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ABSTRACTS

The 9th International Conference on Economics and Social Sciences

Exploring Global Perspectives:
The Future of Economics and Social Sciences

18 - 19 June 2026

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Bucharest University of Economic Studies

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PREFACE

Having already reached the 9th edition, the ICESS Conference reflects the Bucharest University of Economic Studies' continuous commitment to the core values of research: scientific excellence, international collaboration, and interdisciplinary approaches that address real-world challenges. By bringing together researchers and practitioners from all over the world, ICESS creates a dynamic environment for reflection and dialogue, where ideas are challenged, refined, and transformed into solutions with direct applicability in economic and social contexts.

A distinctive feature of the conference is the presence of keynote speakers – former ASE students who are now successfully working in prestigious universities and institutions worldwide. Their presence is not only a source of inspiration, but also concrete evidence that ASE's academic training prepares professionals capable of excelling anywhere in the world. For us, it is a genuine source of pride and a confirmation that performance knows no boundaries when driven by vision, values, and community.

In a society influenced by rapid and often unpredictable change, ICESS serves as an innovative forum for generating knowledge and building bridges between theory and practice, research, and public policy. We strive for each edition of the conference to contribute to the strengthening of a global academic community, united by responsibility, scientific rigor, and a commitment to innovation.

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GUEST SPEAKERS

Răzvan VLAHU
Principal Economist in the Financial Stability Division of De Nederlandsche Bank, The Netherlands, ASE Alumnus

Răzvan VLAHU is a Principal Economist in the Financial Stability Division of De Nederlandsche Bank (Dutch Central Bank). Prior to this, he worked in the Economics and Research Division (Research Department). He has represented DNB in several consultative bodies, including those of the BIS (BCBS Research Group) and the ECB (Macro-prudential Research Network). His research focuses on banking and financial intermediation, and his work has been published in Management Science, the Journal of Financial Intermediation, and the European Economic Review, among others. He has also contributed columns and policy articles to VoxEU and SUERF. Răzvan has held visiting positions at the Toulouse School of Economics (IDEI), the Bank of Finland, and the National Bank of Romania. He is affiliated with the University of Amsterdam, where he teaches graduate-level courses in banking and risk management. He holds a PhD in Finance from the University of Amsterdam, a master's degree in Economics from the Tinbergen Institute, and bachelor's degrees in Banking and Financial Markets, and Economic Cybernetics, Statistics and Informatics from ASE Bucharest.

Răzvan VLAHU
De Nederlandsche Bank, The Netherlands,
ASE Alumnus

Keynote speech
STABLECOINS – GROWTH AND POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

We examine the rapid growth of stablecoins, crypto assets designed to maintain a stable value through pegs to fiat currencies such as the euro or U.S. dollar and backed by reserves including short-term government securities and bank deposits. Our study focuses on how the continued expansion of stablecoins creates a trade-off between financial innovation and systemic risk management, and how this expansion may affect financial stability through various transmission channels. It also reviews key regulatory frameworks and highlights the implications of cross-jurisdictional differences.

Particular attention is given to the interaction between stablecoin ecosystems and traditional financial markets, including potential spillovers to banking systems and sovereign debt markets. As stablecoin issuers accumulate increasingly large reserve portfolios, shifts in user demand or episodes of market stress may trigger rapid redemptions, creating liquidity strains and amplifying risks in underlying asset markets. Furthermore, growing interconnectedness between stablecoins and conventional financial institutions raises concerns about contagion effects, operational vulnerabilities, and concentration risks.

Georgiana GRIGORE
University of Leicester, United Kingdom, ASE Alumna

Georgiana GRIGORE is an Associate Professor in Marketing and Deputy Head of the School of Marketing and Strategy at the University of Leicester, UK. Georgiana's research explores new ways of thinking about and practicing responsible business, particularly in digital contexts. She has worked with practitioners and academics across Europe on research and consultancy to explore how organizations construct, communicate, and implement responsibility, especially within complex cultural or organizational contexts. She has published articles in journals such as Annals in Tourism Research, Journal of Business Ethics, Marketing Theory, Organization, Journal of Business Research, Management Learning, Internet Research, Journal of Marketing Management, or Journal of Strategic Marketing. She is a chair of an annual International Conference in Social Responsibility, Ethics and Sustainability (ICSR), which she co-founded in 2012.

