Name of the student:	Gregorio Vichi
Title of the thesis:	The Absorption Dilemma: An analysis of the national determinants affecting the absorption capacity of EU funds
Reviewer:	Prof. Dr. Javier Arregui

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD
(relevance of the research question, research objective, literature review):

This thesis tries to explain the main determinants and rational behind the variation among Member States in their level of absorption capacity of EU Cohesion Policy Funds. The topic is highly relevant insofar it is a key issue in order to understand the level of efficiency of EU Cohesion Policies. Furthermore, there is very little research so far on this important topic. Thus, this research has been selected with good criteria and clearly it provides, not only a nice description of what has happened in the last fourteen years of this issue but also a sound and tentative explanation of some of the most relevant determinants that shape up the absorption capacity of EU MS.

The objective of the research is also clearly specified in the research: to be able to identify the most relevant mechanisms that elucidate the problems that MS face when trying to implement the resources of Cohesion Funds. This is a relevant aim given that we cannot understand EU public policies without knowing the level of efficiency that Cohesion Policies display across MS and knowing better which mechanisms operate in order to make these policies more or less operative and successful.

The literature review is not too long due to the fact that there is no so much previous research in this topic. The dissertation discuss previous research in a rather descritpive way. Perhaps what it is missing here is to present previous research and/or related research (such as literature on implementation of EU legislation, Europeanisation, multilevel governance or principal-agent theory) in a more critical and compelling way. What I mean by compelling is that although the text mention that there is some relationshipt between those lines of research and the absorption capacity of MS it is not made in a rather systematic and/or critical way. For example, the use of those theories would have been more persuasive if the author would have been how is related (this means similarities and differences) between the europeanisation or the implementation process and the absorption capacity process. This is not directly made but it is presented in a more acritical way. When there are clear associations as well as some disparities between those processes. I am not saying that the theoretical framework is not valid but rather that it could have been presented in a much more compelling way.

 In general, the first part of the thesis in terms of presenting the research question, the aim of the research and presenting the main relevant ideas and arguments that justify the dependent and independent variables (which are clearly derived from theory) is in a pretty good shape.

2. ANALYSIS
(methodology, argument, theoretical backing, appropriate work with sources):

The theoretical framework is well developed on pages 12-16. It includes a formulation of three theory-driven hypotheses. The three hypotheses are based on potentially good explanatory variables. However, in their development some are more convincing than others. Particularly, I believe that the first two hypotheses are better explained and convincing than the third one. This does not mean that the third one is not a relevant one. I believe it is. However, the framing of such hypothesis have clearly room to be improved.

The research design in my opinion is quite good insofar it combines both qualitative and a quantitative approach. This means an effort for the data collection that needs to be clearly recognised. I also believe that the data for testing the first two hypotheses is good enough. I am not so sure whether the data used for the operationalisation of the third hypothesis is at the same level. In any case, I recognise the difficulty of finding available data for the third hypothesis. This means that the research has been providing data at its best. This is also clearly to be valued.

The analysis is well excuted according to the existing data and it develops both a descriptive empirical analysis testing the central hypotheses of the thesis. The qualitative information also complements somehow to the empirical evidence showed in the paper. The author uses qualitative and sustantive information (collected from interviews in Brussels) in order to explain the main determinants that impact absorption capacity of MS. This combination of quantitative and qualitative approach is perhaps the most appealing contribution of this research in theoretical terms that could help the development of future research. Perhaps one way to improve all this together would have been providing some case study of one of two MS with problems of absorption and to analyse more in detailed what happened in those cases. In any case, discussion of the methos is also good. The data used in the analysis provides tentative conclusions that will need to be corroborated in future research.

I believe it is also fair to recognise the descriptive information and transcriptions fo the interviews developed by the author and contained in the Apprendix. All this information clearly helps to understand much better the context and arguments developed in the the data analysed. This clearly reinforces the quality of this research.

3. CONCLUSIONS
(persuasiveness, link between data and conclusions, achievement of research objectives):

The conclusions are not as compelling as it should. The author basically repeats what has been said in the previous (discussion) section which is basically a summary of the main findings through the hypotheses testing and a general explanation of the main determinants that explain absorption capacities of MS. What I have missed in the conclusions is to develop the main implications of these findings both in theoretical and empirical terms. For example, in theoretical terms the reseach has clearly showed that a poor administrative structure and/or political stability of MS may create problems for absorption ... Is this related to management theories ? Is possible having a high rate of absorption with a poor administrative structure? What sort of implications this may have for the formulation and implementation of cohesion policies? In empirical terms we clearly need further research to identify better how agency factors intervine in those processes. At the moment we have some tentative answers but we need further analysis on those mechanisms, which are clearly related to the structural domestic conditions of MS. These sort of argument should have been developed in the conclusions and discussion section.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE
(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout):

The thesis is nicely written and uses scholarly language.

The thesis uses a list of abbreviations which are clearly explained thorugh the Thesis.

The author uses a few number of footnotes and the included citations are not always clearly quoted within the main text. The style is consistent across the paper.

The author has also provided an Appendix with additional descriptive data and information which clearly offer and added value to the Master Thesis.

In general, the formal aspects of the thesis are brilliantly presented and developed.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT
(strong and weak point of the dissertation, other issues)

The thesis has many strong points:

- Original research question (this is a topic rarely analysed in the literature)

- Good dataset (compiled by the author through secondary sources plus first-hand information collected through interviews in Brussels)

- Nice theoretical framework

- Nice research design

- Good analysis that complement descriptive data with empirical evidence and qualitative information developed from interviews with experts

- Superb formal aspects and language of the thesis

Three weak points:

- Framing and data for the development of the third hypothesis could be improved

- Little discussion of the main implications of the research

- Poor conclusions

Grade (A-F)	8,8
Date	Signature
26/06/2024	