ABSTRACT

This thesis examines which non-EU exporting sectors are most likely to be affected by upcoming European sustainability and bio-based material regulations, and how these sectors can adapt to remain competitive in the European Union market. Using a qualitative research design based on document analysis and comparative sector analysis, the study reviews European Union policy documents, academic literature, and institutional reports covering four export-oriented sectors: construction materials, packaging, furniture, and textiles. The findings indicate that the effects of these regulations are uneven across sectors. Construction materials face the strongest regulatory pressure because they combine strict technical and safety requirements with growing sustainability expectations, which makes adaptation more technical and costly. Packaging faces strong pressure related to circular economy goals but offers more flexibility for adaptation through material substitution and product redesign. Furniture and textiles experience moderate to high pressure, mainly through traceability, responsible sourcing, and sustainability reporting requirements. Three forms of adaptation are identified: technical adaptation (product testing, Life Cycle Assessment, Environmental Product Declarations, and digital product data), organisational adaptation (compliance systems, traceability, and due diligence), and economic adaptation (budgeting for certification, investment in reporting systems, and strategic decisions on markets and partnerships). Exporters that successfully adapt are likely to maintain or strengthen their position in the EU market, while those that partially comply or fail to comply risk higher costs, weaker buyer confidence, and reduced market access.

The thesis concludes with sector-specific policy recommendations to support non-EU exporters, particularly in strengthening technical compliance infrastructure, traceability systems, and financial support for adaptation.
Keywords: European Green Deal; bio-based materials; sustainability regulation; non-EU exporters; circular economy; non-tariff measures; adaptation strategies; competitiveness.