

Abstract habilitation thesis (English)

I am currently Associate professor, PhD, with the Department of Public Administration and Management at Babes Bolyai University. I teach both undergraduate and graduate level courses which focus on local and regional development and sustainable urban development and planning.

I am co-director of the Center for Good Governance Studies at Babes Bolyai University (<http://www.apubb.ro/goodgovernancestudies/>). The Center, established in 2010, brings together experts with complementary backgrounds from different Romanian and international universities and research centers: law, public administration, sociology, political science, and economics. At the Center, I am mainly responsible for the research direction that deals with sustainable development and the integration of sustainable development into other policy areas. As co-director, I coordinate young researchers and students who are involved in conducting research with the framework of various projects implemented by the Center. My responsibilities also include writing grant proposals and identification of new research partners. In 2014, I co-edited with D. Dragos the book titled *Alternative Dispute Resolution in European Administrative Law*, published at Springer, which represents the outcome of a 3 years research project, involving researchers from more than 10 jurisdictions of the EU.

I have a relatively significant experience in the implementation of research grants both as team member (5 national grants) and more recently as principal investigator (2 national grants). The topics approached by these research projects include: the reform of the Romanian administrative system, good governance, transparency and the Ombudsman institution, organizational culture, etc. After 2010, I acted as principal investigator/grant director in two post-doc researches which examined the way in which sustainability applies in public procurement with a focus on life cycle costing (12 months) and on how urban sustainability can be measured (30 months). The research outcomes had been widely disseminated both at the level of the academic community and among practitioners. I also took part in the drafting and implementation of grants for institutional development (5), both as expert in the field of education and as member of the management team (evaluation and monitoring expert).

Other professional accomplishments include: I am member of the Scientific Board of the *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, the single journal in public administration from Romania included in Social Sciences Citation Index (Web of Science), impact factor 0,333. I also serve as a reviewer for various international journals in public administration (IRAS). I am frequently invited to Michigan State University, to conduct comparative research on topics of interests for both schools and to have meetings and presentations with practitioners and scholars interested in urban planning, regional development and more recently in good governance (2007, 2008, 2009, and 2013). I also lectured as a guest lecture at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia in 2011. I also work as consultant for various local public organizations, especially on issues pertaining to spatial and urban planning.

My scientific production includes: 5 books (3 as single author); 3 volumes as editor; 25 chapters in edited books/volumes, and 27 journal articles (11 ISI). The majority of these contributions have been completed after I obtained my PhD in 2008. Numerous book chapters are published in prestigious books.

My PhD thesis, which I defended in November 2008, addressed a topic almost unexplored in the Romanian urban planning literature, namely urban sprawl (uncontrolled expansion of the city into the surrounding rural fringe, with dramatic economic, environmental and social consequences). The

research goal was twofold: first, to determine the dimension of the urban sprawl phenomenon in Romania (changes in the land cover; causes underlying these changes; and forecasts on the short and medium term); b) to explore ways in which it can be mitigated through the intervention of the public sector. The second part of the thesis was unique because it introduced in the planning literature from Romania the concept of smart growth – a certain type of urban development, controlled and guided by the local authorities, based on certain qualitative characteristics (cluster development and containment of land fragmentation, design standards that favor human scale and foster a sense of place, mixed use developments, etc.). My thesis included a comprehensive review of various policy instruments used in other countries for implementing smart growth and a tentative analysis of how these tools could be transferred and adapted to the Romanian concept.

The challenge implied by this research was to take a concept from a completely different context and to adapt it to the Romanian one in a meaningful way. In order to avoid comparisons based on indicators pertaining to physical patterns of land use development, I decided to focus mostly on governance issues, more specifically: a) which are the legal, political, and administrative triggers of urban sprawl in Romania; and b) which types of administrative arrangements (for example cooperation versus competition; metropolitan areas versus individual administrative units) are needed at the local level in order to control sprawl.

In the years following the completion of my PhD, I continued to be interested in the topic of urban sprawl and its management by local authorities. My major contribution was to reframe the analysis in the context of sustainable urban development (book published in 2012). Though urban sprawl had always had a negative connotation, the works published after my PhD thesis in this area focused on describing it in terms of an unsustainable pattern of urban development. Thus, one of the main research dimensions of my scientific activity, namely sustainable development, has evolved out of my earlier preoccupations in the area of urban sprawl and urban growth management.

