

The organization of knowledge in multinational firms

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Motivation

Knowledge increasingly important production factor, but **spatial diffusion limited**

MNEs' foreign production **major channel of knowledge diffusion** (Keller, 2004)

However, spatial and cultural frictions hamper flow of information within MNEs (e.g. Ambos & Ambos, 2009; UNCTAD, 2004, ch. IV A.2)

⇔ Most models of MNEs assume **perfect diffusion** of knowledge within firm (e.g. Markusen, 1984; Helpman et al., 2004; Keller & Yeaple, 2013)

Research question:

How do spatial communication frictions within MNEs affect their organization of knowledge, the geography of their investments and their wage setting behavior?

Overview (I)

Assumptions

- ▷ Firm = headquarters + domestic (and foreign) production affiliate(s)
- ▷ Production based on labor and knowledge
- ▷ Knowledge firm-specific and non-rival within firm
- ▷ Employees have to **learn** knowledge for knowledge to be useful in production
- ▷ **Communication** among employees possible
- ▷ Learning remunerated
- ▷ Communication time-consuming; more time if communication across border

Overview (II)

Firm task: **efficiently organize** learning of **knowledge** → **trade-off**

- ▷ Higher fraction of knowledge at headquarters → more costly communication
- ▷ Higher fraction of knowledge at affiliates → higher learning expenses
- ⇒ MNE: **Heterogeneous** optimal local production worker knowledge levels

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Implications consistent with distinct features of MNE behavior:

- ▷ Marginal costs function of workers' knowledge → **Variation in sales/entry**
- ▷ Reorganization of knowledge in MNEs → Residual **MNE wage premiums**

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Supported by empirical evidence on German multinational firms

Literature & Contribution

Gravity due to headquarter inputs in foreign production (e.g. Bahar, 2013; Irarrazabal et al., 2013; Keller & Yeaple, 2013; Yeaple, 2013)

- *Here:* Headquarters **choice variable** of MNE
 - ⇒ Endogenous, non-constant, interdependent marginal costs of production
 - ⇒ Gravity *and* (residual) MNE wage premiums

Wage premiums due to scale (e.g. Helpman et al., 2010; Caliendo & Rossi-Hansberg, 2012) or worker preferences (Egger & Kreickemeyer, 2013)

- *Here:* Common headquarters = **organizational constraint**
 - ⇒ MNE specific source of residual MNE wage premiums

Building blocks: firms as communication networks and knowledge hierarchies (e.g. Bolton & Dewatripont, 1994; Garicano, 2000; Garicano & Rossi-Hansberg, 2006; Antràs et al., 2006; Caliendo & Rossi-Hansberg, 2012; Caliendo et al., 2013)

Outline

- 1 Theory
 - Cost-minimization
 - Profit maximization
 - General equilibrium
 - MNE wage premiums
- 2 Empirical strategy & Data
- 3 Empirical specification & Regression results

Set-up (I)

Two countries, $j = 0$ (home) and $j = 1$ (foreign)

N_j agents per country, each endowed with one unit of time

∞ potential firms per country, each producing a differentiated final product

Production \equiv **problem solving process** based on labor and knowledge
(Garicano, 2000)

1 unit of labor



Mass 1 of problems

from distribution function $\lambda e^{-\lambda z}$

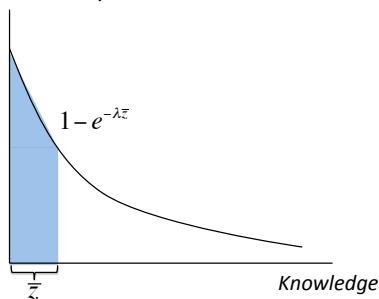


Output if problem solved,

Output $q_j = 1 - e^{-\lambda \bar{z}}$

λ : problem arrival rate

Problem density



Set-up (II)

- ▷ Firm characterized by **firm-specific knowledge level** $[0, \bar{Z}]$ of length \bar{z}
- ▷ Employees have to **learn knowledge** for its being useful in production
- ▷ Employees can **communicate problems** → leverage differences in knowledge

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- ▷ Both **learning and communication costly**:
 learning: increased remuneration $w_j(1 + c_j z_x)$, $x = j, h$,
 communication: $\theta_{kj} < 1$ units of time (to receive message from k in j)
 Cross-border communication more costly than within country communication
 $1 > \theta_{10} \geq \theta_{00} > 0, \theta_{10} = \theta_{01}, \theta_{00} = \theta_{11}$

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 $1 > \theta_{10} \geq \theta_{00} > 0$, $\theta_{10} = \theta_{01}$, $\theta_{00} = \theta_{11}$
- ▷ Only workers input labor, managers only input knowledge (Garicano, 2000)
- ⇒ Workers' knowledge $[0, Z_j]$ of length z_j : more frequent problems
 Managers' knowledge $[Z_h, \bar{Z}]$ of length z_h : infrequent problems
 Optimal to learn full knowledge interval, so $z_h + z_j \geq \bar{z} \forall j$

Cost minimization problem

Optimization problem:

