



Wrocław, 20.08.2024

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The review of the doctoral dissertation  
‘GREEN ECONOMY AS A STRATEGY TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE URBAN  
DEVELOPMENT’

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The Maria Curie-Skłodowska University  
Lublin 2024, 368 pp.

**I. Legal basis**

This review was prepared based on the currently applicable provisions of the Act of 20 July 2018 - The Law on Higher Education and Science (Journal of Laws 2018, item 1668, as amended), or rather its Art. 187, according to which:

- *‘the doctoral dissertation presents the candidate's general theoretical knowledge in the discipline or disciplines and the ability to independently conduct scientific or artistic work’,*
- *‘an original solution to a scientific problem, an original solution in the field of applying the results of one's own scientific research in the economic or social sphere, or an original artistic achievement is the subject of the doctoral dissertation’.*

Taking the above into account, it should be emphasised that the purpose of the review is to determine whether the doctoral dissertation submitted for assessment meets the criteria defined by the legislator, and if so, to what extent.

## **II. Selection and justification of research issues**

The dissertation addresses the issue of green economy as a condition for ensuring sustainable development of the city. The first encounter with the title of the dissertation leads to the conclusion that the research problem undertaken by the author of the dissertation is not only important, but also extremely current. This is determined by the dynamic discussion on the green transition and related legal, organisational and financial requirements, not always and not fully accepted, which are brought about by the implementation of the assumptions of such ambitious strategies as the European Green Deal. In this sense, the choice of the research problem should be assessed unequivocally positively.

Although fundamental research categories such as ‘green economy’, ‘strategy’ and ‘sustainable urban development’, which form the title of the dissertation and determine the approach to the research problem, carry a certain load of well-understood interdisciplinarity, it should be emphasised that they place this problem within the discipline of international relations and, to a lesser extent, the discipline of political and administrative science and, in terms of certain elements, the discipline of management and quality studies. This is evidenced by the crucial fact that ‘(...) *there is a lack of research that elaborates the city from the perspective of implementation of international concept of sustainable development at the local level*’ (p. 11).

The author convincingly justifies the selection of research issues, referring, for example in the introduction itself, not only to statistical data but also to selected, although representative, literature items. The author aptly notes: ‘*The selection of the research problem is justified by the growing importance of cities on the global arena, simultaneously alongside the emerging local-level challenges of urbanization, such as pollution, waste management, urban sprawl, homelessness (...)*’ (p. 10).

It should be also agreed with the author that ‘*while sustainable development is a broad concept, the green economy represents a narrow strategy to implement this idea*’ (p. 9). The way of understanding this strategy - and it should be emphasized that it is relatively capacious in terms of meaning, although not directly expressed by the author herself - corresponds to the

understanding presented by Patsy Healey. It is about a strategy according to which a specific territory - and in the analysed case, a city being a settlement unit and a unit of local self-government - is '(...) *a complex mixture of nodes and networks, places and flows, in which multiple relations, activities and values co-exist, interact, combine, conflict, oppress and generate creative synergy*'<sup>1</sup>.

The both systemic and functional connection between sustainable development and green economy and placing them in the context of the strategic dimension of the activity of the local government administration (although it is obviously not the only actor in urban policy) is a distinguishing feature of the reviewed doctoral dissertation. It should be emphasized that this connection is not incidental, as it is developed by the author in the subsequent chapters of the work.

The decision to select the case study - namely Vancouver - although not explicitly highlighted in the title of the dissertation, deserves an unequivocally positive assessment. The author rightly draws attention to the fact that Vancouver is assessed, and it is worth pointing out a number of international rankings here (p. 9), as one of the global leaders of a modern, ecologically (environmentally) oriented perspective on the programming and implementation of sector-oriented (problem-oriented) sustainable development processes. The focus on Vancouver is therefore a kind of a 'natural' consequence of the author's literature studies and field research. In this context, Vancouver appears as a kind of 'laboratory' of phenomena and processes of diverse political, social and economic provenance which determine the contemporary understanding of green economy as an effective and efficient strategy for implementing the international concept of sustainable development at the urban level.