Her research has received external funding, including from the Innovate UK, the British Academy/Leverhulme, and the Arthur W. Page Center in two consecutive years. She completed a doctorate in Marketing at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies where she used relationship marketing theory to examine the impact of corporate responsibility on stakeholders. Prior to her doctorate, she received a master's degree in Strategic Marketing and a bachelor's degree in Marketing from the same university.

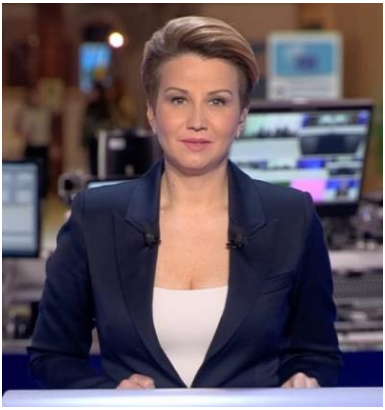
Georgiana GRIGORE
University of Leicester, United Kingdom
ASE Alumna

Keynote speech

METAPHORS OF SYMBIOSIS: WHAT SCIENCE FICTION MOVIES REVEAL ABOUT HUMAN-AI IMAGINARIES... AND BEYOND

How we think about the use of AI to achieve business goals has become normalized as a hyper-efficient and profitable ‘working together’ symbiosis metaphor. Yet public discourse and popular fiction oppose such a view with alternative critical and dystopian positions. We argue that in order to negotiate their own positions around AI, researchers and practitioners might engage with such contradictory views through the sociotechnical imaginaries captured by science fiction. We interpret 15 movies featuring AI to reveal multiple human-AI imaginaries and the metaphors that structure them. We find metaphors of: competitive symbiosis, where humans and AI compete for work, symbiotic mutualism, where humans and AI benefit each other, symbiotic parasitism, where either humans or AI feed off the other, and we also uncover the degree to which these relations are facultative (optional) or obligate (inescapable). The engagement with fictional texts invites sensitivity to the unreflective reproduction of dominant sociotechnical imaginaries and their structuring metaphors allowing alternative and preferred human-AI imaginaries to emerge.

MODERATOR



Sabina IOSUB
Journalist, ASE Alumna

Sabina IOSUB is a journalist with over 25 years of experience. TV Anchor and Head of Programming now at Antena 3 CNN tv station, Sabina Iosub has a vast expertise, covering over time major events in the European Affairs area (Summits, Councils, etc.), extraordinary issues (correspondent on the field in Brussels, Strasbourg & London terrorist attacks), international dramatic events – Amatrice earthquake, and all main political events in Romania – elections, changes of Governments, impeachment of the President etc. Since 2016, Sabina Iosub has been presenting and producing her talk show on European Affairs issues – “Be EU”, recorded in the European Parliament in Brussels and Strasbourg. Sabina moderates some of the most important conferences in the fields of European business, economics, and human rights. She has an MBA in General Management at Sheffield University, a Master’s Degree in Crisis Management (Conflict Analysis and Solutions) at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, and graduated from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Faculty of Business Administration in Foreign Languages.

MINITRACK: AGRIFOOD AND ENVIRONMENTAL ECONOMICS

Chairs:

- **Jonel SUBIĆ, Institute of Agricultural Economics from Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia**
- **Simona Roxana PĂTĂRLĂGEANU, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania**

The agrifood and environmental systems have shown the signs of the transition to a more sustainable model, yet the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have proved that the path to achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is paved with resilient entrepreneurial intentions that strive to enable sustainability at all business levels, as well as efficient management during times of crisis. The objective of the minitrack entitled Resilient Agrifood and Environmental Economics is to explore multidimensional solutions to global challenges faced by the actors involved in the agrifood and environmental sectors. Moreover, this minitrack aims to bring together academic scientists, researchers, decision-makers, entrepreneurs, and representatives of the business environment with the goal of collaborating towards identifying more resilient and agile managerial approaches specific to the agrifood and environmental systems. Papers related to all three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, environmental, and social) are highly welcome.

