

UNIVERSITY "ȘTEFAN CEL MARE" SUCEAVA
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF SOCIAL AND HUMAN SCIENCES
FIELD: BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

SUMMARY HABILITATION THESIS

The role and importance of SMEs in
implementing sustainable development
principles at EU level

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Contents:

Chapter 1. SCIENTIFIC, PROFESSIONAL AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS

- 1.1. Training and career path
- Teaching interests
- Scientific research and complementary activities
- 1.4. Administrative and ancillary teaching activities
- Conclusions

Chapter 2. CURRENT STATE OF KNOWLEDGE ON THE THESIS TOPIC

Chapter 3. CURRENT RESOURCES FOR IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE EU

- 3.1 The importance of R&D (Research and Development) in the sustainable development equation
 - 3.1.1 Introduction
 - 3.1.2 Research methodology
 - 3.1.3 Results and discussion
 - 3.1.4 Conclusions
- 3.2 Education, human capital and universities in EU strategies
 - 3.2.1 Introduction
 - 3.2.2 Research methodology
 - 3.2.3 Results and discussion
 - 3.2.4 Conclusions

Chapter 4. THEORY, REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES ON SMES IN EU SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The role of the statute and the creation of financing opportunities for firms
 - 4.1.1 Introduction
 - 4.1.2 Research methodology
 - 4.1.3 Results and discussion
 - 4.1.4 Conclusions
- 4.2 The role of human resources in the performance of SMEs
 - 4.2.1 Introduction
 - 4.2.2 Research methodology
 - 4.2.3 Results and discussion
 - 4.2.4 Conclusions

Chapter 5 PROJECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

- 5.1 Perspectives on teaching
- 5.2 Development directions of scientific research
- 5.4 Conclusions

BIBLIOGRAPHY

In modern economies, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the main component in terms of their number and their importance in creating jobs and income for society.

Sustainability has emerged as a major challenge for modern society. The Brundtland Report set this challenge by recognising that humanity has the capacity to make development sustainable, to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainability is not just an issue for people and the planet; it is very important in a business context because it has a beneficial economic impact.

In this context the habilitation thesis entitled: The role and importance of SMEs in implementing sustainable development principles at EU level, aims to assess the current economic context, based on scientific research conducted by the author from 2013 to 2021.

The habilitation thesis highlights the scientific achievements in the period after the PhD thesis, as well as the future directions of scientific and academic development. We have structured the habilitation thesis in five chapters, namely: Chapter 1. Scientific, professional and academic achievements, Chapter 2. Current state of knowledge on the thesis topic, Chapter 3. Current resorts for implementing sustainable development in the EU, Chapter 4. Theory, realities and perspectives on SMEs in EU sustainable development, Chapter 5 Projections for the future.

In the first chapter we have included the results of the teaching and scientific research work, obtained so far, materialized in scientific articles and research projects.

Briefly, the teaching, administrative and scientific research work we have carried out so far can be summarised as follows:

A. Relevance and impact of scientific results

- 148 citations in Google Academic (Hirsch Index - 6), 36 citations in articles and Proceedings Paper indexed Web of Science.

B. Ability to mentor students or young researchers

- More than 30 undergraduate and dissertation papers coordinated,
- 3 scientific papers published in collaboration with students in scientific journals or in volumes of scientific events.

C. Teaching skills

- applied and/or teaching activities in the subjects: Basics of Statistics (Statistics), Surveys and Surveys, Business Statistics, Statistical Methods and Techniques for Market Research,

- the quality of teaching has been assessed by students over the last 4 years with scores above 99 points.

D. Ability to transfer its knowledge and results to the economic or social environment or to popularise its own scientific results

- More than 30 articles indexed in international databases (BDI), including 11 articles indexed in Clarivate Analytics - Web of Science,

- 5 articles published in journals absolute influence score (AIS) greater than 0.15,

- More than 20 articles/studies in extenso published in the volumes of recognised international scientific events at home and abroad (with ISSN/ISBN),

- 5 books/chapters in scholarly teaching materials or collective volumes with ISBN as sole author or co-author.

E. Ability to work in teams and effectiveness of scientific collaborations

- Member of the research team of the project "PORTfolio of innovative tools for sustainable development of rural communities with tourism potential, through capitalization of cultural patrimony and cultural identity ", Project code PN-III-P1-1.2-PCCDI-2017-0884, submitted in the competition PN-III-P1-1.2-PCCDI-2017 - Complex projects carried out in CDI consortia (PCCDI), registration number 56PCCDI / 2018, 2018-2020, <http://portcultural.usv.ro>,

- Member of the research team of the project "Consumer Behavior Erasmus Network - COBEREN" ERASMUS, Project Number - 156089 - LLP - 1 - 2009 - 1 - ES - ERASMUS -ENW, 2009-2012,

- Expert involved in drafting, implementation and reporting activities in 10 European and national funded projects (PHARE, PODCA, POSDRU, POCU, FDI), running since 2009,

- Secretary General of the editorial staff of the publication REVISTA DE TURISM - studies and research in tourism,

- Co-organizer of the conference "International Economic Conference" - Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava, editions 2013-2021,

- Co-organizer of the Summer School - Development of entrepreneurial skills - Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava, editions 2017-2021,

- Co-organizer of the International Conference of Scientific Communications: "Tourism between regional development and global economic crisis" Sucevita, Suceava county, 22-23 May 2009.

