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FACULTY OF ECONOMIC SCIENCES AND BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION  
DOCTORAL SCHOOL ECONOMIC SCIENCES AND BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION  
FIELD MANAGEMENT**

**PhD THESIS  
SUMMARY**

**THE ROLE OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT IN PROMOTING  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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**CLUJ-NAPOCA  
2014**

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## **Keywords**

Environmental management, environmental policy, environmental governance, voluntary tools, corporate environmental governance, sustainable development, ISO

## **Introduction, goal of research**

Contemporary environmental policy is based on the assumption that the economy and the environment must be reconciled and united by means of a new and complex approach which will bridge the differences between the two different fields. Similarly, the goal of this research is to assess the compatibility of corporate voluntary practices concerning the environment with the general goals/tenets of sustainable development; also, we are striving to operationalize this goal in the context of a modern approach of environmental policies, more specifically the paradigm of environmental governance.

This general goal can be operationalized more specifically as to include:

- The evaluation and diagnosis of environmental management at the level of companies from Romania;
- The analysis of the context in which the companies have decided to implement certified environmental management schemes (specifically ISO14001 standard) and the way in which the implementation process takes place;
- The companies' adherence to this standard must be understood in the context from Romania, in order to be able to generate a public policy context under which new voluntary instruments, with a normative content capable to generate sustainability, to be implemented by companies.

## **Research methodology, outline of the research strategy**

The proposed research includes three dimensions/levels, two research methods (content analysis and semi-structured interview) and two research tools. The levels of the research correspond to a discovery process based on the review of different sources from the literature, each source contributing to the understanding of the proposed concepts by adding substance to the answers.

**Level 1** deals with the analysis of publicly available documents pertaining to private companies from Romania. The research instrument is represented by an analysis grid of these documents - its main goal is to identify the voluntary approaches/strategies implemented at the level of the corporate sector and to assess their sustainability. The objectives to be achieved through employing this tool are rather flexible, aiming at a diagnosis of the voluntary strategies

and of the willingness of the private sector to voluntarily support sustainability-related objectives and policies. It also hopes to identify the ways in which environmental governance unfolds through the use of voluntary approaches.

**Level 2** implies the drafting of three semi-structured interview guides which are targeting private managers, experts from NGOs, consultants and public servants. The main goal of the interviews is to understand the factors which influence a positive attitude/willingness of the private companies toward sustainable development: which factors can determine/influence the private companies to support the adoption and effective implementation of voluntary instruments.

**Level 3** of the research implies the corroboration of the results from level one and level 2 in terms of influence, impact, and shift towards governance and sustainability. In this section, we are analyzing the conditions/factors which facilitate or on the contrary limit the environmental governance and its normative content, as well as sustainable development. Any findings/measures to be derived from the research need to be stated in terms of recommendations, public policy proposals or tools for facilitating sustainable development through the economic activities of the companies.

### **Research questions**

#### **Level 1: Companies, document analysis grid**

Q 1 – In a democratic society there needs to be a high level of willingness on the behalf of the private companies to adopt best practices in the field of environmental protection. Thus, the research question is: whether or up to what extent do we have such a willingness of the companies from Romania to adopt voluntary strategies?

Q 2 - Distinction between aspirations/positive attitudes concerning environmental management at the level of the companies and beneficial behaviors/practices towards the environment. This gap between good intentions (Q1) and good practices can be bridged only through a complex approach: the change of the companies' behavior towards the environment does not represent a simple matter of coercion.

Q 3 – How can the willingness to support/adopt voluntary instruments can be developed or enhanced as a means to contribute to the public policy in the field of environmental protection?

Q 4 – How do the companies interpret the environmental policy? Is there at least a discourse regarding ecological/environmental modernization at the level of the environmental policy in Romania?

**Level 2 – Interviews with experts** (private managers, experts from NGOs, consultants, public servants)

The second level of the research is meant to help us place the environmental management practices in the broader framework of the market and of existing public policies, but also in the context of theoretical paradigms concerning sustainability. The goal is not to assess if these practices meet or not the requirements outlined in the literature and to highlight deficiencies but rather to determine the way in which the literature on sustainability can contribute (through goals, strategic frameworks and the creation of networks) to the development of environmental management practices.