The main topics covered by the hereby call for papers are related (but not limited) to:

- Food and drink supply and demand
- Food safety and food security
- Sustainable food systems
- Sustainable food production and consumption
- Sustainability in the agrifood business
- Environmentally sustainable businesses
- Human health and well-being

- Circular economy
- Sustainability reporting practices
- International and local developments in sustainability reporting requirements
- Controlling for sustainability
- Professional skills of future accountants working for sustainable organizations
- Technology-driven changes in the traditional accounting system for sustainable development
- Accounting education for SDGs

Jonel SUBIĆ, Ph.D., Principal Research Fellow, is the Director of the Institute of Agricultural Economics from Belgrade, Serbia. During his scientific-research work, he was (co)author of over 250 scientific papers (including 9 monographs), while over 30 of his papers are published within the WoS - indexed journals. In his work, he is mainly focused on agroeconomics, with special interest in the economic efficiency of investments, strategic planning in agriculture, and the economics of the use of new (clean) technologies in agriculture and rural development. He was involved in the realization of over 75 scientific and professional projects.

Simona Roxana PĂTĂRLĂGEANU, Associate Professor, PhD, studied Agrifood and Environmental Economics (EAM) at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. As a Vice-Dean of the Faculty Agrifood and Environmental Economics, her research is situated in the field of Eco and Agrifood Economics and Decision-Making.

AGRIFOOD CHAIN RESILIENCE AND PRICE SHOCK PASS-THROUGH TO CONSUMERS IN THE EU-27

Andreea APETREI KALVERAM
Catholic University of Valencia, Valencia, Spain

Simona Roxana PĂTĂRLĂGEANU
Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

Alina Florentina GHEORGHE (GAVRILĂ)
Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

Alexandra NEDELCU
Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

Abstract. This paper examines how cost and price shocks arising upstream in agriculture are transmitted to consumer food prices across the EU-27, focusing on agrifood chain resilience. Recent disruptions have highlighted food systems' vulnerability to volatile input costs and market uncertainty, raising policy-relevant questions about the strength, speed, and heterogeneity of price shock pass-through from farm to retail. The study investigates whether changes in agricultural input and output price indices are systematically associated with movements in consumer food prices, and whether the transmission mechanism differs across member states. The empirical analysis relies on publicly available Eurostat data, combining the Harmonized Index of Consumer Prices for food and non-alcoholic beverages with agricultural price indices capturing developments in the prices of means of production (inputs) and agricultural products (outputs). The series are harmonized to a common frequency and expressed as growth rates to ensure comparability across indicators and countries. The resulting dataset is organized as a country-level panel for the EU-27 over the period 2020-2025. Econometrically, the paper estimates panel models with country- and time-fixed effects to account for persistent cross-country differences and common shocks affecting the EU as a whole. Distributed-lag specifications are employed to capture adjustment dynamics, allowing pass-through effects to unfold over time. Estimation is implemented in Stata and inference relies on robust standard errors clustered at the country level. In an extension, the analysis explores potential asymmetries in pass-through, testing whether increases in upstream prices translate differently into consumer prices than decreases. The paper contributes evidence on the propagation of price shocks along the agrifood chain in a comparable EU setting and provides insights relevant to resilience-oriented policy. Understanding pass-through patterns informs measures aimed at reducing exposure to upstream cost volatility, improving food systems capacity to absorb shocks, and supporting price stability for consumers during heightened uncertainty periods.

Keywords: resilience, pass-through, food inflation, input prices, panel data.