### **III. The structure of the dissertation**

The structure of the reviewed doctoral dissertation meets the classic requirements for this type of analysis. The dissertation consists of four chapters preceded by an introduction and supplemented by a conclusion. The volume of the chapters is balanced, although their structure is quite diverse, as evidenced by the individual subchapters which consist of even smaller fragments. This diversity is a fully justified reflection of the diversity of the issues which are the subject of the author's considerations presented on the following pages of the dissertation.

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<sup>1</sup> P. Healey, *Complexity and spatial strategies. Towards a rational planning for our times*, Routledge, New York 2007, p. 1.

The introduction, considered as a fundamental part of the doctoral dissertation, contains not only the justification for the choice of the research problem and an overview of the key books, articles and chapters used by the author, but also the research objective, two research questions and the research hypothesis.

While the way the research objective is formulated (*'The main purpose of this dissertation is to research how the international concept of sustainable development is implemented at the local level'*, p. 10) does not directly indicate the search for the connections between this concept and the green economy, the hypothesis clearly emphasizes such connections (*'If a city has a high level of socio-economic development and a liberal government, the usefulness of the green economy concept as a mechanism for implementing sustainable urban development is increasing'*, p. 11). It might be worth deepening the way of understanding two terms - 'high level of socio-economic development' and 'liberal government' which the author uses and which play a key role from the point of view of operationalizing the research hypothesis. This postulate does not mean that it is difficult to determine their meaning. On the contrary, in both cases, explanations are provided by the analysis of the context in which they are used. Deepening the understanding, however, seems to be desirable and justified in the sense that the number of definitional approaches presented in the extensive literature on the subject - namely the approaches relating to 'socio-economic development' and 'liberal government' - is large enough to provoke the selection of detailed interpretation variants.

It should be emphasized that the presentation of the methodological approach used by the author and a brief description of the individual chapters of the dissertation are an integral part of the introduction. The 'presence' of these elements makes this introduction fully complete.

The first chapter, *'The Essence of the Concept of Sustainable Urban Development'*, is an attempt to illustrate not only the essence of the title concept, but also the conditions for its development. The author refers to selected but representative literature, reaches for specialist reports and supplements the entire discussion with graphic materials (illustrations, maps) and tables which constitute enriching illustrative material. It should be emphasized that the way of presenting the content is not only descriptive, as evidenced by the fragments with a critical load (in the proper sense of the word) towards the cited theoretical concepts and approaches. Importantly, the discussion focused on the urban dimension of sustainable development is preceded by the discussion of a somewhat introductory nature, referring to sustainable development as such.

The second chapter, '*Green Economy as a Strategy for the Implementation of Sustainable Urban Development*', is divided into three main subchapters in which the author discusses, respectively, (1) theoretical approaches to the green economy, (2) green economy indicators, and undertakes (3) a search for the connections between the green urban economy and sustainable urban development. This approach should be considered successful, which results from the well-thought-out, in a sense, cascading arrangement of the successive content. The third subchapter, which seems to be of key importance for this fragment of the dissertation, is worthy of attention. It is, following the example of the last subchapter of the first chapter, focused on the urban level which is, after all, the subject of the author's fundamental considerations.

The third chapter, '*Models of Sustainable Urban Development*', takes the form of the discussion of selected theoretical models (although, at the same time, with an application aspect, as evidenced by the practice of functioning of many local government units, including cities) relating to what experts in the field refer to as effective and efficient management (increasingly often governance) of local development. The selection of these models (including garden city, ecocity, compact city, 15-minute city, carbon-neutral/zero-neutral city, smart city) is justified. It reflects the dominant approaches to the issue in the literature, not only typically scientific, but also expert ones. Moreover, the models cited by the author are also in the field of interest of practitioners - representatives of local government administration and their stakeholders (private and social actors) involved in the process of formulating and implementing urban policies, which makes their selection even more valuable. Assuming the multitude of potential research approaches presented by representatives of social sciences in their publications, it should be noted that the way in which the models are discussed is also correct. The attempt at comparative analysis of the analysed models (pp. 251-255) is worth noting, as it also serves as the summary of the entire chapter, valuable both in terms of knowledge and explanation.

