

BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES

DOCTORAL SCHOOL: BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION I

HABILITATION THESIS

**QUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY
IN THE TERTIARY SECTOR,
BASED ON INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS
OF MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS,
WITH BENEFITS IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION**

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Bucharest

2025

Abstract

The habilitation thesis entitled „Quality and sustainability in the tertiary sector, based on international standards of management systems, with benefits in business administration” presents the professional achievements obtained after conferring the title of doctor in science, in the field of economics, under the scientific coordination of prof. univ. Viorel Petrescu, in 2003. This thesis is elaborated in accordance with the standards established by ASE-IOSUD and approved by the university senate, according to art.156 (1) of the Law on higher education no. 199/2023, as amended and supplemented, and approved by order of the minister of education, according to O.M. no. 6129/2016, O.M. no. 3998/2024 on the Methodology for granting the certificate of habilitation and the ASE Senate Decision no. 268/30.10.2024 on the approval of the modification of the Methodology of organization and conduct of the process of obtaining the certificate of habilitation.

Within habilitation thesis, I highlighted the main published scientific results and professional achievements from the scientific and didactic research activity in the doctoral domain of business administration. After obtaining the scientific title of doctor in economics, the academic, scientific and professional career in economic higher education has evolved with the promotion through competition and the appointment, on a decision basis, in the didactic position of Associate Professor, in 2005.

I have selected the most relevant, topical academic, scientific and professional contributions from the specialized field of the author of the present thesis of habilitation, which deals exclusively with subjects and themes specific to the field of economic sciences - business administration: articles published in journals ranked by the National Council of Scientific Research (CNCS) in the A category, indexed to the Web of Science in the SSCI or SCIE categories, with absolute influence score AIS > 0.15, articles from ISI Web of Science Core Collection, Core Economics, with accession number WOS, books published in prestigious, recognized national publishing houses, or articles presented and published in volumes of internationally recognized scientific events in the country and abroad (with ISBN).

The topics of the published articles, from the specialized field of the author of this habilitation thesis, which fall within the topics of business administration, in the global context of significant and topical scientific achievements: good practices of organizations, models /quality management and excellence in business, total quality management, criteria for evaluating organizations in relation to these models, factors, strategies supporting the sustainable development and competitiveness of organizations in the tertiary sector, trends in business and sustainable consumption, business sustainability risk management, food safety,

contemporary challenges of sustainable tourism, green procurement in the hotel industry and in the public sector, the circular economy, as a direction for the sustainability of the hotel industry, the acquisition of knowledge on standards in the digital age, etc.

The actuality of the habilitation thesis lies in the fact that its theme is included in the topics of category A scientific journals, as well as in the trends and opportunities of business administration at present. Also, the articles included in the Check sheet for the fulfillment of the minimum standards and which are found in this habilitation thesis were cited (without self-reading or semi-autociting) in 49 articles, WOS papers, published in the A category journals ranked, of the Q1, Q2 and Q3 quartiles, Web of Science indexed, within the SSCI or SCIE classifications categories, with an absolute score of influence AIS > 0.15, with framing: article or review, in the ISI Web of Science Core Collection, Core Economics category.

Standards for management systems contain valuable and useful ideas in the practice of organizations so that they systematize and prioritize their objectives.

In companies in the third sector, the requirements of management systems within international standards are implemented in order to streamline the activity, thus better business administration, resulting implicitly improving their image in the market and gaining a competitive advantage.

Useful in business administration, in order to continuously improve, economic diagnoses and evaluate the effectiveness of project implementation, are also regular audits, be they internal, external, and, at external suppliers and other external stakeholders, based on EN ISO 19011, Guidelines for auditing management systems, the last edition of which is the 2018 edition.

Certifications are also important for the image of the bodies, being required often in the case of public procurement or for other contractual or regulated reasons, based on the standard EN ISO/CEI 17021-1:2015, Conformity assessment - Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems. Users of this standard can thus document themselves in order to develop their own audit requirements. The guidelines in this standard may also be used for the purposes of self-declaration and may be useful to organizations involved in the training of auditors or certification of individuals.

From the perspective of the certified auditor for EA areas: education, research, services, analyzing achievements from organizations that have implemented quality, environmental or food safety management systems, the habilitation thesis "Quality and sustainability in the tertiary sector, based on international standards of management systems, with benefits in business administration" advocates for understanding and implementing management standards, helping with the internal organization of processes of organizations, and the usefulness of management systems certifications.

Consistent with the areas of interest specific to the didactic and research activity, I deepened: the quality management systems according to EN ISO 9001:2015, the environmental management system according to EN ISO 14001:2015, the energy management system according to EN ISO 50001:2018, the food safety management system according to ISO 22000:2018 (applicable for service providers in public catering: canteens, restaurants, catering, etc.).

