

# **Economic growth under the sign of sustainable development: limits, challenges and controversies**

## **Summary**

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The habilitation thesis entitled "**Economic growth under the sign of sustainable development: limits, challenges and controversies**" presents the main scientific results obtained after the completion of the doctoral thesis entitled "The role of foreign investment in Romania's transition economy", in 2003, at Romanian Academy under the guidance of prof. Gheorghe Zaman. The topic of foreign capital analyzed within the doctoral thesis allowed me subsequently to approach complementary scientific aspects, namely corporate social responsibility and sustainable development in the post-doctoral studies realized at the Romanian Academy, under the guidance of prof. Gheorghe Zaman, through the HRD program "Economic scientific research, support of human well-being and development in a European context", co-financed by the European Union and the Government of Romania from the European Social Fund through the Sectoral Operational Program Human Resources Development 2007 - 2013 (financing contract no. HRDP /89/1.5/S/62988). These topics have been the subject of other research, carried out within multidisciplinary teams, which resulted in the publication of articles in various journals indexed IDB or ISI, in the volumes of conferences indexed ISI or chapters in books published in international publishers (IGI Global and Springer).

The habilitation thesis focuses on the scientific and didactic results that attest the ability to realize and coordinate the scientific research activity in the field of Economics. Thus, the results of the scientific research obtained during the 15 years after receiving the title of PhD, through collaborations within multidisciplinary teams formed by specialists from different universities and research institutes in the country and abroad are presented in close connection with the current state of research in the mentioned field. The scientific approach is based on three levels that define my professional activity, namely the didactic field, the one of the scientific research and the involvement in the real economy as the last field that prints an applicative side especially to my pedagogical activity and which is in the tendency manifested at international level of university entrepreneurship.

In the first section of the thesis, I presented the main results of the scientific research activity that deals with the topic of economic growth and sustainable development. The economic growth is a broad concept debated in the specialty literature, but in the last decades more and more researchers are considering the impact of economic growth on the environment. Thus, the activity of companies is no longer pursued and analyzed only from an economic point of view, but it is also considered the evaluation of the impact on the environment and the social responsibility of the companies towards different categories of stakeholders. For this reason, my research activity, carried out after the completion of the doctoral studies, was structured in three directions, namely: the economic, environmental and social pillar of sustainable development.

Starting from the importance of foreign capital for national economies, I have underlined the controversies that it generates and the negative effects of foreign investment in the host countries, which is why the economic growth must be based on the domestic capital. Starting from these considerations, within a research team, I analyzed the impact of investments, energy

consumption and domestic material consumption in changing the Romanian economic paradigm. The use of energy and the internal material consumption, together with the investment are decisive factors in shaping the production process as basic elements of the economic efficiency of the companies. Another research direction that I approached with several colleagues was modeling the short-term dynamics of real GDP, which is an extremely important aspect for economic policy. The causal relationship between the evolution of the energy paradigm and the economic growth requires an in-depth analysis from a certain perspective, which is why I have also investigated the wider economic effects of energy production and taxation in promoting economic growth and sustainable development.

Agriculture is not a priority area for foreign investors, but I think that the Romanian public authorities should be concerned about stimulating foreign investment in the primary sector, agriculture and the extractive industry, given the development potential of these segments. In addition, agriculture is one of the safe ways of sustainable economic development, as opposed to foreign investment in the financial services sector that realize, on short terms, unjustifiably high profits, without a healthy added value support in the real economy. So, the agriculture represents, at least in the Romanian case, a major economic branch, which includes connotations that go beyond the approach of food safety and becomes an economic variable highly dependent on the general picture of economic development, I considered important to analyze the change of paradigms of land use and correlation their agricultural performance by measuring the evolution of added value in Romanian agriculture. The issue of food safety and security in the context of the paradigm transformations of agriculture imposed by climate change and the need to promote the bioeconomy and green investments have been the subject of several research carried out by multidisciplinary teams that have resulted in the publication of articles in both volumes. conferences as well as in specialized journals.