Choose number of employees at production affiliate(s) and headquarters as well as their knowledge levels such that overall costs of production minimized

$$C(\bar{z}, q_0, w_0, q_1, w_1) = \min_{\{n_j, z_j\}_{j=0}^1, n_h, z_h} \sum_{j=0}^1 n_j w_j (1 + c_j z_j) + n_h w_0 (1 + c_0 z_h)$$

$$\text{s.t.} \quad n_j (1 - e^{-\lambda \bar{z}}) \geq q_j \quad \forall j$$

$$n_h \geq \sum_{j=0}^1 \theta_{j0} n_j e^{-\lambda z_j}$$

$$z_j + z_h \geq \bar{z} \quad \forall j$$

$$n_h \geq 0, z_h \geq 0, z_h \leq \bar{z}$$

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$$n_j \geq 0, z_j \geq 0, z_j \leq \bar{z} \quad \forall j$$

→ n_j, n_h determined by constraints

→ $z_j + z_h \geq \bar{z}$ binding for (at least) one country

Organization of knowledge

Domestic firm/exporter

Knowledge level of managers

$$\underbrace{n_0 w_0 c_0}_{\substack{\text{Marg. benefit of increasing } z_h \\ \text{Decrease in workers' learning}}} = \underbrace{n_0 \theta_{00} e^{-\lambda(\bar{z} - z_h)} w_0 (c_0 + \lambda(1 + c_0 z_h))}_{\substack{\text{Marg. costs of increasing } z_h \\ \text{Increase in learning + change in \# of managers}}}$$

→ Knowledge determined by θ_{00} , c_0 , λ , \bar{z} (θ_{10} , c_j , λ , \bar{z} , w_j for vertical MNEs)

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→ Knowledge determined by θ_{00} , c_0 , λ , \bar{z} (θ_{10} , c_j , λ , \bar{z} , w_j for vertical MNEs)

(Horizontal) Multinational firm

Knowledge level of managers ($z_0 = \bar{z} - z_h$, $z_1 > \bar{z} - z_h$)

$$\underbrace{n_0 w_0 c_0}_{\substack{\text{MB of increasing } z_h \\ \text{Decrease in workers' learning}}} = \underbrace{n_1 \theta_{10} e^{-\lambda z_1} w_0 c_0 + n_0 \theta_{00} e^{-\lambda(\bar{z} - z_h)} w_0 (c_0 + \lambda(1 + c_0 z_h))}_{\substack{\text{MC of increasing } z_h \\ \text{Increase in learning + change in \# of managers}}}$$

→ Additional determinants: q_j via n_j , w_j via z_1 , $j = 0, 1$

⇒ z_h chosen by MNE different from domestic optimum

Organization of knowledge: Results

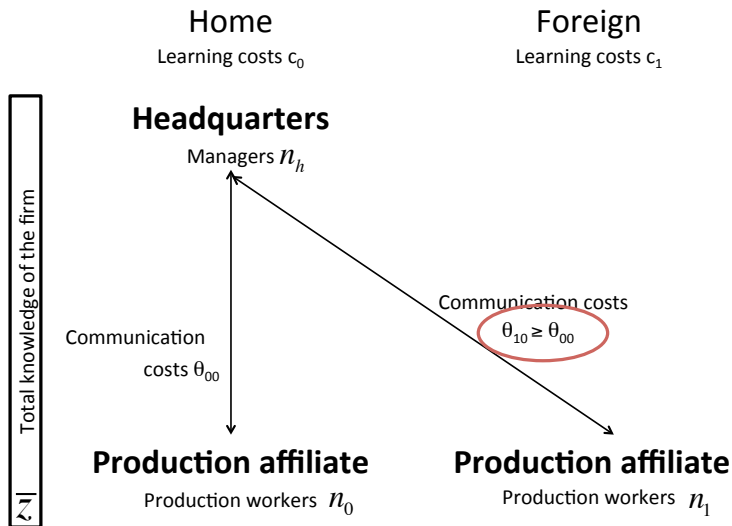
Domestic firm/exporter

Knowledge level of production workers z_0

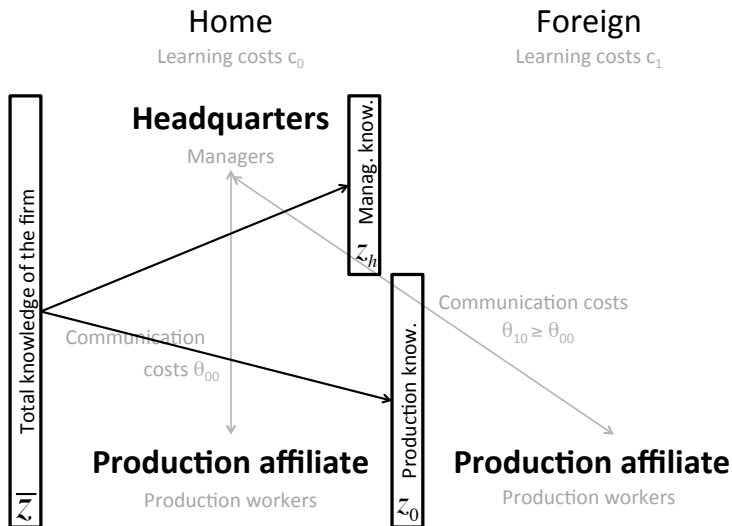
- learning costs c_0
- + communication costs θ_{00}
- + total firm knowledge \bar{z}

