

Summary of the Thesis

This thesis evaluates the impact of stakeholder involvement and Multi-stakeholder Networks (MSNs) on the development of the circular economy and bioeconomy in Central and Eastern European countries. It investigates the role of participatory governance and collaborative networks in developing sustainable and inclusive strategies for regions with diverse institutions and post-transition heritage, in the context of the European Green Deal and the Circular Economy Action Plan.

The research operates on the assumption that sustainability transitions need more than technological solutions or policy alignment. Governance models that want to be effective must integrate actor perspectives from various sectors and governance levels and embed changes within local realities. The research uses sustainability transition, transition management and network governance concepts to study the role of MSNs in mediating complex policy environments.

The research uses document analysis together with stakeholder mapping and qualitative interviews to study eight Central and Eastern European countries. The research uses case studies together with co-creation workshops as participatory activities to enhance the understanding of MSN effects on value chain development and policy dialogue and capacity-building.

The research shows that although national strategies match EU objectives, implementation remains inconsistent because of fragmented governance, together with limited institutional capacity and weak stakeholder engagement. The research shows that MSNs function as vital platforms which enable cross-sector collaboration and knowledge co-creation and trust-building and they link grassroots experimentation with policymaking. The research establishes that MSNs have four essential functions which include co-creating knowledge and supporting innovation and coordinating diverse actors and contributing to policy processes. The roles established for MSNs demonstrate their active role in creating systemic change. This thesis provides advanced academic insights into governance mechanisms that drive sustainability transitions in semi-peripheral EU territories.

The research provides practical policy and implementation recommendations that include enhancing inter-ministerial coordination and maintaining stable funding for stakeholder engagement platforms and developing facilitation skills and using digital tools to increase inclusiveness. Proper support of MSNs reveals strong potential to advance circular and bio-based economic transitions throughout the CEE region and other areas.