

Travel grant report Presenting my DPhil research at Princeton University

With the generous support of the Santander Travel Award and the Sandrew Travel Fund in the total sum of £585 I was able to attend a special conference at Princeton University organized by the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies (PIIRS) to present my doctoral research project on corruption in local governments.

The topic of the conference was related to promoting research on corruption and immigration in the South East European region. It was a full day conference held on 19th of April 2018. The conference was by invitation only and I am therefore honoured to have been invited by my peers to present my research in front of them. I am also grateful to the Santander and Sandrew travel funds for their support of this trip and, by extension, my research.

I presented my first DPhil paper called “Corruption and re-election: How much can politicians steal without getting punished” which uses data on fraudulent public procurements administered by mayors of Croatian municipalities as a unique proxy for corruption and ties it to re-election probabilities of those mayors. There is an optimal level of suspicious procurements for which politicians maximize their re-election chances. When a mayor surpasses the cut-off level of around 20% of suspiciously allocated funds from public procurement, his or her probability of re-election starts to decline, while he or she loses office for at least one half of all procurements allocated suspiciously. In order to address potential endogeneity issues I apply a fuzzy regression discontinuity design based on population thresholds that determine the size of the local council, where the intensity of the treatment (corruption) increases with increasing council size. The results overall confirm a concave relationship between corruption and re-election.

This paper is the first part of my three-paper thesis and represents the key first step in proving my overall hypothesis. I seek to find out how the collusion between politicians and firms benefits each of them and how their relationship yields unwanted consequences in increasing income inequality. Presenting my papers at conferences and getting feedback from top academics is at this point highly beneficial for my doctoral research.

This is exactly what I was able to receive at Princeton – excellent feedback from some of their distinguished academics and post-doctoral students. In addition, I found the experience to be an excellent networking opportunity with scholars doing work on corruption in the East European region, where we exchanged ideas and even some useful datasets. The experience was invaluable given that a few of us are planning to work together and pool our datasets in order to develop a new type of corruption index for the region using big data on public procurement contracts. Finally, I have already presented my main findings in front of Croatian Parliament, in front of the National Council for Monitoring the Implementation of the Anti-Corruption Strategy in November 2017. They are preparing the draft of the new law on anti-corruption strategies and will be looking for further evidence from my research to help them draft it. Collaboration with scientists doing similar work on recognizing corruption will be extremely helpful in providing the authorities in my country with the best possible tools to recognize and reduce corruption practices in public procurement.