Of importance for the research field of the author have also been distinguished the ecological certification in the field regulated by Regulation (EU) no. 848/2018, certification for transport - logistics and services - public passenger transport according to EN ISO 13816:2002 (applicable for road, rail, sea, air transport) and certification for the hospitality industry, Hotel Safety & Security (applicable to hotels, restaurants and other enterprises whose activity consists of commercial catering and /or guest accommodation, with the aim of demonstrating that strict hygiene regulations in the hospitality industry are optimally implemented to protect employees and guests from infections.

The habilitation thesis is structured on the main directions of academic, scientific and professional career development. The thesis structure includes: the abstract, the lists of tables, figures and abbreviations included in the paper, the most important scientific achievements published in the domains of the proposed theme, on disciplinary or interdisciplinary thematic directions, professional and academic achievements, the plan of development of the university career, as well as the bibliographic references investigated for the foundation of their own scientific research.

The thematic content of *the first section*, which presents the most important published scientific achievements, is organized on two thematic directions, quality and sustainability, consistent with the author's concerns, after supporting the doctorate in economics, the topic of the present habilitation thesis highlighting some of the many thematic directions of the complex field of business administration.

Regarding the standardization and certification of products and services, I mention the book with the same title published in ASE Publishing House in 2004, developed as a co-author. This was done in order to support the training of the students from the masters, from the Faculty of Business and Tourism, and, so that they can finally being able to create a standard that is useful to them in the commercial areas in which they profess or revise an existing standard to improve it, in order to regulate the market of goods and services in Romania, to raise their quality level, so that they are comparable to those in the countries of the European Union, thus supporting business ethics, as well, and last but not least, to be used in public procurement and in the production of specifications. I also found it useful to get involved in the training of

specialists in standards and quality of product or service, to help protect the needs of citizens, consumers in Romania.

In the same thematic register, I presented the paper "*The role of standardization in preparing specialists for trade*" at the International Conference "Commerce and Competitiveness", published in ASE Publishing House, Bucharest, 2004, ISBN 973-594-755-2 and 978-973-594-755-2, as well as the paper "*Economical value of standards*", in the scientific event "The 33rd Annual Congress of the American Romanian Academy of Arts and Sciences", published in the Polytechnic International Press, Montréal, Québec, 2009, and I published two articles: "*Management of the Standardization Activity based on Programmes*" and "*On strategic standardization management*" in the Economics, Management, and Financial Markets edited by the Addleton Academic Publishers, New York, in 2009 and 2010.

The topic of standardization is still current / relevant, Ivana Mijatović, Biljana Tošić and Milan Jovanović, researchers at the Faculty of Organizational Sciences at the University of Belgrade, Serbia, published in 2019, in the journal Amfiteatru economic, the article "*The Acquiring of the Knowledge about Standards in the Digital Era*", addressing also the role of standards and standardisation in the global market, as well as certifications for SMEs.

The next thematic direction we addressed in our academic, scientific and professional careers was that of quality management systems, auditing and certification of these systems. During this period, we held courses and seminars in the discipline Quality Management, which is in the program of the year III license, respectively Techniques and tools of quality management, located in the master's program, at the Faculty of Commerce (then called Business and Tourism). I have taken several long-term postgraduate courses, both within the Academy of Economic Studies and within the TÜV Rheinland Academy, and worked in parallel in both institutions, as a holder and collaborator. Since 2009, as an external auditor of TÜV Austria, we have conducted third-party audits, certification or supervision, within the quality management systems certifications, for various organizations in the fields of education, research, services, tourism.

I mention some of the scientific achievements in this thematic direction: the article presented at the international conference Commodity-Consumer-Quality "the XXI-st Century's Perspective" "*Features of the manager of quality management system*", published in 2007 in Samperi - Messina Publishing House, Italy, ISBN 978-88-86038-40-9, in which we approached the role of the representative of quality management (QRM) in the organizations in Romania and the challenges they face. In 2008 I participated with a chapter "*Assurance and quality management*" in the book coordinated by Professor Dinu Vasile, published in ASE Publishing House, ISBN 978-606-505-051-8 and I published in the journal Amfiteatru

economic, 10 (2), the article *"The continuous improvement of the management system corresponding to an organisation through the evaluation of its risks"*, in which we anticipate risk assessment as a necessity or requirement in any organization, in correlation with the continuous improvement of the quality of products, services, management systems.

The study of leadership in organizations has been a long-standing and high-interest concern, being at the same time one of the topics addressed in each audit. Ideas relating to the planning and organization of processes of organizations, as well as reports about some solved cases or the experiences of directors or managers of organisation (of any kind: company, corporation, firm, enterprise, authority or institution), or, that of the representatives of quality management are also useful in the professional career of the teacher, who must bring new and real elements from the entrepreneurial practice. A work, under the aegis of these goals, *"Permanent improvement - principle and objective, leaders attribution and responsibility"*, I presented it at the IGWT Symposium in 2010 "Facing the Challenges of the Future. Excellence in Business and Commodity Science", the article being published in the Quality-access to success Journal no. 116 /2010th.

