

Summary

Thesis Title:

The Social and Environmental Dimension of Sustainable Development in Romania in the Context of the 2030 Agenda

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This doctoral thesis analyses the social and environmental dimension of sustainable development in Romania, within the broader vision of the 2030 Agenda. It examines how “sustainability” is implemented in national governance and the extent to which Romania, as a state, manages to manage a balance between structural vulnerabilities, public policies, strategic alignment and institutional reform. By connecting theoretical approaches from sustainability science, ecological economics and governance studies, the research positions Romania as a revealing case study for a post-transition country, negotiating normative convergence in relation to practical constraints.

The thesis begins by outlining a conceptual framework of sustainable development, tracing its evolution from the first international initiatives to the complex architecture proposed by the Sustainable Development Goals. The analysis then extends to the global and European institutional architecture governing sustainability and the structural conditions that influence the Romanian context, including the actors involved and the strategic tensions that define the political arena in which Romania operates.

At the level of national governance, the thesis systematically assesses Romania’s performance in three critical areas: social inclusion, environmental resilience and institutional trust. The investigation includes an analysis of issues related to poverty, educational inequity, vulnerability to climate change and perceptions of public trust in decision-making. It examines

the extent to which these dimensions are reflected in national strategies and government actions or, conversely, to what extent they remain marginal within the official sustainability discourse. While the thesis reveals both progress and stagnation, it provides an evidence-based assessment of policy performance in relation to commitments made in the field of sustainable development.

The final section of the paper presents a set of exploratory scenarios for Romania's possible trajectories by 2030. The first scenario reflects a path marked by institutional coherence and significant investments in the field of sustainability; the second outlines a moderate systemic adjustment; and the third highlights the risks of institutional inertia. These scenarios are not forecasts, but strategic tools intended to support decision-making under conditions of uncertainty and to clarify the implications of each governance option.

Rather than proposing sustainable development as a simple list of technocratic objectives, the thesis argues that its implementation depends on systemic factors such as the existence of a long-term institutional vision, the capacity for intersectoral coordination, and public trust. Thus, Romania's path towards sustainability is configured more as a challenge of governance, vision, and commitment than as an exercise in formal compliance. The research contributions provide a concrete basis and a strategic framework for managing this complex of transitions.

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Synthesis

This doctoral thesis conducts an in-depth investigation of the social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in Romania, within the normative, strategic, and institutional framework derived from the European Union's 2030 Agenda. The latter provides an integrated architecture for operationalizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across Member States, with emphasis on policy coherence, socio-economic convergence, and a just ecological transition. The thesis offers a critical examination of how Romania translates these European imperatives in a context shaped by post-transition institutional legacies and persistent structural imbalances.

The research is structured into five analytical chapters. It begins by delineating the conceptual and theoretical framework of sustainability, followed by an analysis of the EU's institutional architecture and governance mechanisms underpinning the 2030 Agenda. It then explores the interlinkages between social inclusion, ecological resilience, and institutional legitimacy, focusing on selected SDG targets that are particularly relevant to Romania's national challenges.

The thesis includes both quantitative and qualitative assessments of Romania's performance in key areas such as poverty reduction, equitable access to education, climate action, and public trust in institutions. The methodological toolkit integrates statistical indicators, composite scores, correlational analyses, and scenario-based projections for the 2025–2030 horizon, supported by qualitative reasoning on institutional barriers and opportunities.

In the final chapter, four exploratory scenarios (baseline, realistic, optimistic, and pessimistic) are developed based on five critical variables, offering a prospective evaluation of Romania's trajectory in relation to the EU's sustainability commitments. The thesis concludes with a set of strategic lessons and public policy recommendations grounded in the principles of transparent, inclusive, and sustainable governance.

The original contribution of the research lies in articulating an integrated methodology for assessing sustainability in Romania, which interrelates the social, environmental, and institutional dimensions, proposes applicable scenario analysis tools, and provides an operational framework for evidence-based national policymaking towards the 2030 horizon.