

Senior and junior supervisor research topic application for the IPhD Programme in Regional Development,year

Name/position of the senior supervisor: Prof. Dr. László Szerb, full professor
Highest academic degree: DSc.

Name/position of the junior supervisor: Balázs Kovács, assistant professor
Highest academic degree: PhD

Title of the suggested research topic: Examining small business operation and competitiveness

The international relevance, importance, and timeliness of the research topic:

Although small firms make up the vast majority - 99.8-99.9% - of the firms in the competitive sector, employ roughly 65-75% of the workforce and account for 53-58% of GDP, our knowledge of them is still limited. The resource-based concept of competitiveness provides a good theoretical framework to systematically research small firms. Competitiveness itself is a very popular line of research, with national, regional, industry and firm-level orientations. However, the study of the competitiveness of small firms is a relatively underdeveloped area where it is relatively easier to find interesting and novel results.

Which UP-FBE research could the PhD candidate join?

In order to better understand the place and role of small businesses in the economy, the Small Business Research Group was established within UP-FBE. Within this framework, a resource-based theoretical model was developed to examine the competitiveness of small enterprises along ten competences. A questionnaire has been developed to this end. The small business research group, which also manages a data set now covering 10 countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, France, Indonesia, Colombia, Mexico, Serbia, Spain), is also piloting a survey in Pakistan. The questionnaire is currently available in 14 languages. 1243 Hungarian and 1278 foreign firms were surveyed in the 2016-2022 time period. Those who join the research team will also be asked to contribute to the development of the dataset in return for access to the full dataset.

Possible research directions:

The result of the rather long questionnaire is that many research directions can be opened. In recent years, there have been publications in the fields of competences, strategy, strategic configurations, marketing, online presence, human resources, innovation, internationalization, financial performance, both in single countries and in multi-country data. Of particular interest are analyses aimed at international comparisons. Research can be done in virtually all functional areas. In particular, I am suggesting the examination of online and web practices, innovation, strategic configurations, and internationalization.

The supervisor's expertise and experience in the research field

I have been researching small businesses for more than 25 years, I have numerous national and international publications and grants (OTKA, NKFI, TÁMOP, EFOP). I am also the head of the Small Business Research Group at UP-FBE and the head of the Small Business Research international research group (together with Esteban Lafuente). I have several PhD students who have defended and are currently working on the topic of small business competitiveness.

The most important publications in the research field over the last five years

Rideg A, L. Szerb L.; A. R. Varga (2023) The role of intellectual capital on innovation: Evidence from Hungarian SMEs, *TEC Empresarial 2023*, vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 1 - 19,

Lafuente, E. M., & Szerb, L. (2021). Understanding resource-based competitiveness: competencies, business processes and alternative performance assessment. *Competitiveness Review*, 31(3), 353-360.

Lafuente, E.; Szerb L.; Rideg A. (2020) A system dynamics approach for assessing SME competitiveness, *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development* 27(4); pp. 555-578.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/JSBED-06-2019-0204>

Lafuente, E., Leiva, J.C.; Moreno-Gómez, J. & Szerb, L. (2019) A system dynamics approach to competitiveness: An analysis of the relevance of the configuration of competitive pillars and aspiration performance on efficiency, Available online in *BRQ Business Research Quarterly*