While sustainable development was a somewhat natural progression, in line with my educational background, especially master and PhD, the evolution of my second main research direction is less clear cut. Starting with 2009, I began working with my colleague D. Dragos (expert in public law), on a variety of topics addressing mainly issues such as the administrative reform in Romanian and other transition countries and free access to documents. These early works, despite of their pronounced legal character, address also issues pertaining to the governance literature: why are certain legal institutions and provisions working in one country and not in the rest of the countries transitioning to democracy; implementation challenges and factors which make legal provisions and institutions ineffective, etc. We both realized that our contributions can be placed under the generous framework of good governance studies. This was the main reason why in 2010 prof. Dragos and I created the Center for Good Governance Studies. Our intention was to bring under the umbrella of one research entity of a variety of individuals with backgrounds not only in law but also in sociology, economics, public administration, public policy, etc. Since 2010, the Center has developed tremendously and it still continues to grow. There are several clearly developed research directions and its members are involved in a variety of international networks and projects. From my perspective, the main gain of being part of the research team at the Center is that over time I have been able to strategically integrate my two main research directions and interests, namely sustainable development and governance, into one broad coherent theme.

The section from the Habilitation thesis presenting my scientific accomplishments is structured in three main parts. The first part represents the organizing framework – a reflection on how the concepts of sustainable development and governance work together. Part two and part three represent the two main research directions under which my publications can be grouped.

Both sustainable development and governance emerged in the late 1980s from similar parentage and represent contested and fuzzy concepts. Sustainable development arose from two main sources: concerns vis-à-vis the growing degradation of the environment and criticism of the development aid policies of the main international donors. The Brundtland report, in 1987, did not necessarily coin the term of sustainable development but it launched it in a way that significantly increased its appeal. It offered a popular definition of sustainable development: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. The report also acknowledged that sustainable development implies the responsibility of a wide range of actors – both public and private, coupled with the wide participation of the public, and with the increasing role and involvement of civil society organizations.

Governance is most commonly defined as the opposite of government. While government centers on the institutions and actions of the state, the term governance allows non-state actors such as businesses and non-governmental organizations to be brought into any analysis of societal steering. Once the number of the actors involved in societal steering multiplies, the types of institutional arrangements and power relations among these actors changes as well. The hierarchies which are characteristic to the government paradigm are replaced under governance with flexible arrangement, which include networks and informal regimes. The transition from hierarchies to networks and informal arrangements also means that accountability is sometimes blurred and that increased coordination among various actors is needed.

When I first started to reflect on the possible structure of the habilitation thesis, I had two dilemmas. First, I realized that I was trying to bring together not one but two fuzzy concepts. But this should not stop us from reflecting on how sustainable development will or should be implemented, given the fact that it is rather obvious that the type of changes implied by sustainable development do not happen automatically. From the three main modes of governance: hierarchies, markets, and networks, it is important to determine which mode we should rely on when pursuing sustainable development.

A second dilemma I had when trying to organize the materials for this thesis was the distinction various scholars operate between “governance and sustainable development” and “governance for sustainable development”. Scholars pertaining to the first category and employing a vastly empirical approach are interested in how sustainable development has been interpreted and pursued in various contexts. Scholars pertaining to the second category, and employing a normative approach, are interested in identifying and making recommendations regarding what governance systems should be employed in order to reach the goals of sustainability. However, we should ask ourselves if this distinction is useful or the two approaches can co-exist. In my research, especially the one conducted in the framework of international networks (for example sustainable public procurement, Europeanization of national law) I am mostly employing an empirical perspective, with a focus on describing how certain developments are being implemented in the Romanian context. Very often, however, these works also include normative recommendations regarding how things could be changed in Romania, based on best practices from other systems. Though the distinction in itself is

useful to better understand the questions asked by various scholars, in the case of my own research, my approach is mixed.

The framework that best fits my research thus far is the one which argues that governance for sustainable development calls for a reflection on four main dimensions: Policy integration; Development of common objectives, criteria, choices and trade-off decision rules and indicators of progress; Information and incentives for practical implementation; Programs for system innovation.

The results of my research – publications, grants and conferences, are grouped into two main research directions: I) Sustainable development and II) Governance/Good governance. The separation is somewhat artificial but I opted for it for the sake of more clarity (see the comments above pertaining to how sustainable development and governance work together). In my analysis I make however full use of the considerations presented in the organizing framework, highlighting whenever possible the interconnectedness between these two concepts.