Constant marginal costs of production

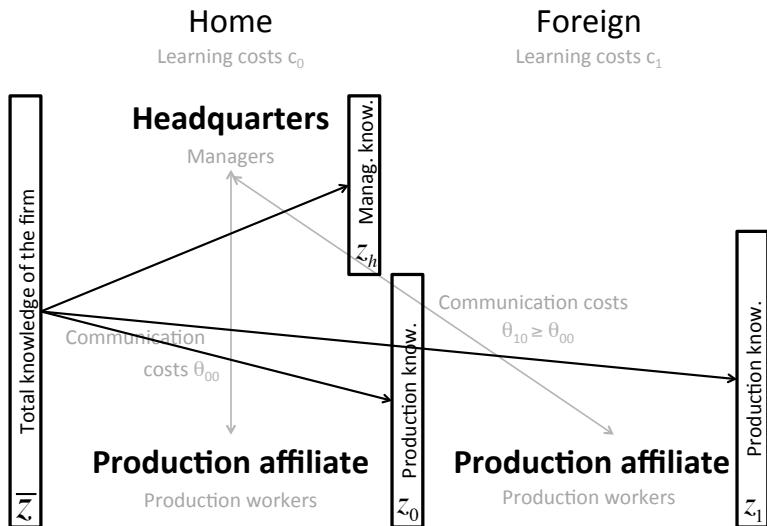
Organization of knowledge: Illustration



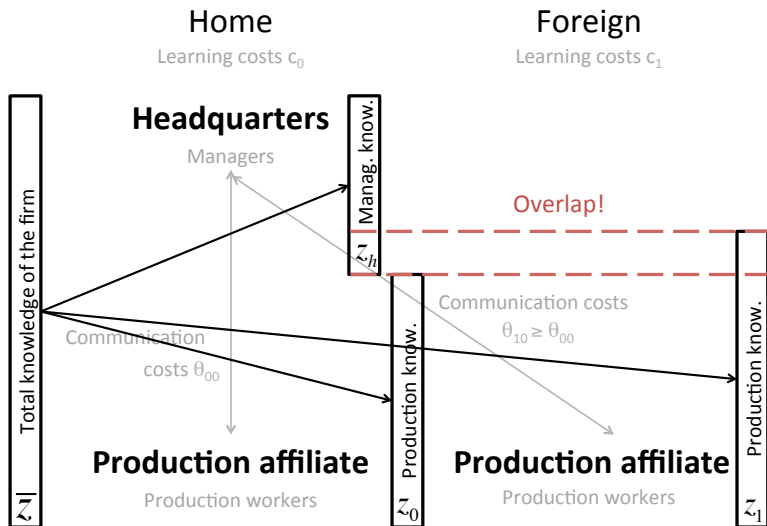
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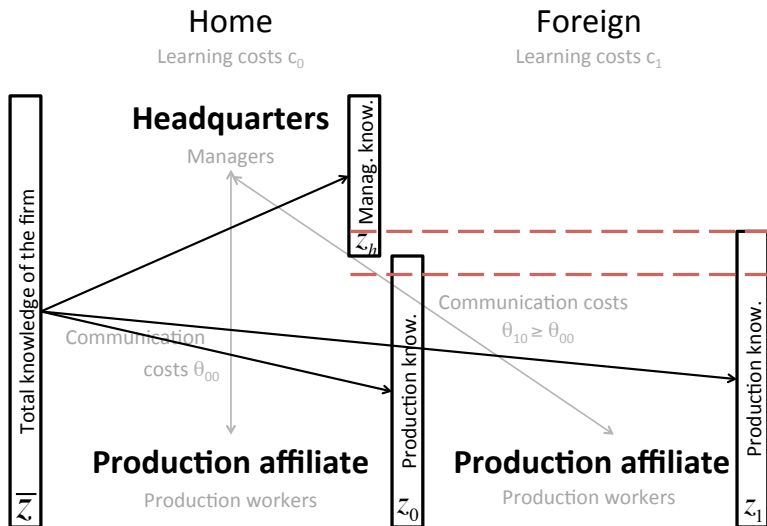
Organization of knowledge: Illustration



Organization of knowledge: Illustration



Organization of knowledge: Illustration



Organization of knowledge: Results

Horizontal multinational firm

Knowledge level of production workers z_j

– learning costs c_j

+ communication costs θ_{j0}

(+) total firm knowledge \bar{z}

– production quantity q_j

+ production quantity $q_k, k \neq j$

Non-constant marginal costs of production

Organization of knowledge: Implications

Variation in marginal costs of production across countries

$$\xi_j = \frac{1}{1 - e^{-\lambda \bar{z}}} (w_j(1 + c_j z_j) + w_0(1 + c_0 z_h) \theta_{j0} e^{-\lambda z_j})$$