Given the specific concerns of the didactic activity, I also investigated the problem of financing of investment through capital market mechanisms, drawing attention to the decoupling between the real and the symbolic economy, with harmful effects on the process of economic growth. The intensification of the financial innovation process has led to the emergence of highly sophisticated stock exchange products, which are used not only for hedging, but also for speculation. The desire of some economic agents to obtain as much profits as possible led to the excessive use of stock products under the conditions of very small margins (guarantees), which fueled the speculative bubbles with toxic effects on the national economies.

Foreign capital has started to be oriented towards green investment that generate growth in clean energy production and clean technological innovations. Renewable energy production is one of the most important topics of our day, and reducing the costs and increasing the efficiency of renewable sources generates an important flow of foreign direct investment in this field. Starting from this finding, in several research teams, I analyzed different aspects regarding the environmental pillar of sustainable development. My main research directions have addressed the following aspects: (i) Economic growth and environmental impact. Kuznets curve; (ii) Green investments in the context of climate change; (iii) Renewable energy and biofuels - vectors of sustainable development. Energy or food security - the challenge of the millennium.

The scandals involving large transnational corporations, ecological disasters caused by oil companies and global warming were important factors that prompted consumers, NGOs and other stakeholder groups to be aware of the impact of business activity on the environment and local communities. Over time, companies have also turned to non-environmental issues that concern

working conditions, employee education, respect for human rights. In this way, we assume a rethinking of the relationship between the economic, social and environmental performances that any company must have. Thus, the economic, social and environmental objectives of the companies are no longer in conflict and are integrated in the business strategy. Firms are not only responsible to shareholders, but also to the environment, employees and local communities.

Starting from the consideration that transnational societies are the main promoters of social responsibility programs, in 2010-2012, I was involved in a postdoctoral studies project carried out at the Romanian Academy, the Institute of National Economy. The postdoctoral scholarship, won by competition, gave me the opportunity to carry out an extensive scientific research on the issue of corporate social responsibility and sustainable development in the Romanian economy. Through the analyzes, I identified the effects of the programs carried out on labor standards, the environment, human rights and the fight against corruption, these being the four areas of interest on which these programs operate, according to the Principles developed by UN Global Compact. In the analyzes conducted during the postdoctoral studies, I have emphasized the importance of the actions of the public authorities which, on the one hand, create the legal framework or encourage the economic agents to initiate various programs of social responsibility; and on the other hand, they promote social responsibility through their own activities such as green public procurement programs.

In section II of the thesis, I presented the evolution of my professional activity taking into account the three interdependent activities: didactic, research activity (over 20 years) and activity in the administrative, managerial field (both at the University of Petroleum-Gas of Ploiesti, as well as within companies from Prahova county). The professional recognition and impact of my work are demonstrated by the number of citations in Google Scholar and Web of Science, by the value of Hirsh indexes in these databases (10, respectively 4), as well as by the involvement in the scientific / editorial committees of journals in the country. and from abroad, indexed to IDB or ISI or to prestigious international conferences (indexed to IDB or ISI).

In section III of the thesis, I presented my plan for professional and academic development, considering the paradigm shift regarding the role of universities in society and economy. The activities and functions of universities are amplified and nuanced under the pressure exerted by external factors such as the reduction of public funding that determines the need for the use of new financial resources, the demand for applied research from public institutions and private companies, the need for lifelong learning, the globalization of the economy and increasing competition for students, teachers and researchers; the information society / knowledge revolution; climate change and the need to promote sustainable development, the "massification" of the educational process. In view of the above, I believe that my career development should be based on the academic-research-real economy triad, the results being beneficial for me as well as for the students, university and economic agents involved. In this way, it also ensures the manifestation of social responsibility in both the academic and the economic environment.