DATA-DRIVEN ECONOMICS-BETWEEN PRECISE ALGORITHMS AND IMPRECISE INDICATORS

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Abstract. This paper deals with a critical analysis of the role of data in the modern economy. The paper explores the current gap that exists between high-precision algorithmic data processing and the inherent imprecision of economic indicators in the data-driven analytics and predictions of the modern economy. Although the proliferation of IoT devices and sensors provides a significant amount of raw data, with projections to increase the volume of data generation, its translation into reliable economic insights remains subject to systemic biases and paradoxes. The authors start from the thesis that data is the "new oil", also emphasizing that it is relatively worthless without adequate processing, analysis, and interpretation. The main thesis of the paper is that reliability and trust are more important than the sheer quantity of data or the complexity and sophistication of tools for processing it. Without trust in the institution that publishes the data, the entire economic structure "collapses like a house of cards". Although technology enables the collection of significant amounts of data, accelerates processing of data, and increases automation of the data to information transformation, the human factor remains indispensable in recognizing hidden patterns. The authors conclude that in the era of algorithms, the insight brought by an expert represents a key competitive advantage. Data are not just numbers, but bearers of deeper social and economic values that require careful, ethical, and socially responsible interpretation.

Keywords: data-driven economy, critical analysis, technology, reliability, economic indicators.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT IN AGRI-BUSINESS: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract. The world economy is globalized, and businesses are increasingly complex and must integrate multiple activities. As such, the business is seen as an integrated system and its results need to be assessed in an integrated manner. In this context, integrated management analysis is essential for identifying imbalances, underpinning decisions, and improving organizational performance. This study aims to evaluate the performance of a business based on integrated management analysis, using an original method of visualizing the firm activities' results, divided into four major domains: management, marketing, production, and economic. The main findings show a good development of the production area, but also deficiencies of the economic domain, which is developed at half of its current potential. The results of these analyses support the manager in the decision-making process, allowing to take the most appropriate measures to increase business performance.

Keywords: business performance, integrated management analysis, data visualization, agri-business.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RENEWABLE ENERGY CONSUMPTION AND ECONOMIC GROWTH IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract. Renewable energy has become a key component of the European Union's strategy for achieving sustainable economic development and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. As investments in renewable energy technologies continue to increase across Europe, understanding the association between renewable energy consumption and economic growth has attracted considerable attention from researchers and policymakers. This study examines the relationship between renewable energy consumption and economic growth in European Union member states using panel data covering the EU countries over the study period. The analysis is based on indicators obtained from Eurostat and the World Bank, including renewable energy consumption and gross domestic product per capita. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis are employed to explore the strength and direction of the relationship between the variables. The results indicate a positive association between renewable energy consumption and economic growth, suggesting that countries with higher levels of renewable energy utilization tend to exhibit stronger economic performance. The findings support the view that the expansion of renewable energy can contribute to sustainable economic development while simultaneously supporting environmental objectives. Although the analysis does not establish causality, it provides useful evidence on the coexistence of renewable energy development and economic growth within the European Union. The study contributes to the ongoing discussion on the role of renewable energy in modern economies and offers insights for policymakers seeking to promote a balanced transition toward a more sustainable and competitive European economy.

Keywords: renewable energy, economic growth, sustainable development, correlation analysis, economic performance.

STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE ENERGY SECTOR IN THE DIGITAL ERA: EVIDENCE FROM VALUE ADDED AND PRODUCTIVITY DYNAMICS

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Abstract. The energy sector is undergoing a profound structural transformation driven by decarbonization, technological change, and increasing digital integration. Beyond the adoption of digital technologies, these processes reshape value creation patterns, internal sectoral composition, and productivity dynamics within energy-related activities. This paper examines structural transformation in the energy sector by analyzing long-run changes in value added and labor productivity, with digitalization treated as an enabling mechanism rather than the primary outcome. Using harmonized national accounts data, the analysis applies a structural decomposition and diagnostic framework to capture internal reallocation dynamics and identify periods of accelerated reconfiguration. The results show that productivity growth in the energy sector reflects a combination of internal efficiency gains and structural shifts across energy-related activities, with digitalization reinforcing these dynamics rather than acting as a standalone driver. By focusing on value added and productivity dynamics, the paper contributes to the energy economics literature by clarifying how digitalization interacts with structural change at the sectoral level, beyond labor market or technology adoption narratives. The findings offer relevant insights for understanding the economic foundations of the digital energy transition and its implications for sustainable sectoral development.