- + communication costs with headquarter θ_{j0}
- total firm knowledge \bar{z}
- production quantity q_j (only for horizontal MNEs)
- + production quantity $q_k, k \neq j$ (only for horizontal MNEs)
- MNEs and domestic producers with same marginal costs may coexist

Variation in remuneration of workers across countries

Profit maximization

Many firms, firm i characterized by firm-specific knowledge level \bar{z}_i
Consumers with **CES preferences** in both countries

Iceberg transport costs τ

Fixed costs: domestic activity f^D , exporting f^X , FDI f^I with $f^I > \tau^{\sigma-1} f^X > f^D$

Firms choose profit-maximizing option among four alternatives:

- ① Domestic firm
- ② Exporter
- ③ Vertical MNE (serves both countries from foreign affiliate)
- ④ Horizontal MNE (serves each country from local affiliate)

Profit maximization: Results

Comparative statics

Foreign MNE production quantities and sales **decreasing** in communication costs

Profit maximization: Results

Comparative statics

Foreign MNE production quantities and sales **decreasing** in communication costs

Special features of **horizontal MNEs**:

$$q_j^I(\bar{z}_i) = Q_j P_j^{\sigma-1} \left(\frac{\sigma}{\sigma-1} \xi_j(\bar{z}_i, q_0^I(\bar{z}_i), w_0, q_1^I(\bar{z}_i), w_1) \right)^{-\sigma}$$

- ▷ Production quantities implicitly defined
- ▷ Effect via quantity **reinforces** direct effect of parameters:
Example: $\theta_{10} \uparrow \rightarrow \xi_1 \uparrow \rightarrow q_1 \downarrow \rightarrow \xi_1 \uparrow \rightarrow q_1 \downarrow$
- ▷ Domestic performance affected by FDI:

$$q_0^D(\bar{z}_i) = q_0^X(\bar{z}_i) \geq q_0^I(\bar{z}_i)$$

- ▷ Decision to become multinational depends on **total profits**:

$$\pi^I(\bar{z}_i, w_0, w_1) - w_0 f^I \geq \pi^X(\bar{z}_i, w_0) - w_0 f^X$$

General equilibrium sorting pattern

Unlimited mass of potential entrants, sunk costs of entry f

Symmetry in $c_0 = c_1$, $N_0 = N_1$

Standard equilibrium conditions (ZCP, FE, labor/goods market, trade balance)

Zero cut-off profit conditions

Higher knowledge level $\bar{z}_i \rightarrow$ lower marginal costs \rightarrow higher profits

\rightarrow Cut-off knowledge levels \bar{z}^* , \bar{z}^X , \bar{z}^I with $\bar{z}^I > \bar{z}^X > \bar{z}^*$

\rightarrow Cut-off marginal costs $\bar{\xi}^I < \bar{\xi}^X < \bar{\xi}^*$

Comparative statics

Probability of MNE entry **decreases** in communication costs:

- $\triangleright \bar{z}^I$ increases in communication costs; decreases in transport costs;
- $\bar{\xi}^I$ decreases in communication costs; increases in transport costs

Multinational firm wage premiums

1 MNE wage premiums due to **selection**

Production worker knowledge increasing in firm knowledge

⇒ MNE wage premiums due to selection of higher \bar{z} firms into FDI

2 **Residual MNE wage premiums**

i.e. MNEs pay higher wages than domestic firms with **same** marginal costs

MNE wage premiums occur for sure

- ▷ In home country if $\frac{w_1 c_1}{w_0 c_0} < \frac{\theta_{10}}{\theta_{00}}$
- ▷ In foreign country if $\frac{w_1 c_1}{w_0 c_0} < \frac{\theta_{10}}{\theta_{00}}$ and $c_1 \geq c_0$ for horizontal MNEs, always for vertical MNEs

MNE wage premiums vary with home/foreign country characteristics:

Communication costs θ_{10} , relative wages w_1/w_0 , relative learning costs c_1/c_0

⇒ MNE wage premiums for FDI from developed countries in particular to developing countries, consistent with empirical evidence (e.g. Aitken et al., 1996; Heyman et al., 2007; Hijzen et al., 2013; Girma & Görg, 2007)

Summary & Discussion

Communication frictions within MNEs affect optimal organization of knowledge in production

Impact consistent with major stylized facts of MNE behavior:

- ▷ Variation in sales
- ▷ Variation in entry probability
- ▷ Multinational firm wage premiums

Competing mechanism discussed in literature (e.g. Giroud, 2013) - **monitoring** - only explains investment features:

Higher cross-border monitoring costs

- Higher foreign wages, lower sales, lower investment probability
- ↔ Selection of firms with superior monitoring technology into FDI
- ⇒ Monitoring model predicts MNEs pay **lower** wages than other firms

Data

Required information for rigorous test of model:

Data on routineness of production tasks across different locations of MNEs
(to my knowledge non-existent)