Q 5 – Can sustainability be promoted also through a broad mobilization of heterogeneous forces and interest groups, which can influence the companies' activities? Can we identify other actors, whose daily decisions have a bigger and more direct impact on the way in which resources are used than the coercive public policy?

Q 6 – Can sustainability be approached through voluntary mechanisms? Why?

Q 7 – Evaluation of the link among environmental public policies, environmental private management, and investments, innovation, and performance at the level of the companies.

Q 8 – Is there an instrumental value attached by companies to environmental management and environmental reporting? Are there any pressures from the competition that will make the environmental standards relevant?

**Level 3: Conditions and prerequisites for sustainability – public and private policies; their relevance for sustainability**

The research questions refer to the public and private environmental governance from Romania (Q 9-Q 19). We are trying to determine:

- If governance has replaced, in a significant manner, government in the field of environment (qualitative assessment).
- The qualitative evaluation of the transition from the traditional government approach to the new models of governance in the field of the environment.
- The interaction between the new governance mechanisms and the old ones, based on high level of regulation, the analysis of the interactions among the three levels, the level of participation of the stakeholders outside the public sector.

- Identification of processes in the practice of private companies and at the level of environmental policies that can be assimilated to the main topics of governance as they are outlined in the literature.
- Who should be involved in governance and how is this aspect decided?
- What roles should different institutional or individuals stakeholders play and how are they determined?
- Which is the proper level for local decision-making (local, regional, national, territorial administrative units, natural/physical units)?
- Who is responsible, ultimately, for the decision-making processes which imply multiple organizations placed at different levels?
- Which sources of information will be used within decision-making processes and how is the validity of the various sources of information analyzed?
- Assessment of environmental and social outputs – focus on performance indicators versus changes on the long run in behaviors/attitudes (of organizations and individuals).

### **General conclusions**

Somewhat unexpectedly with regard to the paradigm of CSR and the technology-based optimism which dominates the literature is the fact that private managers expect the public sector to lead the way (to lead, to guide, to inform, and to regulate). This secondary role that private managers are willing to embark on is contrary to the views from the literature. Therefore, we have serious reasons to question the fundamental hypothesis at the foundation of the ecological modernization which states that the role of the public sector is constantly diminishing. We believe, at least in the context from Romania, that the state is still an important player, irrespective of the concept we are referring to – sustainable development or some more concrete manifestations of sustainability such as eco-efficiency, environmental performance, recycling, energy-efficiency, etc.).

Learning – We consider this variable as the most important from the perspective of the conclusions of the research. On the long run, if we take into account the fact that environmental impact is a component of current economic activities, there are visible changes at the level of individual behaviors – the members of the organization usually collaborate in order to identify and solve these impacts. The organizations which have good practices in the field of

environmental protection are organizations whose employees have constantly learned, are connected to the realities of the market and of the local, national and European public policies.

The variables which influence the efficiency of environmental management systems from private companies include:

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Environmental management is efficient when:</b>	<b>Environmental management is only formal when:</b>
Eco-efficiency	- reduction of the environmental impact can generate efficiency (cost reduction)	- reduction of the environmental impact can't generate efficiency (cost reduction are not significant)
Type of benefit	- a private benefit is pursued	- a public benefit is pursued
Externalization of costs	- costs cannot be forwarded to another actor (provision chain in the auto industry)	- costs can be forwarded (state, public contracts)
Competitiveness	- the market is competitive (the price of resources)	- the market is regulated (the price of resources)
Market	- there are many clients	- there are very few or only one client (the state)
Financing	- only access to private capital	- access to public funds (construction)
Distance from competition	- competitors are behind (do not employ similar practices in the field of environment)	- there are close competitors on the market (though paradoxically, the existence of competitors in close proximity reduces the pressure to be at the forefront of the environmental movement)
Role of marketing	- marketing is very important for the company, and so is the public image	- the company is not forced to make special efforts concerning marketing (infrastructure, resources, state, ecological services)
Community	- physical proximity of the community	- physical distance from neighbors/inhabited areas

**The most significant barriers** for the development of environmental management systems at the level of companies, based on the research from the thesis, include:

- Failure to include environmental management as a component of the overall strategy regarding economic activity.
- An expectation on the behalf of the companies that any improvement should be rewarded by subsidies/incentives: public policies which will finance investments in new technologies or offer significant tax deductions.
- Environmental management is often limited to simplistic actions, without having mechanisms or procedures concerning the achievement of strategic objectives.