The fourth chapter, '*Green Economy as a Strategy for Sustainable Urban Development: The Case Study of the City of Vancouver*', plays a key role in achieving the research objective defined by the author, answering the research questions and verifying the research hypothesis. While its first part focuses on Vancouver as the subject of the author's scientific exploration, its second part takes the form of a multi-factor analysis of the sustainable development model implemented in this city conducted, which is worth emphasizing, in relation to selected models presented in the third chapter. The last subchapter takes the form of an author's

analysis of the relationship between the green economy concept and the development model implemented in Vancouver, taking into account, as is clear from reading this fragment of the work, a broad and therefore complex catalogue of development challenges of multi-sectoral provenance which the local government administration is facing. It should be emphasized that the author presents not only the current state, but also outlines, albeit cautiously, certain development prospects (see: strengthening) of these bilateral relationships. Interestingly, the author also attempts to formulate an answer to the question of whether, and if so, to what extent and on what principles, the model implemented in Vancouver can be implemented in other cities. This approach should be assessed positively. The author draws attention to the relatively extensive catalogue of conditions that must be met so that the typical Vancouver thinking about urban development becomes universal and therefore adaptable. The author thus indicates such elements as: political will and leadership, collaboration and partnerships, technological innovations, and long-term planning and vision (pp. 320-321).

The entire discussion ends with a short, yet conclusive conclusions, in which the author provides answers to the research questions formulated in the introduction. Importantly, the author also verifies the research hypothesis confirming, based on the analysis of the situation in Vancouver, that *'high levels of socio-economic development and a liberal government often create an environment, where the concept of a green economy becomes increasingly useful for implementing sustainable urban development'* (p. 326). This is an important observation in the sense that it constitutes the essence of the author's considerations presented on the pages of the reviewed dissertation.

The immanent part of the work consists of a bibliography (divided into four main groups), a list of illustrations, a list of tables and a list of maps. The form (transcript) of in-depth interviews that the author of this dissertation conducted in Vancouver might be worth including in the appendix.

The final assessment of this dimension of the dissertation is clearly positive.

#### **IV. Theory and methodology**

It is hard to disagree with the statement that the assessment of the theoretical and methodological approach used in the dissertation is the key element of the review, with particular emphasis on the adopted research perspective and the manner of using a specific set of research methods and techniques. This issue is important because it actually determines the

ability to conduct scientific research placed within specific traditions and theoretical approaches and based on purposefully and properly selected instruments.

The author's considerations are embedded in the framework of global governance theory which emphasizes the growing role and significance of a broad, and in fact constantly expanding, group of actors taking up activity in the global arena of influence and dependence. These actors not only include nation states as traditional participants in international relations, international organizations created by these states or, finally, transnational corporations gaining importance because of their economic potential. It should be emphasized that the catalogue of actors is also supplemented by cities as sub-state actors, or more precisely, city governments (municipal self-government administrations) which, drawing on the possibilities related to the circulation of resources within the triad: public actors (including government actors) - private actors - social actors, take actions that go beyond the traditional (classical) understanding of cities and their borders. In other words, these activities, aimed at performing public tasks and, consequently, meeting the collective needs of local communities that manifest themselves in many areas of urban policies, constitute the essence of the difficult-to-ignore transition from a territorial-administrative approach to an integrated functional approach.

Taking the above into account, it should be noted that the author correctly notices and names the dependencies observed on the line between the transnational level and the local level (or rather the urban level, and considering Vancouver itself - the metropolitan level). Referring first to the concept of sustainable development, the author in her next step places it, and very clearly, in the urban political, economic and social reality. It is therefore a kind of transition from the macro scale (the aforementioned concept, developed and detailed by not only many theoreticians but also practitioners) to the micro scale (Vancouver and the activities of the municipal self-government administration which cooperates with private actors and social actors focused on urban matters, implementing a variant of the green approach to programming and implementing local development processes).

