EXPERT OPINION

on the doctoral thesis titled
Proposal of a framework for a cluster development in the selected Central European countries

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The relevance of the theme for the development of field of study

Submitted doctoral thesis is focused on the research of industry cluster development in selected countries of Central Europe. Clusters have become the significant topic in the economic and regional policies in both advanced and underdeveloped countries and international organizations in the last two decades. The majority of national and regional governments in the European Union gave the cluster policies their priorities and the European Commission organised after 2000 several studies on clusters and cluster policies in the member states and launched many new cluster initiatives since then. The clusters and innovation were involved in the economic policy strategies almost in all EU member countries, the successful examples may serve the Czech Republic and Poland as well. From this point of view the theme of doctoral dissertation is very timely and very demanding.

The analysis of thesis, the methodology and results

The structure of work follows a recommended standard of doctoral dissertations at the Faculty. The first chapter analyzes the current state of the problem based on critical literature review. Briefly summarizes the concept of clusters and cluster initiatives, cluster characteristics, activities and approaches and explains the policies for clusters development in the EU. Up to date is the inclusion of current trends, initiatives and projects of the EU devoted to cooperation and clusters and explanation of concept of World class clusters indicating a good orientation of student in the issues under consideration. The chapter concludes with the summary of approaches to clusters in Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic. The author could explain here why she chose Germany, France and Sweden for presentation of cluster policies in Europe.

The second chapter is devoted to the setting goals and objectives. The main objective is to propose a framework for a cluster development in macro (government and local policies) and micro perspective (clusters themselves) in Central European countries of Poland, Czech and Slovak Republics. This objective is further divided into four sub-objectives, i.e. analysis, mapping, management and financing and comparison of the development of clusters in each investigated country. An appreciation deserves the clear formulation of two research questions which can be converted into two hypotheses

The following part of thesis describes the methods chosen to the solution of the work. In addition to the usual general methodological approach it focuses on the critical analysis of literature and the importance of primary research based on questionnaire surveys and structured interviews. In this part I do have a comment that the overview of respondents and data used given at page 98 and their summary from the annexes would be more appropriate here.

In next part of the thesis in chapter four the author describes the main results of the work. At first she presents the proposal of a framework for a cluster development in an ideal environment and then she analyses the cluster policies and their results in three selected countries. I found this part very promising as the description of current cluster policies in selected countries, the research and really very detailed analysis and comparisons are quite new and were not so far presented in such an extent. Beneficial are also detailed presentations of clusters in country regions. The chapter concludes by the proposal of a framework for cluster development in the selected countries which forms other important achievement of doctoral thesis. On the other hand as the descriptive parts prevail in this chapter following questions arise: Which are the benefits of clusters and how they are measured in different investigated countries? This could be answered during the defense. Also other issues could be discussed: How to persuade the politicians to support clusters and cooperation? Why shall the (regional) government finance the established clusters? And from which budget? How shall the regional authorities affect the business clusters (what about market forces?). Etc. and etc.

As the objective of the thesis was to develop proposals I found it fulfilled and achieved in the way it is presented and also in the answer to the research questions.

The fifth chapter is devoted to the assessment of benefits of the work. The proposal of a policy model is quite new as well as are the research results from research in the field and their comparison and the recommendation for further cluster development which concerns both the theoretical and practical aspects of the thesis.

A statement on the significance of thesis for the theory and practice
I agree with the author on the potential benefits of work for theory, practice and research at the faculty. In the assessment of the cluster policy we should also consider the impact of the world economic (financial) crisis on the current situation in each country, which may affect the cluster support initiatives in both public and private sector. We should also bear in mind that clusters are not a panacea, and in particular in Central and Eastern Europe there is not always a theory which pays that "clusters are industry driven". In our countries may pay "Clusters are subsidies driven as far as these are available".

A statement on formal presentation and language level
Presentation of work is very good and follows the standards-based school. The work is written very well, mostly with clear and readable English. However some phrases reveal the specific Central-European usage of English. An example can serve the word "problematics" which is understandable to Czech readers and by which the author means "issues" or "field of interest", etc. I would also recommend the author when using the direct quotation to refer to the page of the cited work. However these

details do not affect the overall high level of the thesis. The thesis covers 190 pages and 3 annexes. The text is accompanied by 37 figures including tables and graphs which make it very understandable. Total number of 143 references to mostly contemporary sources prove deep author´s interest in the studied issues.
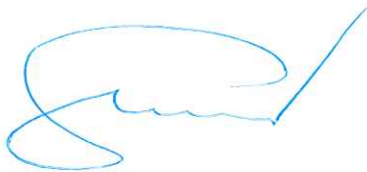
A statement on student publications

The list of 18 published student works is quite sufficient and almost impressive. She is co-author of two articles in impacted journals (however they seem not to be related to industry clusters), four articles in professional international journals analyzing cluster phenomenon, two chapters in the book, and ten international conference papers, which are mostly close to the content of the work.

Conclusion:

The presented doctoral thesis can be beneficial both in terms of a summary of theoretical approaches and in terms of gaining practical experience and opportunities to further support of cluster development in Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic.

I recommend definitely to approve the doctoral thesis of Ms. Bialic-Davendra for defense and after its successful performance to award her the degree Ph.D. in accordance with the Czech university law.

In Ostrava, 2nd September, 2011
prof. Ing. Karel Skokan, Ph.D.