- Overestimation by the companies of the financial, human and time effort involved in the implementation of an efficient environmental management system.
- Lack of prioritization of environmental goals among other organizational goals. Though present in the daily activity of companies, they are considered less important by comparison with other areas – public health, consumers’ protection, workers’ health, etc. in this areas lack of compliance with existing regulations generates more direct risks for the companies (sales, public image, fines, partnerships).
- Transfer of responsibility toward other upper levels/actors. The lack of priority given to the environment is not the result of the managers’ individual preference/attitude. It is rather correlated with the lack of interest or credibility at the level of the community/market. One issue in terms of internalizing the costs for environmental problems (especially those which represent negative externalities at the community’s level) has to do with the free-rider’s dilemma. The respondents in our research have argued that new practices are blocked because there is the perception that the community/the market will not reward those who implement environmental management projects and thus they risk ending up only with additional costs.
- Inaction. Though private managers generally agree that public agenda in the field of the environment is important and relevant and accept in principle the responsibility of the companies for identifying solutions for improving environmental performance, they fail to act upon these beliefs, do not allocate the necessary funds, and do not allocate the necessary human resources for generating these changes at the level of the organization (stated willingness versus de fact involvement).
- Preference for external pressure. Many of the respondents have indicated that significant fines are a precondition for efficient environmental management practices (if environmental practices are regulated then all companies need to do the same thing, they are equal). In this context it is questionable which the place is for voluntary instruments, based on the benefits obtained by the companies and then based on their social responsibility. Most of the respondents declared themselves in favor of regulation of environmental protection; however it should be developed locally, in a participatory manner and should be fairly implemented. As our research progress, we discovered that the role to be played by voluntary strategies is rather small. We are more optimistic with regard to the potential of big companies to contribute to the development of voluntary environmental practices, given their potential to influence at a bigger scale the market, the other stakeholders, contractual partners, the providers, etc.

- Lack of proper infrastructure, of public services offered to companies. The local administrations need to manage this problem in an integrated manner, by protecting private operators from useless costs and efforts. They can accomplish this by eliminating all inefficiencies. Other respondents have argued that they are willing to meet public authorities half way in what concerns issues such as recycling and reuse of waste from production cycles. The managers are signaling the lack of an integrate system, operated by the local authorities, which should facilitate environmental activities – data bases with specialized companies, transport facilities, etc.
- The costs and the risks involved. Ecological management is rather associated with additional costs for companies than with significant savings in what regards production costs. Some respondents justify the inaction of the companies in light of a weak public sector, with a limited role in this field. Environmental costs are perceived as risky especially in the post-crisis situation and in the context of an imminent recession, when the position on the market is unsure. Most investments concern incremental improvements of the eco-efficiency since these are considered less risky on the short run.
- Training of the human resource. We discovered that employees with responsibilities in the field of environmental protection do not know the field or environmental management enough in order to understand the way in which environmental management plays into the bigger picture of the organization's functioning (in reference to final outcomes). Sustainability is not an easy concept and it cannot be learned at the workplace if we have in mind broader outcomes to be obtained rather than simple compliance with the existing laws/regulations. Sustainability should become a guiding tool for the activities of the companies.
- Environmental policy is not credible. Some respondents stated that they are frustrated by the realization of what could be done better and by the lack of demand on the market or by the corruption from the public sector which makes things to be done formally but without paying attention to the generated benefits, despite the fact that companies spend significant resources.

### **Recommendations**

The starting point for this research was the analysis of voluntary approaches and of the context which could facilitate them and increase their potential. However, this does not exclude the fact that these instruments can only function only in the context of a coherent environmental policy as a whole, meaning a more heterogeneous mixture of market-based instruments and voluntary tools as well as a major effort on behalf of the state to promote them, to inform and

educate the stakeholders, and to provide support mechanisms. Environmental management systems, the instruments and the practices identified at the level of private companies have a significant role in encouraging the ecological performance of the companies; however, the interviews have demonstrated that this type of systems need facilitation performed by the state, that voluntary approaches do not work separately from the rest of the environmental policy, and that incentives are needed in order to co-interest the companies. Although the hypothesis of the win-win relationship between environmental and economic performance has not been invalidated, the way in which this scenario unfolds in practice is highly contextualized: thus, the economic gains seem to be more of an opportunity than a guaranty and it necessitates facilitation involving public policies, the market, ethic consumption, and a favorable economic context in which consolidated values and behaviors from a social point of view can manifest themselves.