- ⇒ **Non-causal empirical analysis** based on
Microdatabase Direct investment, German central bank, 1999-2010
- ▷ Universe of German FDI at investor-affiliate-ownership channel level
 - ▷ Restriction to majority owned affiliates
 - ▷ Information on 164,608 observations at parent-country-year level

Target: document impact of **communication cost** beyond other factors

- ▷ Flight time Frankfurt-main city
- ▷ Linguistic distance
- ▷ Office hours overlap
- ▷ Telecommunication costs (monthly subscription to business telephone service)

Empirical hypotheses

- ① Comparative statics on cut-off knowledge level \bar{z}^I / cut-off marginal costs $\bar{\xi}^I$:
 $\bar{\xi}^I$ decreasing in communication costs
- ⇒ **Hypothesis 1:** Observed cut-off productivity level of entrants increasing in communication costs

Empirical hypotheses

- ① Comparative statics on cut-off knowledge level \bar{z}^I / cut-off marginal costs ξ^I :
 ξ^I decreasing in communication costs
 ⇒ **Hypothesis 1:** Observed cut-off productivity level of entrants increasing in communication costs

- ② Comparative statics on foreign marginal costs ξ_1 :
 ξ_1 increasing in communication costs
 ξ_1 decreasing in $\bar{z} \Rightarrow$ selection bias!
 ⇒ **Hypothesis 2: within firm**, observed foreign productivity decreasing in communication costs

Empirical hypotheses

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 ⇒ **Hypothesis 2: within firm**, observed foreign productivity decreasing in communication costs

- ③ Can effects really be attributed to allocation of knowledge?
Corollary: positive effect of communication costs on ξ_1 decreasing in problem arrival rate λ
 ⇒ **Hypothesis 3:** negative effect of communication costs on observed foreign productivity stronger for firms in sectors with higher R&D intensity

Caveats

① Coarse productivity measure

Lack of input data

→ Productivity measured as labor productivity $\ln \left(\frac{\text{sales}}{\text{employees}} \right)$

② Small number of sectors

Data distinguish 39 sectors at 2 digit NACE Rev. 1.1 level,
R&D data available for only subset of 21 sector groups

③ Non-causal interpretation

Largely non-causal interpretation appropriate due to self-selection of firms into destinations

Hypothesis 2: Within-firm variation in foreign productivity

Observed foreign productivity

- communication costs with headquarter
- + firm-specific knowledge level

Specification: productivity differences

$$y_{ijt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \theta_{jt} + \beta_2 Q_{jt} + \beta_3 c_{jt} + \beta_4 w_{jt} + \gamma \mathbf{X}_{jt} + \alpha_{it} + \epsilon_{ijt}$$

with

- ▷ y_{ijt} : firm i 's labor productivity ($\ln(\frac{\text{sales in } j}{\text{employees in } j})$) in country j in year t
- ▷ θ_{jt} : communication costs between Germany and country j in year t
- ▷ $Q_{jt}, c_{jt}, w_{jt}, \mathbf{X}_{jt}$: controls
- ▷ α_{it} : parent-year fixed effect
- ▷ ϵ_{ijt} : error term

No causal interpretation due to self-selection of firms into destinations

Hypothesis 2: Foreign productivity - Regression results (I)

Linguistic distance	-0.071** (0.030)	-0.064* (0.034)	-0.084*** (0.032)	-0.066** (0.030)
Log flight time	-0.044*** (0.011)	-0.005 (0.013)	-0.028** (0.013)	-0.109*** (0.026)
Time difference to Germany	0.020*** (0.002)	0.036*** (0.003)	0.042*** (0.004)	0.019*** (0.002)
Log GDP	0.057*** (0.008)	0.081*** (0.011)	0.098*** (0.011)	0.052*** (0.008)
Public expenditure per pupil, % GDP p.c.	0.016*** (0.002)	0.018*** (0.003)	0.013*** (0.002)	0.014*** (0.002)
GDP per employee	0.207*** (0.008)	0.151*** (0.012)	0.108*** (0.015)	0.214*** (0.009)
Log compensation per employee		-0.013** (0.006)		
Trust, survey 1996			0.231*** (0.032)	
Log distance				0.048*** (0.018)
Constant	4.374*** (0.094)	4.327*** (0.110)	3.943*** (0.112)	4.390*** (0.093)
R^2	0.191	0.136	0.138	0.191
Observations	116,702	91,600	99,061	116,702
# country combinations	9,037	8,628	8,638	9,037
# countries	87	21	23	87

Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Parent-year fixed effects.