Research Direction I: Sustainable development

1. Sustainability planning

My research in the area of sustainable development is guided by the normative assumption that local governments can and should intervene in order to steer urban development in the desired direction. Sustainability planning represents a change of paradigm, reflecting the values and objectives underlying sustainable development. My contribution in this area is both theoretical and empirical. From a theoretical standpoint, I was interested in analyzing various theories in planning as well as the emergence of sustainability planning in the context of post-modernism. From an empirical standpoint, I examined with the occasion of several separate researches, if master plans drafted at the local level reflect the values and principles of sustainability planning.

2. Sustainable cities and communities

The local level currently represents the scale at which numerous policies and efforts aimed at advancing sustainable development take place. This is also based on the normative suggestion encompassed by Agenda 21 which, emphasizing the role to be played by local communities in advancing sustainable development, states: “Think globally, act locally”. The concept of sustainable communities grew out from the understanding of the importance of individual behavior and of the local government context in which this behavior occurs. Its origins are also linked with the development of new scientific fields such as community development. The transition from sustainable communities to sustainable cities is linked to the understanding of the role cities, as the basic administrative units in most administrative systems, play in dealing with infrastructure, green spaces, local economic development, etc. The main criticism against considering cities as an efficient scale at which sustainable development needs to take place has to do with the fact that often environmental, social, and economic problems do not fit nicely within the administrative boundaries of one city.

3. Horizontal integration of sustainability concerns into other policy areas: public procurement

Sustainable development cannot be regarded as an isolated policy objective; it gains a lot more strength when it is integrated into other policies which traditionally do not concern themselves with sustainability concerns. Within the context of the European Union, public procurement is a perfect example in this sense – traditionally, all actors involved were concerned with achieving the best value

for money; later on, policy-makers realized that since significant amounts of money are used by public organizations to purchase goods/services/works, they could pursue also social and environmental considerations. From 2013 to 2014, I was the principal investigator in a post-doc research grant financed by Babes-Bolyai University which explored the instruments that are used under the label of sustainable procurement in the context of the new 2014 Procurement Directives (Life Cycle Costing and Eco-labels).

4. Scaling up: role of international organizations in sustainable development

The topic of global environmental governance is perhaps the best suited one for discussing the links between the two organizing concepts employed in this thesis, namely sustainable development and governance. My research on the World Bank examines the role this institution plays in the realm of environment and explores the transition from a do no harm approach to a more-proactive one. My research was meant to address two main objectives: a) to discuss various instances of internationalization of policy norms which become internationally recognized benchmarks for mitigation of negative environmental and social impacts; and b) to analyze the reform process of the safeguard policy that started in 2010 in light of recent criticism regarding the possible dilution of these standards. Despite the highly technical and legal character of the contribution, the chapter addresses broader issues relevant from a governance perspective: How do the safeguards evolve over time and under which factors?; Why should international organizations be accountable to those impacted by their activities/projects?; How much discretion states should enjoy in deciding how to achieve the objectives underlying the safeguards?.

Research Direction II: Governance

1. Good governance in the context of former communist countries

A sizable part of my research efforts and publications since 2008 focuses on the investigation of the principles of good governance in the context of former communist countries, with an emphasis on the identification of best practices in the region (Central and Eastern Europe) and beyond and on their successful transfer/adaptation to specific national and sub-national contexts (most often, Romania). Good governance principles and the policy instruments subsequently developed to implement these principles are investigated often in connection with corruption, which is one of the most significant problems faced by this group of countries.

1.1. Transparency and openness: Free access to information and public participation

A key research dimension at the Center for Good Governance Studies is administrative transparency. It is broadly defined as to encompass different elements such as: freedom of information, participation in decision-making and transparency through e-government. My research in this area includes theoretical studies, focusing on a comparative analysis of freedom of information regimes in the countries from the CEE region; empirical analyses focusing on the assessment of the level of transparency in Romania in various contexts (urban versus rural) and policy areas (environmental matters).

1.2. Accountability: The role of Ombudsman institutions

Besides administrative transparency, the study of the Ombudsman institutions in various national settings is another key research dimension at the Center for Good Governance Studies. Similar to administrative transparency, some of my early preoccupations in this area are the result of a joint

research initiative undertaken in the framework of EGPA conference, study group no. X, Law and Public Administration. As part of this project, I participated in a workshop in 2010 in Liverpool (23-26 August, under the coordination of prof. B. Thompson) which explored this topic from a comparative perspective. From 2009 to 2011 I was part of a national research grant which financed a comprehensive study regarding the role of the Ombudsman institution in Romania as a promoter of good governance. As a result of this project I co-authored several contributions regarding the interaction between the Ombudsman and the courts in Romania and I co-edited a book comprising the translation of several international contributions regarding the Ombudsman institutions. In 2015, together with my colleague D. Dragos, I was invited to offer a speech at the colloquium marking 20 years of existence for the European Ombudsman (22 June, Brussels). The speech was developed into a book chapter which will be published in 2016.

