

## FOREWORD

As can be easily observed by simply browsing a newspaper, a legal journal, or a news website, there are two “magic” words in today’s media: digitalization and sustainability. As legal scholars, one of our duties is to conjugate the principles and tools of classical legal tradition with the challenges of modern times. Both digitalization and – most importantly for us – sustainability are not only among such challenges, but are perhaps the most fascinating and hotly debated examples thereof.

As is better explained in the Introduction to this edited volume, in 2021 the Law School of Mykolas Romeris University (MRU) elaborated its 2022–2026 research program, which is devoted specifically to investigating the intersection between the Rule of Law, the concept of sustainability, and new technologies. This volume, among the early outcomes of the research program, marks an extremely promising start.

Together with dr. Dovilė Sagatienė we conceived the notion of structuring this book in the manner that I believe sustainability should be dealt with when more broadly applied to the legal field: by looking both at its intersections with different areas of law and at specific examples. Highly valuable work has gathered together thirty scholars – coming mainly, but not only, from Lithuania – to compose the 24 contributions that form the four parts of this edited volume.

As an area-by-area (national and international public law, private law, and criminal law) approach is already inherent in the structure of this volume, I am here proposing a few somewhat different ideas to consider when cross-reading it.

The first basic issue is the idea of sustainability itself. This book provides several points of view regarding what we should understand the word *sustainability* to mean, and this plurality enriches both the public and academic debate and the book itself. This is made very clear in the part on the concept of sustainability in national Constitutions, but many other contributions also focus on specific facets of either environmental (the parts on electric vehicles; on waste management; and on environmental crimes) or social sustainability (the contribution on the sustainable reduction of drug consumption, and that on sustainable work).

Another among the most significant topics of the present day is digitalization. Many contributions deal specifically with this issue, again from different perspectives, and they highlight the fact that we should see and pursue some kind of an alliance between digitalization and sustainability. This is certainly the message of the contribution on AI4SDG, but the paper on data processing is also closely related to digitalization – as are those on online voting in private companies, on the

protection of vulnerability reporters in the field of cybersecurity, and on the need for a combination between law, finance, and technology, with a view to a more consistent approach to sustainability.

A third trend might be in line with the idiom of “new wine in old wineskins” – i.e., how sustainability affects old issues that traditional legal studies have already considered, bringing in new possible solutions. This is certainly true of the contributions on subsidiarity in criminal law, on apparent authority in civil law, on quality product guarantees, and on sustainable spatial planning.

A further tendency naturally concerns the sustainable mobilization of wealth, with specific reference to the business environment. This is the case for many contributions in this volume: on international investment law; on sustainability clauses in commercial contractual relations; on shareholder activism in public companies; on the legal regulation of reorganization in Ukraine; and on green procurements, and thus the sustainable intersection between public and private entities.

A final possible trend is the widening of access to justice as a specific element of sustainability – not necessarily within its social dimension. The following contributions consider different profiles of this topic: on civil cases; on incapacitated persons and criminal justice; and on the role of legal professions in promoting sustainability.

Naturally, the grouping above is just one among the many possible ways of reading this volume. Nevertheless, it provides the opportunity to offer a few general remarks.

First: sustainability is a concept that is not to be relegated solely to its environmental dimension. The environment is hugely important, but it does not completely absorb the scope of sustainability, which must be seen as a holistic notion. In fact, the reader will derive a clear perception of this from the above trends in the contributions to this volume, besides the natural structure of the book itself.

Second: sustainability has to do, in different ways, with a lot – if not all – of the issues we usually face in dealing with traditional legal studies. Moreover, sustainability is not a precise object of law, but a concept that contributes to defining the soul of law. If we consider that dealing with sustainability is inevitable, then the most recent regulations should be sustainable by design, and older regulations should undergo sustainability-friendly reinterpretation. Sustainability is first of all, then, a criterion.

Third: even if this book is mainly focused on Lithuania, it contains the seeds for far broader expansion. This is made evident by the presence, among the authors, of several scholars from Ukraine that MRU has hosted. Scholars from Poland, Austria, Turkey and France are also present, and this is very promising for the possible fallout from this book, which is likely to germinate into further initiatives – both those hosted by MRU and by other institutions abroad.

Fourth, and perhaps most importantly: as some authors point out in their contributions, the key challenge for sustainability in the long term is also a matter of education. The fact that a university puts its efforts into collecting such a meaningful set of contributions in the field of sustainability signals that these papers are very likely to serve as the basis for research-led teaching in the field of sustainability, from the point of view of legal sciences. In order to have true sustainability in place, the players of the economy first need willingness; second, a policy; third, a framework; and, fourth, people who are able to serve to such a purpose. Aside from the first point – which, in the long run, still concerns education – universities are called to play a meaningful role in the remaining

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three via research, public engagement, and teaching. MRU thus deserves praise for this volume, as do all of the colleagues involved in its creation, because it represents a profound step forward in the field of sustainability, both in Lithuania and globally.

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