Hypothesis 2: Foreign productivity - Regression results (II)

Linguistic distance	0.001 (0.031)			
Log flight time		-0.146*** (0.028)		
Office hours overlap			0.012** (0.005)	
Log monthly subscription phone				-0.047*** (0.014)
Log GDP	0.034*** (0.008)	0.031*** (0.008)	0.016** (0.008)	0.022*** (0.008)
Public expenditure per pupil, % GDP p.c.	0.019*** (0.002)	0.013*** (0.002)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)
GDP per employee	0.216*** (0.009)	0.229*** (0.009)	0.056*** (0.011)	0.043*** (0.012)
Log GDP per capita			0.409*** (0.019)	0.431*** (0.021)
Log trade costs	-0.134*** (0.025)	-0.137*** (0.024)	-0.063*** (0.024)	-0.060** (0.024)
Log distance	0.039*** (0.011)	0.135*** (0.021)	0.067*** (0.014)	0.046*** (0.010)
Constant	4.361*** (0.102)	4.513*** (0.106)	0.949*** (0.221)	1.079*** (0.201)
R^2	0.194	0.196	0.223	0.224
Observations	99,177	99,177	99,177	99,177
# country combinations	8,843	8,843	8,843	8,843

Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Parent-year fixed effects.

Hypothesis 3: Effect of communication costs across sectors

Negative effect of communication costs on foreign productivity

- + problem arrival rate
i.e. mitigated by lower R&D intensity/ reinforced by higher R&D intensity

Specification: productivity differences

$$y_{ijt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \theta_{jt} \times \lambda_{it} + \beta_2 y_{i0t} + \beta_3 Q_{jt} + \beta_4 c_{jt} + \beta_5 w_{jt} + \gamma \mathbf{X}_{jt} + \alpha_s + \alpha_j + \alpha_t + \epsilon_{ijt}$$

with

- ▷ y_{ijt} : firm i 's labor productivity ($\ln(\text{sales}/\text{employees})$) in country j in year t
- ▷ $\theta_{jt} \times \lambda_{it}$: interaction of communication costs between Germany and country j in year t and R&D intensity of sector of firm i in year t
- ▷ y_{i0t} : firm i 's domestic labor productivity in year t
- ▷ $Q_{jt}, c_{jt}, w_{jt}, \mathbf{X}_{jt}$: controls
- ▷ $\alpha_s, \alpha_j, \alpha_t$: sector, country and year fixed effects
- ▷ ϵ_{ijt} : error term

Only MNEs that are active in multiple countries

Hypothesis 3: Effect of communication costs across sectors

Dependent variable: foreign productivity

Int. R&D intensity \times log flight time	−0.006** (0.003)			−0.005* (0.003)
Int. R&D intensity \times linguistic dist.		−0.031** (0.018)		−0.010 (0.017)
Int. R&D intensity \times time zone difference			0.004*** (0.001)	0.004*** (0.001)
Domestic productivity	0.203*** (0.025)	0.203*** (0.025)	0.205*** (0.025)	0.202*** (0.025)
R^2	0.290	0.290	0.290	0.291
Observations	36,329	36,316	36,329	36,316

Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Country, sector and time dummies included.

Controls: GDP, Public expenditure per pupil, % GDP p.c., GDP per employee.

Robustness checks

- ▷ Extensive margin results robust to different cut-off levels (5th/10th percentile)
- ▷ Intensive margin results robust to Heckman selection model, exclusion of affiliate sector groups (e.g. wholesale/retail trade)
- ▷ Robust to additional FDI/productivity determinants:
 - taxation,
 - institutional quality
- ▷ Robust to using alternative measures of model parameters

Conclusion

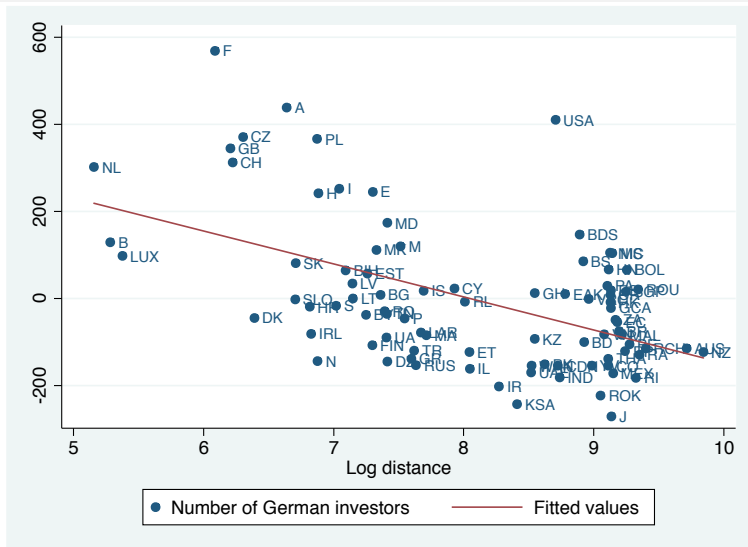
Spatial communication frictions within multinational firms

- ▷ increase the knowledge of production workers at home and abroad,
- ▷ decrease foreign sales and the entry probability,
- ▷ and explain why residual MNE wage premiums arise.