There are two direction based on which recommendations for an effective private environmental management can be developed:

**The state**, through legislation, transparency, identification and elimination of corrupt practices can contribute toward the development of private voluntary practices.

Some private behaviors are correlated with eco-efficiency or resource consumption. Others do not have any implicit financial benefits, and therefore a framework able to generate such benefits needs to be created, by taxing pollution so that any incremental improvement will generate a mutual and incremental benefit; conversely, a worsening of the status quo should imply a cost.

Obligations concerning transparency: it is necessary to have legislation which will make environmental reporting mandatory and public. A framework similar to that regulating free access to public information should be created. Public interest is easy to be justified in cases with an impact on the environment.

Innovative public policy solutions: if the economy admits to the lack of rationality of the consumer, than public policy should do so. There are studies which place environmental behavior in the context of behavioral sciences and which could lead to innovative solutions.

Insufficient governance mechanisms: there is a gap between willingness and initiative, as well as between public initiative and the legal capacity. There is a clear need for the decentralization of some environmental responsibilities and of the resources resulting from the application of economic instruments (local environmental taxes). Capacity is important if the economic tools are to withstand the legal test in court since any tax will be contested and

subjected to the legal scrutiny of the courts (the court battle between Local Council Giurgiu and the Company AcelorMittal for a local pollution tax).

**The market**, through the separation of environmental management systems from the bureaucracy resulted from the relationship with the state (procurement, audits) and by linking it with efficiency, competitively, and competition can generate efficient environmental practices.

The scenario which is based on the market should be accompanied by deregulation in the energy sector (liberalization of the price), and in other fields such as state aid, subventions and the facilitation of the activity of some companies providing ecological services in their relation with the state.

The development of a simple standard concerning sustainability: ISO 14001 standards is quite spread and functions based on the ability to guide practices without too many theoretical details. Many companies do not understand the complex role of an environmental management system but there are also good strategies of companies which have understood to develop the environmental management system to the benefit of the company and to go beyond mere compliance with the standard. Lessons can be derived from the experience with ISO 14001 – this standard put the environmental management on the agenda of the companies as an alternative to prove compliance with existing legislation. We assume that a sustainability standard could represent such an alternative, by taking into consideration broader objectives. There are at the global level organizations which are currently experimenting with such standards, but what has come out of this process is either too complex or too vague. A more clearly operationalized version would have more success; it could be oriented toward simple procedures, inspired from management, not from public policy or the theory of environmental governance.

### **Personal contributions**

We consider that the main contribution of this thesis is the bridging of some complementary topics into a common research framework. The methodology brings together aspects regarding management, public policies, economics and sustainable development in a research meant to place environmental management at the core of all these pressure/influence sources, in order to determine the measures which can contribute to the consolidation of environmental management as a relevant activity in the business strategies of private companies.

### **Future research directions**

This research touches upon numerous topics which require a more integrated theoretical framework in order to be clearly related from the perspective of the relevance for private

environmental management. In the paper one can already find general connections but a theoretical model with clearly defined variables can be developed in the future, with an emphasis on the analytical component and less on the exploratory dimension.

A research interest coming out of this thesis concerns the analysis of environmental policies at the level of companies and the drafting of guidelines for coherent policies in line with the normative framework of sustainable development. A significant problem from the standpoint of management is the setting of objectives. We discovered during the research that this is the main deficiency with regard to environmental management in the case of the companies from Romania: superficial and very general public policies which are not reviewed and do not evolve together with the other key strategic components.

How to approach the reality of the public-private cooperation in the field of the environment is also worth researching in the future. The brief conclusions presented in this material represent a departure point for future researches, which should objectively analyze first and foremost concrete examples of public-private cooperation and voluntary agreements.

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**Site-uri web:**

166. Follow-up site pentru Rio +20, <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>
167. Site Rio +20, <http://www.uncsd2012.org/thefuturewewant.html>