



**BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA**

**FACULTY OF GEOGRAPHY**

**Summary of the PhD. thesis**

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE METROPOLITAN  
AREA OF CLUJ-NAPOCA  
ROMANIA**

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**The main goal of the thesis:** To examine to what extent is the governance and development of Cluj Metropolitan Area sustainable

**The theoretical approach:** From a theoretical perspective the thesis explores the evolutionary nature of sustainable urban development and examines various academic debates on the old and new regionalism approaches. An in-depth attention is given to the integrated metropolitan governance approach which in the perspective of the scientific literature remains at a demanding stage.

**The methodological approach:** the thesis is based on the method of triangulation which involves both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative nature of the analysis is presented through investigation based on statistical data whereas the qualitative research techniques consists of comparative analysis of policy documents as well as interviews.

**The structure of the thesis:** The thesis is organized in seven chapters. The first chapter presents the research background by introducing the main research question and the supplementary sub-research questions. Next to this, it includes a methodological overview and describes the structure followed throughout the analysis. Chapter two gives a theoretical review on the evolutionary process of the concept of sustainability, placed in the context of urban development. It follows through the historical models shaping the implication of the concept throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and offers a definitional analysis of urban sustainability placed in the framework of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The third chapter gives an overview of scientific literature about influential approaches to metropolitan governance, explores the perspectives of integrated governance and identifies various requirements for its efficient implementation. The following three chapters account for the empirical base of the thesis. Therefore, chapter four uses quantitative analysis as a methodological approach to bring forward the territorial realities of the metropolitan area in the light of the 16 out of 17 Sustainable Development Goals set out by the Agenda 2030. Further, chapter five, discusses the integration of urban sustainability into the spatial planning policies at local, regional, national and European levels of the policy making

process. The last empiric chapter, chapter six, investigates perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the metropolitan governance in commencing a successful and efficient integrative approach. This part of the research is based on interview analysis. Chapter seven is the last chapter of the research which brings forward the main conclusions and answers the main research question and its complementary research questions.

**Key words:** sustainable development, metropolitan area, metropolitan governance, urban development, integrated governance

### **The main contributions of the thesis to the current state of knowledge**

#### **Theoretical contribution:**

From a theoretical perspective the thesis offers a pioneering investigative and methodological approach in metropolitan sustainability assessment with a strong focus on the urban governance practice. Considering that integrative methods in governance actions lead to sustainable planning and development, the research claims that there are several factors that enhance a more efficient implementation of integrative governance practice that bring forward more sustainable urban planning and development.

As the background behind the notion of urban sustainability existed long before the term was coined under this characterisation, a theoretical review on the emergence of the concept of sustainability but also its changing nature in the context of urban development is necessary. Therefore, with a definitional analysis of urban sustainability placed in the framework of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the most appropriate approach to the current sustainable governance endeavours is identified.

Next to this, the geographical reorganization of the economic space experienced over the past decades but also the concept of territorial cohesion largely supported by the European Union

place great attention on finding common and integrative solutions for metropolitan-wide challenges. Nonetheless, the mix of features that support a more efficient governance practise that enhance o more sustainable metropolitan development, remains a debatable topic with distinct considerations for the theoretical research. Consequently, the theoretical contribution of the thesis can be placed in the framework of two distinct scenes:

- Exploring and improving the theoretical influences of urban sustainability throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and investigating the application of this notion in the context of current urban development and planning. Through an overview of the existing literature strongly related to this subject, the thesis claims that contemporary urban problems mainly triggered by the urban growth phenomena require integrated solutions. Nevertheless, the analytical challenge essential to be addressed is how can metropolitan areas apply unifying and efficient governance approaches in order to sustain a more sustainable development.
  
- Through the review of scientific literature on several influential approaches to governance at metropolitan scale, combined with a series of scientific research that refers to integrative governance, the thesis accentuates on seven elements that are suggested to promote a more integrated metropolitan governance. Consequently, the thesis becomes part of a larger discussion on the prerequisites for sustainable governance and offers a theoretical framework as a so-called formula which enhances efforts to achieve this. The framework is aimed to be a comprehensive tool that can be applied in various metropolitan settings nevertheless, the particularities of distinct spatial contexts should not be neglected.

The study aims at contributing to the literature in the field of sustainable metropolitan development with particular focus on the governance dimension. It offers a resourceful and theoretically supported framework in placing urban sustainability in contemporary terms and suggests essential factors that support in various ways its achievement.

## **Empiric contribution:**

The originality of the thesis relies also in its methodology which is based on the method of triangulation used to respond to the research question and its sub-questions. The mixed-method based on quantitative and qualitative analysis creates an intricate relationship between the actual situation regarding sustainability in Cluj Metropolitan Area on one hand and policy approach as well as stakeholder activities that in fact shape its development on the other. Existing studies mostly rely on analysis largely focused on specific dimensions of urban sustainability. Therefore, the thesis aims to give an overarching view about the level of sustainable development (through the analysis of the SDGs set in the Agenda 2030) in the study area yet, also a specific focus on the influences (forged by the planning policies as well as various stakeholders) that urban development, hence metropolitan governance is subject to. The empiric part of the thesis consists of three chapters, each involving different methodological investigation and based on analysis of statistical data, comparative analysis of policy documents and semi-structured interview analysis. Therefore, the contribution of this research brought within the field of urban sustainability and governance, manifests itself in:

- An inclusive methodology that reflects on the fact that within the metropolitan area of Cluj-Napoca, the best results in terms of the SDGs formulated in the Agenda 2030 are achieved by the urban core (the municipality of Cluj-Napoca) whereas the Cluj Metropolitan Area is more than half way behind on the road towards achieving the maximum levels. To our knowledge, the research methodology designed through this section of the research (within the fourth chapter) and based on a country level methodology, is the first to facilitate the measurement of the SDGs on local level. As pointed before, the results suggest that the integrative nature of metropolitan governance is questionable in the CMA and greater efforts are needed for better integration of the neighbouring communities.
  
- A separate framework constructed on a predefined criterion and based on a review of the scientific literature assists in mapping out the commonalities differences and patterns in



the analysed policies on different scales. This approximation offers a more holistic approach on the actual development directions followed by the spatial policies on four levels -European, national, regional and local- of policy making process. The method produces a more clear and complete view about the coherency levels in policies and brings evidence to further actions in the process of their improvement.

- Based on the literature review as well as the results gathered through the previous two empiric chapters, a separate interview guide has been built to address the views of various stakeholders involved in the planning and development process of the metropolitan area. Through this method a more comprehensive picture of the urban governance was created and a more accurate reflection on integrative conducts resulted. As detected through the interview analysis the actuality of interdependency should receive greater awareness not only from those who shape the development of the metropolitan area but also those who experience it. Next to this, leadership and public education are elements that contribute to create higher levels of consciousness in the local communities's thinking regarding a more sustainable living and behaviour.

The analysis show that Integrated governance does contribute to a more sustainable urban development and there is apparent progress in the governance practice of the CMA to guide development in a sustainable manner. Nevertheless, in a metropolitan perspective it is important to recognize that engaging a wide range of stakeholders in this process is a must. Next to this, a more sustainable conduct and understating of sustainable development can only be achieved at better levels if remediated at its roots, at the level of its citizens and one of the most significant means for this is education.