Empirics:

- ▷ Predicted investment and wage setting behavior consistent with stylized facts
- ▷ In line with within-parent across-country labor productivity differences

The geography of MNE entry

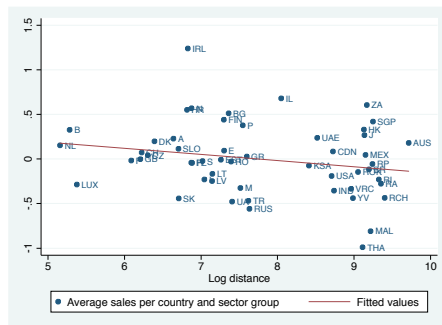
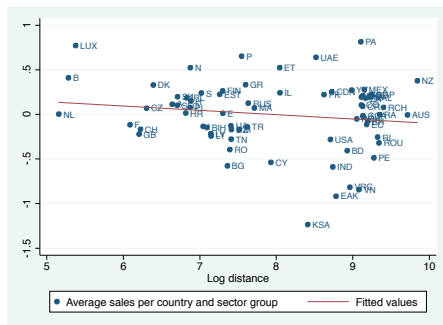


Residual number of entrants from regression of number of entrants on GDP.

Source: MiDi data base.

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The geography of MNE sales



Residual average sales from regression of average sales per country on GDP.

Source: MiDi data base, 2005.

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Hypothesis 1: Cut-off productivity levels

Cut-off productivity levels

+ communication costs with headquarter

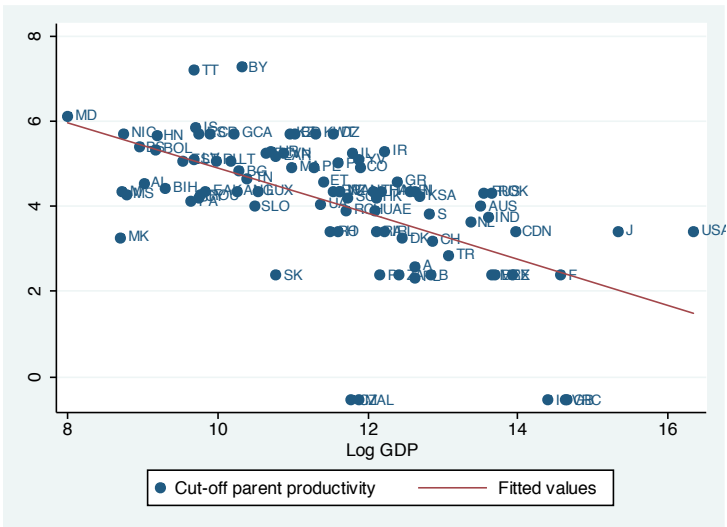
Specification

$$y_{sjt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \theta_{jt} + \beta_2 c_{jt} + \beta_3 Q_{jt} + \beta_4 w_{jt} + \beta_5 A_{jt} + \alpha_t + \alpha_s + \epsilon_{sjt}$$

with

- ▷ y_{sjt} : minimum domestic productivity $\ln\left(\frac{\text{domestic sales}}{\text{domestic employees}}\right)$ of investors in sector s that invest in country j in year t
- ▷ θ_{jt} : communication costs between Germany and country j in year t
- ▷ $c_{jt}, Q_{jt}, w_{jt}, A_{jt}$: controls (learning costs, market size, wages, labor productivity of j in t)
- ▷ α_s, α_t : sector, year fixed effect
- ▷ ϵ_{sjt} : error term

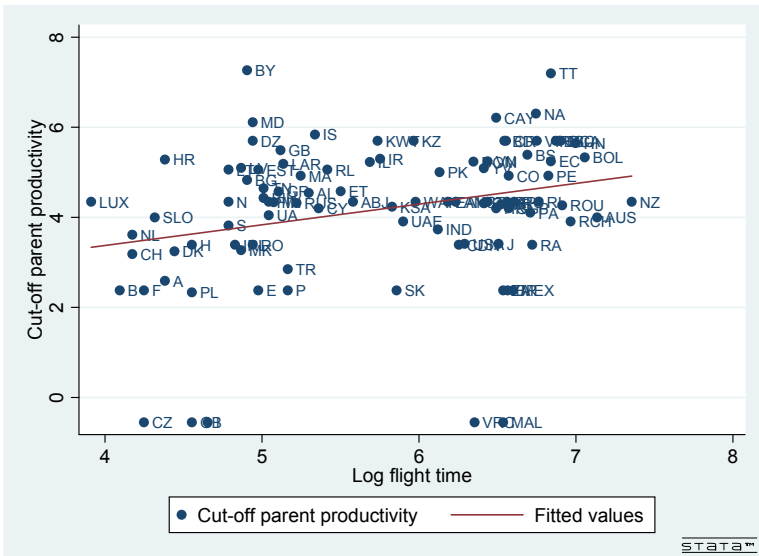
Cut-off productivity and market size



Source: MiDi data base.

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Hypothesis 1: Cut-off productivity - Graphical evidence



Source: MiDi data base, 2005. Minimum domestic productivity of investors per country.