1.3. Ethical conduct

Integrity in government is a precondition for effective governance – the public good is placed before individual and/or group interests and corruption, irrespective of its form, is not tolerated. My research in this area includes a general chapter on anti-corruption strategies used throughout CEE countries as well as a more specialized chapter dealing with conflicts of interest in public procurement. In addition to these works which focus exclusively on corruption, the majority of the volumes on public procurement published under the EPLS series, include considerations pertaining to how corruption manifests itself in respect to various stages of the public procurement process and various strategies to fight against it (see section on the Europeanization of national administrative law).

2. Europeanization of the national administrative law

Currently, the administrative laws of the member states of the European Union are no longer shaped solely on the national level but they are subject to European influence in many ways. This influence is perceptible not only in cases when European law is applied by the national courts, but has crossed over in cases involving purely internal matters. In this context, the doctrine makes a distinction between the legislative or jurisprudential influence of EU law over national law when the courts and the administration implement Community law, on the one hand, and the voluntary adoption of Community law principles in national legal order, on the other hand. The latter is not directly determined by the application of Community law. It provides for a voluntary reception of principles developed by the European Court of Justice in purely internal matters, due to the fact that they are considered a worthwhile addition to the national law.

In this area of the Europeanization of the national law, my research has focused on a number of directions which are listed below. My contribution to this body of research, which at a first glance appears as highly legal and technical, consists in the use of a governance lens in analyzing this process of Europeanization – the empirical research which usually accompanies these researches tries to determine and to analyze all the conditions and factors which influence compliance with EU requirements. The enforcement of European law in the national legal order also raises questions about the organization of the judiciary and about whether or not additional institutional mechanisms need to be created. I am also interested in analyzing how changes of legal provisions and institutions reflect broader concerns at the society level – for example corruption and the need to attract EU funds in a timely and efficient manner.

2.1. Judicial review of administrative decisions: Tradition and change

My work in this area started from a very bold international project, striving to reflect on how the transition to the governance paradigm influences public law, more specifically the way in which the judicial review of governmental decisions is carried out. The endeavor of the editors is extremely courageous – applying concepts from the governance jargon such as partnership, networks, and new forms of communication/media to the field of law is rather unusual. The editors set the stage for the national chapters by comparing and contrasting two very different models – the traditional and the dialogue model, which are relevant with reference to different administrative law topics. The expectation is that the traditional model is more concerned with form and procedure than the dialogue model and that the dialogue model is more concerned with reaching a substantive outcome that is acceptable to all participants than with formal procedures. But the expectation also is that in the dialogue model the judiciary plays the lesser role as to the substantive decisions reached between the parties-in-dialogue.

2.2. Implementation of EU Directives into the national law: Challenges

As a young member state of the European Union, Romania has faced numerous challenges with regard to the process of transposing the EU Directives into the national legislation. Very often, due to limited administrative capacity, the national legislator has opted for a copy and paste transposition, without a very clear understanding of the subsequent problems of implementation. This has created in many policy areas a rather similar problem – excellent legislation, in line with the EU provisions, no significant delays in transposition, but major challenges during implementation. In my research I am examining two instances of transposition which deal with two separate EU Directives (Services Directive and the Public Procurement Directives).

My objectives in terms of research are listed separately for the two main directions described in the thesis. They include:

Research direction I

Continuation of previous research

- In the area of urban sprawl, on the short and medium term, I am interesting in: a) Exploring if significant land cover changes are taking place in Romania (new data sets are available from Corine). The main goal is to identify, if compared with previous years, the pace of the process has changed and if so, which are the main changes. b) Determining the impact of the growth pole policy in Romania on the phenomenon of urban sprawl. This policy is predicated based on the assumption that growth will not take place only within the city but also in the neighboring communities, through significant spill overs. It remains to be seen however if this type of growth it is truly sustainable and if the policy is producing indeed polycentric development or rather it encourages the development of mammoth edgeless urban agglomerations.
- In the area of sustainable public procurement, I am interested to continue my previous research by focusing on the creation and development of standardized methodologies for life cycle costing that could be used by contracting authorities for certain basic products. If possible, together with other researchers at the Center, we are interested in working closely with several local authorities that are interested in exploring how they could implement life cycle costing into their procurement.
- In the area of sustainability measurement, I am interested in doing research on communities which are already implementing ISO 7120:2014, a first sustainability metric to be applied to

communities. Using the indicators provided under this standard, I am interested in determining how cities perform vi-a-vis certain dimensions and indicators.

