

**THE BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES  
THE FACULTY OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS**

**Domain of doctoral studies:**

**INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS**

# **SUMMARY OF HABILITATION THESIS**

**Sustainability and Competitiveness in  
Business Management at International Level**

**Candidate:**

**PhD Assoc. Prof. Irina-Eugenia IAMANDI-MUNTEANU**

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## SUMMARY OF HABILITATION THESIS

The recent economic-social theory and practice have shown that the implementation of a sustainable organizational behaviour contributes to the overall wellbeing of the community that aims to the achievement of the sustainable development objectives, but also to the consolidation of the competitive advantages of the responsible company. In this context, after defending the PhD thesis in 2009, my research objectives were included into the broad field of international business management, with a focus on corporate social responsibility and strategic analysis of the organizational factors that contribute to the success of businesses developing across national borders, by taking into account the need of ensuring the overall sustainability and the competitive advantages for companies.

The habilitation thesis entitled “Sustainability and Competitiveness in Business Management at International Level” presents a well-documented synthesis – from a structural-thematic and chronological perspectives – of the main scientific, professional and academic endeavours that I have undertaken after achieving the PhD degree in 2009 and up to present, as well as the personal plan for further developing my academic career in teaching and scientific terms.

Thus, the habilitation thesis is structured into two main parts – *I. Specific contribution to the development of scientific research in the field of sustainable business management at international level in the current context: Scientific, professional and academic achievements* and *II. Plans for developing my scientific, professional and academic career* – preceded by a summary (in Romanian and English) and an introduction, while the thesis ends with a separate section (*III. Bibliographic references*) dedicated to the scientific papers used for its documentation. In the first part of the thesis, I presented my main achievements in the PhD specialization field “International Business and Economics” after 2009, from a double perspective: on the one hand, I outlined the main scientific research directions carried out and the original results obtained in the global context of specialized research in the field of international business management; on the other hand, I emphasized the evolution of my teaching and scientific career so far. The synthesis of the results obtained on the three levels of the academic activity – teaching, scientific and professional prestige dimensions – in the end of the first part of the habilitation thesis founded and supported the argument from the second part of the paper, which highlighted my future teaching and scientific plans for sustainable career development.

Regarding the contribution made to the development of specialized research in the field of sustainable business management at international level, I divided the scientific endeavour into four main exhibiting directions, of which the first two are particularly significant for the relevance and impact of my contributions (including the dissemination of the achieved results in ISI-rated journals with positive AIS): *I.1. Social responsibility and corporate sustainability – premises of organizational competitiveness and sustainable development*; *I.2. Sustainable and resilient entrepreneurship*; *I.3. Strategic organizational restructuring and sustainable performance*; and *I.4. Additional themes of multidisciplinary research*. Each section ends with an argument regarding the research methodology applied in the papers, the summary of the personal contribution to the development of specialized literature, and also the correlation with the taught subjects and the students’ scientific coordination.

The above structure was based on the reason of grouping my scientific works according to my research interests and the solutions proposed in the literature in order to overcome the negative effects of the financial crisis. After the economic crisis, a series of transformations appeared at national and organizational level, which required economic and social solutions aimed at mitigating the negative impact and leading to increased competitiveness. Some of the ‘sustainable’ measures had stated the strengthening of general welfare of the society and improvement of living conditions (main request), development of public-private partnerships, organizational restructuring, support for entrepreneurship development and new knowledge creation, positive engagement of the stakeholders, and promotion of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in all areas, especially in those with high potential to contribute to economic growth and to create new long-term jobs. Thus, the investigated research period (2009-2019) corresponds to the years following the financial crisis, therefore ensuring sustainability and competitiveness in business management in this context has become a topic of vital interest. In the habilitation thesis, I chose to focus on three issues of the above, in view of my deep-rooted research interests: CSR (top priority), entrepreneurship, and organizational restructuring.