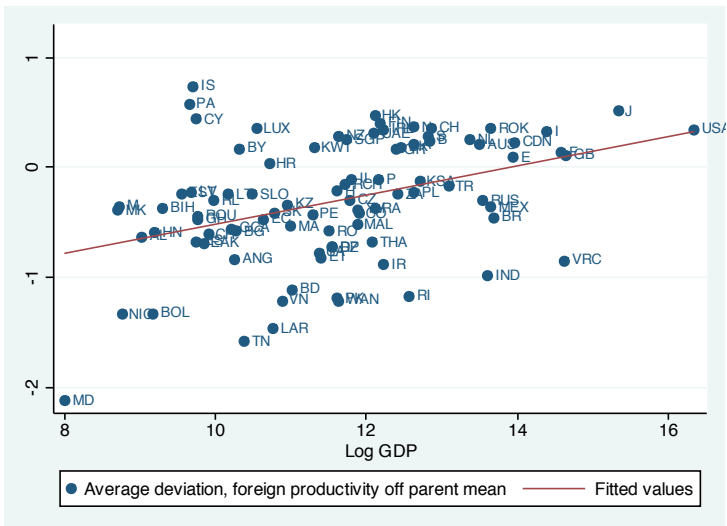
Hypothesis 1: Cut-off productivity - Regression results

Log flight time	0.212*** (0.057)	0.321*** (0.058)	0.366*** (0.120)
Linguistic distance	0.407*** (0.096)	0.404*** (0.092)	0.516*** (0.092)
Difference time zone	0.009 (0.009)	0.005 (0.012)	-0.003 (0.009)
Per pupil public exp. on educ., % GDP p.c.	0.007 (0.011)	0.031** (0.014)	0.023 (0.011)
Log GDP	-0.157*** (0.028)	-0.168*** (0.058)	-0.146*** (0.044)
GDP per employee	-0.000 (0.036)	0.048 (0.056)	0.065 (0.052)
Log compensation per employee		0.027 (0.025)	0.018 (0.013)
Cost of starting a business			0.090*** (0.021)
Log distance			-0.025 (0.083)
Constant	5.285*** (0.504)	3.800*** (0.548)	2.999*** (0.419)
R^2	0.326	0.394	0.400
Observations	8,154	4,708	4,708

Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Year and sector dummies included.

Foreign performance and market size

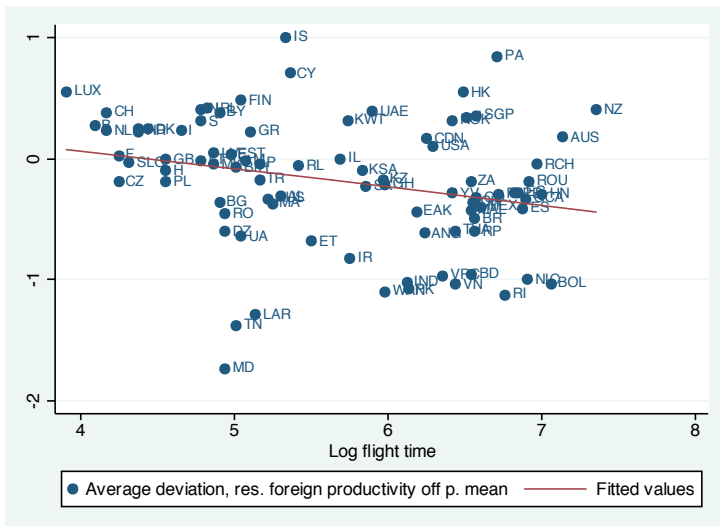


Note: deviations in foreign prod. off parent mean (i.e. controlling for heterogeneity).

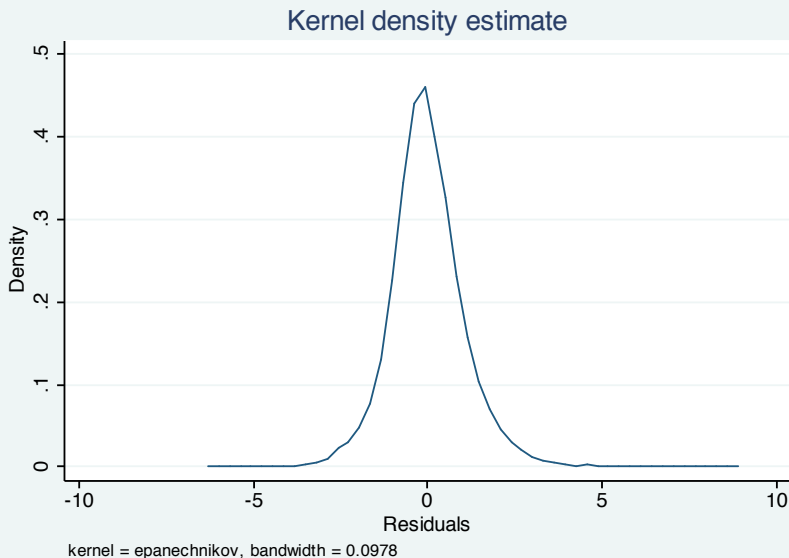
Source: MiDi data base, 2005.

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Hypothesis 2: Foreign productivity - Graphical evidence



Heckman selection model: foreign productivity



Heckman selection model: investment probability