When analysing the set of research methods and techniques used, it should be emphasised that it fits into the approach to the organisation and then implementation of research procedures typical of social sciences. The author sees the potential of, among others, comparative analysis, documents analysis (primarily legal acts and other documents, including city documents), statistical data analysis, case study, but also, which caught the reviewer's

attention, the in-depth interviews mentioned earlier. As it results from reading the dissertation, the academics from the University of British Columbia (UBC) were the participants of the four interviews conducted as a part of the author's research stay in Vancouver. The observations and opinions of the research participants supported the SWOT analysis of Vancouver conducted by the author, becoming the asset of the dissertation. Although the intention and manner of using the research methods and techniques are generally understandable and legible, it would be worthwhile to attempt a more precise characterization of those fragments of the dissertation in which the author refers to the simulation method allowing 'to assess the replication of the particular model' (p. 19).

In summary, the theoretical and methodological dimension of the reviewed dissertation meets the requirements.

## **V. Sources**

Analysing the bibliography (pp. 328-364) one can notice that the author uses at least four types of sources. Most of the over 500 sources were prepared in English.

In addition to the analysis of the documents of various provenance (documents made available by, among others, the United Nations, OECD and the European Commission), attention is drawn to the focus on the documents resulting from the activity of the municipal administration of the City of Vancouver. This is, in a sense, a 'natural' and fully justified perspective, especially bearing in mind the subject of the dissertation, which is to explore the intricacies of conducting municipal policy in that city.

Additionally, the author uses in the dissertation not only the books, chapters and articles that can be described as classics from the canon of literature on local development, including sustainable local development and the green paradigm, but also those that were published relatively recently, and thus present the results of recently conducted scientific research. Referring to such items allows the author to present the latest findings related to the issues of the dissertation. This is particularly important in the context of dynamic and therefore current transformations in the way of understanding sustainable local (urban) development and the green economy which are encountered and presented by the representatives of various scientific fields, not only social sciences.



Publications presented via websites constitute a significant part of the sources used. In this case, we are talking about contribution articles, press releases and various information presented by public, private and social entities.

The author draws attention to an important source, namely the aforementioned interviews, whose participants were academics from the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Vancouver.

Considering the above, the selection and use of sources should be assessed in an unequivocally positive manner, corresponding to the requirements set for doctoral dissertations.

## **VI. Linguistic and technical layer**

The language of the work meets the requirements for doctoral dissertations, although the author did not avoid stylistic and syntactic shortcomings, especially when taking into account the formulation of multi-complex sentences. When submitting the work for publication, it would be worth considering proofreading this type of text fragments.

It should be emphasized that the work, although relatively extensive, is not ‘overly wordy’. The reader is not ‘stuck’ in a thicket of statements that do not have the appropriate cognitive or explanatory value. Therefore this is a style of formulating statements that deserves reviewer’s approval.

Considering the technical preparation of the work, it is necessary to emphasize the author's diligence in the field of preparing footnotes and bibliography. Despite some minor shortcomings (which are really difficult to completely avoid in the course of work on a relatively extensive dissertation which we are dealing with in this case), they are coherent and prepared according to one consistently used scheme. The author does not use digressive footnotes, which allows one to assume that all the basic assumptions and statements are included in the basic (main) text of the dissertation. The assessment of the dissertation in this respect is unquestionable.

The table of contents and the lists of illustrations, tables and maps placed in the final part of the manuscript deserve a positive assessment. It is worth emphasizing that it is the aforementioned illustrations, tables and maps that constitute the ‘added value’. Usually

prepared with due diligence, they not only make the argument clear, but also create a kind of 'support', a significant supplement or reference to the presented assumptions and statements.

In conclusion, the assessment of the linguistic and technical layer is positive.

## **VII. Conclusion**

After a thorough analysis of the doctoral dissertation, I state that it meets the statutory requirements. The author submitted an interesting scientific work for assessment which is an original solution to the important and current research problem. Considering the above as well as all the partial assessments presented in this review, the final assessment of the doctoral dissertation 'Green economy as a strategy to achieve sustainable urban development' and, at the same time, the conclusion of the review is unequivocally positive.

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