

Economics 312
Project #3 Assignment

Spring 2013
Due: Midnight, Monday, February 25

Partner assignments

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Hedonic price analysis is used to model the value of commodities with varying characteristics. Early applications of this analysis included cars and asparagus (!). More recent applications have included computers and, very commonly, houses. Hedonic analyses of house prices are usually done with the individual house as the unit of analysis, but this question asks you to apply the analysis to a dataset in which the observations are neighborhoods.

The data set `hprice.dta` contains a set of variables for each of 506 neighborhoods. The variables in the data set are defined below:

`nnumber` = neighborhood number
`price` = median neighborhood house price (\$)
`crime` = crimes committed in neighborhood per capita
`nox` = atmospheric concentration of nitrous oxides (p/100m)
`rooms` = average number of rooms in neighborhood houses
`dist` = weighted distance of neighborhood to 5 employment centers
`radial` = index of neighborhood access to radial highways
`proptax` = property tax per \$1000 valuation in neighborhood
`stratio` = student-teacher ratio in neighborhood schools
`lowstat` = percentage of neighborhood people of “low status”

1. General considerations

- What are the advantages or disadvantages of performing this analysis at the neighborhood level rather than at the level of individual houses.
- What effect (positive, negative, or none) would you expect each of the other variables in the dataset to have on median house price?

- c. Consider the use of median house price as the dependent variable. Would you expect the variables of the model to affect all house prices within a neighborhood in the same way, so that the effect on the median would be a good proxy for the effect on the price of any given house? If not, how would this affect your interpretation of regression results?

2. What factors determine the median house price in these neighborhoods?

- a. Estimate a regression of the log of neighborhood house price on other neighborhood variables that might be associated with price. You may test alternative specifications of the right-hand side, both in terms of including and excluding variables and in terms of linear vs. non-linear specifications. Present a representative set of candidate regressions in a table created with `outreg`, then discuss which regression you are choosing for subsequent analysis and why you prefer it to the alternatives.
- b. Interpret the coefficients of your preferred regression in terms of the effects of the regressor on the price of houses. (Remember that the dependent variable is in logs.) Does each coefficient have a plausible sign and magnitude?
- c. Based on your preferred regression, which factors are most important in determining house prices? Be sure to consider both the economic impact (i.e., for which variables a one-standard-deviation change leads to the largest price changes) and statistical impact (i.e., for which variables are we most confident that the impact is non-zero).

3. Assessing the effects of proposed policies

Suppose that you have been hired by the board of directors of neighborhood number 130's homeowners' association. The board believes that their neighborhood's property is undervalued and wants to increase house values. They have asked you to advise them on the following propositions using your statistical analysis. For each, write a short essay supported by relevant tables showing your estimates and calculations.

- a. Are board members justified in believing that property values for neighborhood 130 are too low, given the neighborhood's characteristics?
- b. What are the major factors affecting values in neighborhood 130 both positively and negatively relative to other neighborhoods?
- c. Colin Commuter, one of the board members, has argued that improving a major road connecting the neighborhood to downtown would increase property values. The road improvement would increase the value of the radial access index from 4 to 8, but the increased traffic would increase nitrous oxide concentrations from 6.24 to 6.50. Would this be a good idea? How confident are you of your answer?

- d. Board member Sarah Scardicat is worried about neighborhood crime. She has proposed an increase in police service that would require an increase in property taxes from 43.7 to 47.7 and lower crime from 0.881 to 0.6. Would this significantly increase property values?
- e. Trevor Teacher has proposed to the board that they raise property taxes to hire additional teachers to lower the student-teacher ratio. Board members would be willing to do this only if it doesn't harm property values. Use your regression to compute point and 95% confidence-interval estimates of the amount of increase in the property-tax rate that could be imposed without hurting property values in order to lower the student-teacher ratio by one unit. (You might need to use `nlcom` for this part, even if your model is linear in these variables.)