Financial or management system audits are used in the practice of managing organisations to obtain conclusive information about the status of that organisation and are scheduled at specific time intervals or times as often as necessary, usually carried out with employees from that organisation or with consultants with expertise in auditing, where internal audits are outsourced. Certification or supervision audits are scheduled annually, within 3 years, as long as certification lasts, being carried out by competent auditors for the field of activity of the organization whose management system audits it, with theoretical and practical training carried out under the auspices of the certification body it represents. The article *"Good practices in the third party audits of the systems of quality management according to TÜV Cert requirements"*, published in 2011 in the journal *Amfiteatru economic*, 13 (30) outlines the work mode, including professional and ethical skills, that a third party auditor must prove.

Among the areas for which we received the endorsement of the certification body in order to carry out certification and supervision audits were the services, which allowed me to elaborate a scientific point of view on the quality of tourism services in Romania, in the paper *"Evaluation of the quality of tourist services in Romania"*, worked out as co-author, along with my colleagues, prof. Delia Popescu and prof. Olimpia State, presented at "The 22nd edition of RESER (European Association for Research on Services) International Conference: Services and economic development: local and global challenges", the article being published in 2012 by Editura ASE Publishing House, ISBN: 978-606-505-565-0. As a continuation of this theme,

in 2014, I published as co-author, along with prof. Ion Schileru, article "*Quality and Vision in the Romanian Tourism Agencies*" in the journal *Amfiteatru economic*, 16 (8).

The topicality of the theme is demonstrated by recent citations in indexed journals Web of Science in the SSCI or SCIE categories, with AIS > 0.15, review or article, in the ISI Web of Science Core Collection, Core Economics category:

Eneko Ibarria, Luis Garay, Antonio Guevara, 2020, "*Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the Travel Supply Chain: A Literature Review*", *Sustainability*, 12 (23), WOS:000597465900001;

Corina Larisa Bunghez, 2020, "*Marketing Strategies of Travel Agencies: A Quantitative Approach*", *Sustainability*, 12 (24), WOS:000603260500001;

Alina Emilia Maria Gherdan, Ramona Vasilica Bacter, Cristina Maria Maerescu, Tiberiu Iancu, Ramona Ciolac, Alexandra Ungureanu, 2025, "*Sustainable Tourism Development in Mountain Regions: A Case Study of Peștera Village, Brasov County, Applying the Analytic Hierarchy Process*", *Sustainability*, 17(4), WOS:001431804300001.

The project with contract number ASE DCE 48 / 2009-2010 concluded with the business environment, on the topic: "*Research for improving the content and provision of training courses in the field of integrated quality-environmental management system*", synthesized the theoretical and practical experience gained in the years when I intensively dealt with the domain of management systems, but also to improve the performance of courses and interactive variants of working with students or learners, in undergraduate or short-term postgraduate courses.

Sustainability concerns have materialized since 2007, with the presentation of the paper "*Requirements of environmental management for the goods of future decades*" at the international conference "Commodity-Consumer-Quality: the XXI-st Century's Perspective", published in the Samperi-Messina publishing house, ISBN 978-88-86038-40-9, published as co-author, along with prof. Ion Schileru. In the same team we published article "*Good Practices Preceding the Implementation of the System of Management of Environment, on Small and Medium Enterprises*", in the journal *Amfiteatru economic*, 13 (5), 2011, WOS:000297929300005, where we have put forward an FMEA approach, applicable for risk assessment, priority selection and identification of environmental objectives within an SMEs organisation.

In order to demonstrate the importance and timeliness of the subject in the domain of environmental management systems, I mention that the article was cited in the *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 74, indexed journal Web of Science in the SCIE category, located in the Q1 (red) quartile, AIS₂₀₂₄ = 1,590: Ferenhof, Helio Aisenberg; Vignochi, Luciano; Selig, Paulo Mauricio; Lezana, Alvaro Guillermo Rojas; Campos, Lucila M. S., 2014, "*Environmental*

management systems in small and medium-sized enterprises: an analysis and systematic review", WOS:000337773000005.

As co-author, along with prof. Vasile Dinu and prof. Ion Schileru, we published in 2012 the article "*Attitude of Romanian Consumers Related to Products' Ecological Labelling*" in the journal *Amfiteatru economic* 14 (31), WOS:000300910600002. This article received in 2014 the Diploma of Excellence, III award, for the largest number of citations in the Web of Science, of an article published in the journal *Amfiteatru economic*, it enjoyed 35 citations in the Web of Science, still at the top of downloads, ranked III, with 470 downloads.