New research directions/topics/projects

- Sustainability reporting in the public sector/in public organizations. This is a new topic for me, though closely interlinked with sustainability measurement. My research in this area intends to focus on identifying various systems for sustainability reporting that are employed worldwide by public organizations and to determine if certain governance factors trigger or hinder their successful implementation.
- Urban mobility and sustainable transportation systems. This is a completely new topic but highly relevant in respect to both governance and sustainable development. Transportation as an economic sector produces significant pollution and negative environmental damages. In urban settings, transportation is regarded as an area where radical changes could take place due to the implementation of innovative solutions. Such innovative solutions include for example intermodal transportation.
- Riverfront redevelopment. Similar to urban mobility, this is an unexplored topic for me in the past however it holds an enormous appeal. In most societies/urban context rivers and water courses are regarded as assets for the urban development of cities, and more importantly for the general public. They play a function in providing space and facilities for recreation and leisure. In the context of Romanian cities, riverfronts have been vastly ignored. It wasn't until recently that local decision-makers have started to redevelop them. I am interested in exploring how other former socialist cities are using riverfronts and to determine their economic benefits.
- Quality of life in urban settings – urban aesthetic and design. Quality of life is a broad concept that encompasses a number of different dimensions. It encompasses both objective factors (e.g. command of material resources, health, work status, living conditions and many others) and the subjective perception one has of them (Eurostat Statistics Explained). There is relatively a well-developed body of literature on the topic of living conditions and how they are negatively impacted by a number of factors such as pollution, noise, crime, etc. Less research is available on how citizens perceive urban design and aesthetics and whether they can be considered as prerequisites for a high quality of life. This research will be framed in the context of large cities from Romania which are now struggling to develop policy tools to control the quality of urban design (local codes for regulating outdoor signs/advertising).
- In the next years I intend to increase the international visibility of my research in the area of sustainable development. While in the area of governance my work has a great deal of international visibility, the impact of studies in the area of sustainable development and urban planning is more limited (mostly national). To this end, I also intend to take part in more international conferences on sustainable development and planning.

Research direction II

Continuation of previous research

- An update on the implementation status of the Services Directive is needed especially with regard to the implementation of the Point of Single Contact and the screening and the updating of sector specific laws in line with the provisions of EGO no. 49/2009.

- In 2016, together with my colleague D. Dragos, we will prepare and launch a new comparative research call in the area of free access to information within the framework of study group no. X from EGPA conference. The proposed research topics will not focus on the drafting of national chapters but on putting together comparative analysis of how various institutions and tools are used to ensure more transparency (for example the role of the Ombudsman in securing free access to government information). The expected outcome will be a book, published abroad, whose publication is estimated for 2018.
- Some of the earlier works on corruption in public procurement will be expanded in the next years into grant applications. I am interested in expanding the empirical research, provided there are funding opportunities available at national and international level.

New research directions/topics/projects

- In the area of public procurement, it is necessary to realize an inventory of the legislative changes imposed by the transposition of the 2014 Procurement Directives into the national legal order (needs to be done by 2016, drafts of the new legislation already available for public consultations). The research focus needs to be twofold: taking stock of the new legal provisions and analyzing from a comparative perspective the legislative solutions and the policy instruments introduced by the new national law/regulation (especially necessary with regard to new provisions/instruments which have not been present in the old regulation).
- Also in the area of public procurement, an interesting empirical research would target the transparency practices employed by contracting authorities for direct procurement. Numerous contracting authorities are known to fake transparency and equal treatment of economic operators by implementing various internal rules. A comprehensive analysis of these internal rules and practices could offer us a detailed picture of how transparent these public authorities are in this area.
- In the area of conflicts of interest, a research should be conducted regarding the implications of the ex-ante integrity control conducted by the National Integrity Agency (NIA). The new regulation is in place since only since the fall of 2015; however, the system has been developed and tested starting with the previous years in the framework of an EU financed program.