In Chapter *I.1. Social responsibility and corporate sustainability – premises of organizational competitiveness and sustainable development*, I highlighted my main scientific contributions regarding: the role of CSR in achieving the sustainable development objectives, the evolution and implementation of CSR in the EU in post-crisis period, the models and patterns of reporting and assessing corporate sustainability at European level, the contribution of corporate sustainability to increasing organizational competitiveness, and the analytical-empirical exemplification of corporate involvement in different EU social fields. The implementation of a sustainable organizational behaviour (CSR) is a win-win strategy, whereby companies actively contribute to local or national sustainable growth, but they simultaneously become more competitive, especially by attracting the positive involvement of all stakeholders. From a theoretical and empirical perspective, I confirmed the two-way relationship between CSR and corporate financial performance. Nowadays, the shift from the more general notion of CSR to the use of specific ESG (ecological, social and corporate governance) criteria, which are easier to assess in an international investment environment focused on risk mitigation, is becoming increasingly significant. Moreover, the investigations that I carried out at European level revealed that the current corporate sustainability (ESG) for the listed companies is mature, strategic and integrated in their basic operational activities. Thus, although with proven competitive potential, CSR/ESG should not be considered a generally suitable panacea but must be strategically correlated with the company’s financial resources. The organizational sustainability and competitiveness are determining each other through the available resources.

Chapter *I.2. Sustainable and resilient entrepreneurship* reflected my contributions related to: the assessment of the entrepreneurial character in the EU, the development of resilient agritourism entrepreneurship in Romania, and the role of start-ups in achieving the sustainable development objectives. In order to contribute to local sustainable growth and to provide a viable alternative to the options offered by large companies, especially during the crisis and post-crisis periods, the entrepreneurship fundamentally depends on various (economic-administrative, social, educational and cultural) conditions in the external environment, which support each other, but cannot be substituted. In addition to a comprehensive analysis of how entrepreneurial initiatives should be supported at

European level, I was also involved in a particular analysis of the (economic, social and tourism) context that nurtures the development of agritourism entrepreneurship in Romania. Regarding the start-ups' role in the sustainable development, the inclusion of the sustainability issues even in their core business initiatives was proved.

In Chapter **I.3. *Strategic organizational restructuring and sustainable performance***, I showed my contributions on increasing organizational competitiveness through: the efficient management of business internationalization, the outsourcing and business networks in specific contexts (e.g. the banking system in South-Eastern Europe), and the risk mitigation by corporate redesign and financial innovation. The last research direction, exposed in Chapter **I.4. *Additional themes of multidisciplinary research***, outlined some findings in related areas, but which add on the picture of sustainability and competitiveness in business management: the human resources management, the economic and social efficiency of sport, the application of new information technologies in international business etc.

My research concerns are reflected as well in the teaching component, considering the subjects that I teach in the Faculty of International Business and Economics (REI): *International Management* (Bachelor's degree, International Business and Economics), *Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility in International Business* (Master's degree, International Business, until 2015), *International Business Negotiation* (Master's degree, International Business, until 2015), *Human Resources Management* (Bachelor's degree, Applied Modern Languages) and *Human Resources Management in International Business* (Master's degree, Business Communication in English).

In the second part of the thesis, the one concerning the expected development of my academic career, I structured the discourse from general issues (proposed objectives and activities) to particular issues (directions of action and targeted results), based on two main academic components: 1. teaching activities and scientific coordination of students and PhD candidates; 2. scientific research. The wide-ranging actions to be further applied mainly refer to: planning, organizing and coordinating the teaching activities; comprehensive development of business graduates; coordination of multi-/cross-disciplinary research teams with various skills; scientific research on the previously directions, but also on other related topics included in the broad field of sustainable business management at international level; multidisciplinary collaboration with specialists at global level; publication of articles in the main international journals, especially in ISI journals with AIS higher than 0.15 etc.

In order to highlight the personal contribution to the knowledge development in the field after 2009, I divided the bibliographic references from the third part of the thesis into two categories: my scientific papers and other bibliographic references.

The arguments presented within the thesis highlight my self-standing teaching and research competences and performances, allow for the confirmation of new teaching and scientific directions, and support my ability to coordinate diverse research teams, in order to increase the recognition of the achieved results at international level.