The actuality of this theme can also be demonstrated by the latest citations:

Jurconi, Alexandru; Popescu (Iacobescu), Ioana Maria; Manea, Daniela-Ioana; Mihai, Mihaela); Pamfilie, Rodica, "*The Impact of the "Green Transition" in the Field of Food Packaging on the Behavior of Romanian Consumers*", *Amfiteatru Economic*, 24 (60), 2022, WOS:000878397900007;

Ciumara, Tudor; Lupu, Iulia, "*Green Procurement Practices in Romania: Evidence from a Survey at the Level of Local Authorities*", *Sustainability*, 12 (23), 2020, WOS:000597890300001;

Kardos, Mihaela; Gabor, Manuela Rozalia; Cristache, Nicoleta, "*Green Marketing's Roles in Sustainability and Ecopreneurship. Case Study: Green Packaging's Impact on Romanian Young Consumers' Environmental Responsibility*", *Sustainability*, 11 (3), 2019, WOS:000458929500318;

Bojnec, Š., Petrescu, D.C., Petrescu-Mag, R.M. and Rădulescu, C.V., "*Locally Produced Organic Food: Consumer Preferences*", *Amfiteatru Economic*, 21 (50), 2019, WOS:000456190000014;

Nistoreanu, Puiu; Aluculesei, Alina-Cerasela; Avram, Daniel, "*Is Green Marketing a Label for Ecotourism? The Romanian Experience*", *Information*, 11 (8), 2020, WOS:000577775100001.

As co-author, along with prof. Ion Schileru, I have worked a project with contract number: ASE DCE: 56 / 2009-2010, with the business environment, on the topic: "*Researching the peculiarities of public services and utilities in Romania in a contemporary context*". This represented the beginning of a new stage in the university career, with the tenure starting in 2011, at the Department of Tourism - Services, currently the Department of Tourism and Geography. The themes of energy and transport were some of the most studied and debated in the years that followed.

Finally, whereas transport, tourism, hospitality and gastronomy are related, I mention the article made as co-author, along with prof. Lelia Voinea and prof. Ion Schileru, "*Perceptions of the Slow Food Cultural Trend among the Youth*", published in the journal *Amfiteatru economic*, 18 (10), 2016, WOS:000388624700009, which illustrates sustainability in the current food trend.

Regarding the relevance and timeliness of this topic I mention some of the citations for this article:

El Bilali, Hamid; Strassner, Carola; Ben Hassen, Tarek, "*Sustainable Agri-Food Systems: Environment, Economy, Society, and Policy*", Sustainability, 13 (11), 2021, WOS:000660703700001; Macein, Jose Luis Cruz; Hocine, Mohamed Amine; Hernández-Jiménez, Veronica; Rodríguez, Jose Pablo Zamorano; Gmada, Samir Sayadi, "*The Gap in Sustainable Food Services in Public Institutions: The Perceptions of Young Consumers from Public Universities in the Madrid Region (Spain)*", Foods, 12 (22), 2023, WOS:001108165500001; Velcovská, Sarka, "*Generation Y's Perception of Product Origin and its Labelling in the Context of Food Quality and Safety*", Amfiteatru economic, 20 (47), 2018, WOS:000427829800004.

In **the second section** of the thesis are presented the academic career development plan, which underlines the relevant aspects related to the *professional activity* (studies and stages), *the scientific contribution* (the most relevant books, articles, scientific communications and research projects), *professional prestige* (diplomas recognizing of scientific research activity, membership in professional organizations and associations), as well as *the main directions of career development*.

In **the third section** of the thesis are included numerous bibliographic sources that cover the vast area of management systems, being useful for documentation both in the didactic activity, as well as in shaping the theoretical underpinnings of different scientific works (books, articles, scientific communications). Many of them are recent foreign sources, which indicates the candidate's concern for scientific innovation in this domain.

In conclusion, this habilitation thesis outline the professional, scientific and academic career of the candidate, demonstrating the ability to coordinate research projects and disseminate research results in prestigious journals listed in the Web of Science. The future contributions to the research and teaching activities in the domain of Business Administration will be reflected in the following research directions: improving energy efficiency in Romania in relation to consumer protection, analysis of the results of energy audits carried out by public authorities, sustainable public transport, improvement of public health and the environment as a result of the modernization of the public water and sanitation system, and, review and improvement of drinking water standards.

My didactic activity will continue to take place alongside my colleagues, in the Department of Tourism and Geography, Faculty of Business and Tourism of the Academy of Economic Studies of Bucharest, Romania, with the hope that the students I will coordinate will benefit from the expertise, but also from my enthusiasm in carrying out professional and scientific projects that will motivate them.