities than non-migrants), while negatively testing Hypothesis 2 (enterprises started by return migrants do not have higher survival rates than those started by individuals without migration experience) and Hypothesis 3 (returnees do not sustain their businesses for longer periods than non-migrants).

These results not only advance academic knowledge, but also offer practical implications for creating a supportive environment for returnee entrepreneurs, knowing that their propensity to start businesses is relatively high.

Furthermore, the author made significant effort to define key concepts and terms relevant to the study of return migration and entrepreneurship. The definitions provided are clear and extensive, enhancing the reader's understanding of the complex phenomena under investigation. By defining terms used throughout the dissertation, the author ensures that these concepts are interpreted consistently.

Despite these strengths, the dissertation has a few **shortcomings**:

- While a comprehensive literature review is essential for situating the research within the existing knowledge, an overly long bibliography (over 750 references) can indicate a lack of focus and selectivity in selecting sources. **In research work, it is critical to prioritize quality over quantity, ensuring that each cited work significantly contributes to the understanding and context of the dissertation topic. Streamlining the bibliography to include the most influential studies would not only enhance the clarity and coherence of the literature review but also demonstrate the researcher's ability to critically evaluate and integrate the most relevant academic contributions.**
- Regarding references, I am wondering why the author does not use original sources when quoting classical works, instead of relying on contemporary works that refer to the originals. Moreover, it is unclear why the author does not use primary statistical data sources, such as Eurostat, Statistics Poland, or the World Bank, when discussing the Polish and EU economies, especially given that this dissertation falls within the economics and finance domain (e.g., pages 152-153).
- The style of the majority of this dissertation closely resembles that of the introduction sections in research papers, where topics are briefly mentioned and followed by numerous references to other studies that have addressed similar issues. However, in a dissertation, the author is expected to dive deeply into specific topics and provide detailed explanations, demonstrating a thorough understanding of the genesis and consequences of the problems being tackled. Merely listing numerous sources without substantial discussion does not suffice. While reading this dissertation, one often gets the impression

that the author sometimes unnecessarily dives into side topics (to cite more sources?).

This approach can cause readers to lose the main thread of the argument. Consequently, some paragraphs are only loosely connected to the section titles that they fall under.

- Another issue is the excessive historical and theoretical framework presented in some cases. For example, discussing the history of entrepreneurship or Poland back to the 18th century does not add much value in the context of this specific dissertation. The appendix, filled with copied and pasted images from various web pages, also detracts from the dissertation's value and seems unnecessary.
- Furthermore, the choice of a three-month period to define a return migrant, especially within the context of this dissertation, is puzzling. Only one of the analyzed "Diagnoza Społeczna" reports defines a migrant as someone who has been abroad for at least three months, while the others account for longer periods. The concept of return migrant entrepreneurship is tied to the degree of embeddedness in the social and economic landscape of the host country. I would argue that the ideas for starting a business upon return often stem from long-term experiences in another culture. Therefore, the longer an individual stays in the host country, the more likely they are to draw on these experiences to fill a market niche upon her / his return. Thus, using such a short period (which might also be debatable in terms of migration definitions) seems quite surprising.
- It appears that English is not the author's first language, resulting in some sentences being difficult to understand due to syntax errors. Some words are also used in incorrect or unfortunate contexts. For example, "mill" is incorrectly used as an abbreviation for "million" throughout the dissertation. For dissertations written in a non-native language, I always strongly recommend having them reviewed by a native speaker or an experienced, professional proofreader of research texts.
- Lastly, the conclusions section does not seem well-constructed. It appears chaotic and should more clearly summarize the analysis, explicitly reference the dissertation's aims, and elaborate on the results, including the verification of research hypotheses, comparing them to other similar studies.

Despite these shortcomings, the overall evaluation of the dissertation remains positive, given its undeniable strengths.

## Detailed remarks

- page 9 – I would consider including *liquid migration* in the typologies
- p. 11 – since 2022, I would consider indicating which war author has on her mind
- p. 16 (onwards) – The theoretical approaches to return migration were actually approaches to analyzing migration in general, not specifically return migration. The return migration thread was sometimes forced, as the original theories did not account for it. It was surprising that migrant network and migration systems theories were discussed so briefly, despite their relevance in explaining return migration motives. p. 35 – the last paragraph goes away from this section topic (determinants)
- p. 36. There are also negative effects of remittances (see Okólski 2011)
- p. 60 –The *entrepreneurship* should be discussed before the *economic theories on entrepreneurship* (p. 41).
- p. 76. – I am wondering why definition of *immigrant* is included in this section. This probably results from four different subchapters entitled *Definition of key terms and concepts*. A better approach would be to include one subchapter with definitions, at the beginning of the dissertation.
- p. 82 (A.) The content of this subchapter was actually not ethnic enclave theory but rather enclave entrepreneurship theory.
- p. 113 – The last paragraph of 3.3.5. is not related to the section title
- p. 127 – The graph on the left-hand side is not readable
- p. 134 – There was a lack of thorough explanation for the shift in migration patterns (e.g., transitional agreements, the prevalence of English as a common foreign language in Poland)
- p. 135 – **Denmark did not open its labour market for the citizens of new EU member states in 2004 – only the UK, Ireland and Sweden did.**
- p. 135 – the predominance of male emigrants was not that significant in this case (53-56%)
- p. 135 – well-educated Poles were not overrepresented in case of this migration – the majority had secondary / vocational education



- p. 136 - this emigration wave should not be considered a loss of valuable human capital or brain drain; additionally, the first paragraph on this page related to return migrations, whereas this section was meant to describe emigration.
- p. 137 - /last paragraph/ the explanation is straightforward and relates to Poland's population vs. other CEE countries; moreover, emigration from Poland as a percentage of the total population was not the highest among the CEE countries.
- p. 143 – I assume the petty trade has not vanished completely (?)
- p. 150 – the last paragraph is not connected to the section title
- p. 160 – /last paragraph/ it would be advisable to deep dive in results of those studies
- p. 192 – last bullet point was unclear—what was meant by "the region with mean GDP"?
- p. 193 – table 12 lacked a left-hand column with category names.

Additionally, some grammar, spelling, and syntax errors were identified. However, these did not affect the overall quality of the dissertation.

## Conclusion

Considering the original and innovative approach to the research problem, the applied research methods, the use of data sources, and the thorough literature review, **I conclude that the dissertation submitted for review meets the requirements for doctoral dissertations** as specified in the Act of July 20, 2018, Law on Higher Education and Science (Journal of Laws of 2018, item 1669, as amended) and may be subject to public defense. In light of this, I recommend proceeding with Ms. M.A. Anke Lasek to the next stages of the doctoral process at the Krakow University of Economics.

[PL: Niniejszym stwierdzam, że rozprawa doktorska autorstwa mgr Anke Lasek spełnia wymogi określone w ustawie Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym i nauce z dnia 20 lipca 2018 r. (tj. Dz. U. 2023 r. poz. 742 z późn. zm.) w związku z ustawą z dnia 3 lipca 2018 r. przepisy wprowadzające ustawę – Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym i nauce (Dz. U. z 2018 r., poz. 1669, z późn. zm.) i uzasadnia dopuszczenie P. mgr Anke Lasek do publicznej obrony]