Chapter II reviews the main papers in the international stream of publications dealing with themes similar to this thesis. SMEs are in a unique position to adopt sustainability practices, as the development and growth of SMEs is seen as a significant part of a sustainable world. SMEs, in particular, develop close relationships with their customers so that they can describe the sustainability of services and products to their customers. SMEs can also easily respond to sustainability issues in communities through their diversity and flexibility, provided they receive

sufficient support and incentives commensurate with their diversity and adaptability.

There is a positive correlation between the individual concerns of SME owners/managers and the time and resources they devote to sustainability. The literature reports that the key factor for SMEs' commitment to sustainability is that owners/managers provide a business culture to achieve environmental and social improvements. This culture should formulate environmental, social and ethical objectives and encourage employees to have positive attitudes towards sustainability issues.

The first part of Chapter III presents the importance of R&D (research and development) in the sustainable development equation. As is well known, R&D activity is linked to the accumulation of new knowledge, continuous innovation and the transformation of ideas into new products/services, which requires skilled employees who are willing to learn continuously. The post-capitalist society, argues Peter Drucker, is equally a society of organisations and educated people, constantly accumulating new knowledge.

The SME sector has been and remains essential to all innovative processes taking place in capitalist societies; through their large number, through the capacity and vision of entrepreneurs, through competition with large corporations; SMEs are somewhat 'forced' to innovate continuously as failure would mean bankruptcy and exit from the market.

Through my research I have sought to test the hypothesis that R&D expenditure has a greater influence on more sophisticated exports and that there are significant differences between countries in how R&D expenditure influences the technological content of exports as a way of assessing the degree of development of an economy.

The second part of Chapter III highlights research on the role of education and human capital in EU sustainability strategies. A particular focus has been placed on the role of universities as vectors for change on various issues, including sustainability awareness. In addition to education and research, the so-called 'third mission of the university' is to study how to improve the quality of people's lives and solve global problems. Universities are a fundamental element, a vector to explore, test, and communicate the essential conditions for sustainable development. Awareness of sustainability in the community is developed through education, leading to increased demand for environmentally friendly products and services. In other words, it is desirable that environmental education strategies and programs expand to cover local business communities and SMEs, and government should motivate consumers to purchase green products and services.

Chapter IV of the thesis presents a synthesis of the theory, realities and perspectives on SMEs in EU sustainable development.

Entrepreneurship policies and the SME sector are one piece of the puzzle in a complex network of actors and institutions that interact with and support entrepreneurs and business owners in the regional entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Under the umbrella of entrepreneurship and SME sector policies, we can find various

activities, including training and education, advisory and counselling services or direct financial support distributed through financial instruments (preferential loans and credit guarantees) and grants.

Thus, part of the research work carried out was oriented towards assessing the overall economic impact of non-reimbursable financial support received by private economic agents in North-East Romania. The analysis was limited to these units because this area is one of the poorest in Romania and Europe.

Also, another aspect to which we paid attention in the research work carried out was the role of human resources in the performance of SMEs. The aim of the research was to identify the training needs of entrepreneurs and employees in SMEs in the Romania-Ukraine-Moldova cross-border area, to analyse specific training practices in this cross-border area and to identify common features or disparities: management and employee attitudes towards training, perception of long-term training, participation in training programmes, type of courses organised, cooperation with training providers, financial support for training measures and periodicity of training programmes offered to employees. At the same time, I have tried to answer the question whether countries from a common past (socialism) that are part of the same cross-border region show different trajectories, given the inclusion of one of them in the EU since 2007. This issue is investigated in the research by focusing on specific human resource training in SMEs, which could be conceptualised as an indicator of economic dynamism.

The description of my concerns in the field of business administration, presented in the first chapter, materialised in the participation in various research projects and the publication of books and articles, is continued in Chapter V, where I propose to deepen and extend research in this field, using new variables, new approaches and methodologies. For the next period, I propose three research directions:

A. A first direction of interest in future research would be to deepen the issue of MNC's (multinational corporations), including the relationship MNCs - SMEs, both at the level of the global economy and for Romania.

B. Deepening the concept of knowledge management (KM), a subject that has become of great interest in the field of business management, starting with Polanyi's work that discusses for the first time the tacit dimension of human knowledge.

C. Finally, a third research direction for the future is related to the issue of what Peters and Waterman called 'business excellence' in the 1980s.

I believe that, in the current economic, social and technological context, research can only be carried out in teams made up of members with backgrounds in various fields of activity and that participation in such teams will support the acquisition and processing of new knowledge and the development of new skills in research approaches.