Keywords: energy sector, structural transformation, digitalization, value added, productivity.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EXPORTS OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS IN SERBIA AND NEIGHBORHOOD COUNTRIES

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Abstract. Agriculture is a traditional economic activity that in the past had a great economic and social importance in both Serbia and in the neighborhood countries (Croatia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria). With the development of other economic activities, primarily industry and service activities, the economic and social importance of agriculture has declined. Despite this, agricultural products still retained a significant share in the exports of the mentioned countries. The aim of the paper is to analyze the share of exports of crop and livestock products in the gross domestic product of selected countries in the period 2014-2024. Crop and livestock products were chosen because of their importance in the structure of agricultural production in Serbia, as well as in neighboring countries: Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, and Hungary. The paper also shows the current production of the analyzed products, as well as export values, for these countries. For the purposes of the analysis, the comparative method, desk research, methods of analysis and synthesis, as well as descriptive statistics were used. The research uses data available on the websites of: FAOSTAT, EUROSTAT, as well as on the websites of the ministries of agriculture of the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Romania, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Bulgaria, and the Republic of Croatia. The authors conclude that in the analyzed period, the share of exports of crop and livestock products in the gross domestic product decreased in most countries, which is one of the indicators of the decrease in the economic importance of agriculture.

Keywords: agricultural products, crop production, livestock production, export, gross domestic product.

DYNAMICS OF RASPBERRY PRODUCTION AND EXPORT IN SERBIA: A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF TRENDS AND ECONOMIC INDICATORS (2014-2023)

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Institute of Agricultural Economics, Belgrade, Serbia
Mirela MITRAŠEVIĆ
University of East Sarajevo, Bijeljina, Bosnia and Herzegovina
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Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

Abstract. The raspberry sector represents one of the most important export-oriented segments of agricultural production in the Republic of Serbia, contributing significantly to foreign exchange earnings, rural development, and overall economic performance. This paper aims to analyze the dynamics of raspberry production and export, as well as key economic indicators influencing the development of this sector in Serbia during the period 2014-2023. The study applies a descriptive analytical approach based on secondary data from relevant national and international statistical sources, including production volume, harvested area, yield, export quantity, export value, export prices, foreign direct investment, international development assistance, and rural population. The results indicate that raspberry production increased from 61,715 tons in 2014 to a peak of 127,010 tons in 2018, reaching 98,674 tons in 2023, which suggests a long-term upward trend despite fluctuations. Export quantities remained relatively stable, ranging from 79.1 to 103.9 million kilograms annually, while export value grew significantly, reaching EUR 362.9 million in 2021. At the same time, the average export price rose from EUR 2.48/kg in 2014 to EUR 4.28/kg in 2021, reflecting improved competitiveness. The analysis shows that production growth was mainly driven by the expansion of the harvested area, whereas the yield levels remained relatively stable. Increasing foreign direct investment and international development assistance indicate stronger institutional support, while declining rural population represents a potential constraint for long-term sustainability. Overall, the findings confirm the strategic importance and strong export potential of the raspberry sector in Serbia, providing a basis for future research and policy development.

Keywords: raspberry production, raspberry export, agricultural sector, Serbia.

TRENDS AND STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVES ON ORGANIC AGRICULTURE IN ROMANIA

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Steliana RODINO
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Abstract. Organic agriculture is a branch of the agricultural sector that is important in promoting sustainable development and the responsible use of natural resources, in order to preserve them for future generations. This paper analyzes the dynamics of the main statistical indicators of organic agriculture in Romania during the period 2015-2024, namely the number of certified economic operators, the organic agricultural area, and the level of organic production for the main agricultural crops. The study is based on official statistical data provided by the National Institute of Statistics and EUROSTAT, following the annual developments. The results highlighted a general trend of increasing interest in organic practices, reflected in the variation in the number of certified economic operators and the expansion of organically cultivated areas, with small oscillations determined by economic, social, and environmental factors. At the same time, the data recorded on organic production by crop reveal the development potential of this branch of the agricultural sector, especially for dry legumes and protein crops for cereal production (including seeds and mixtures of cereals and legumes), which recorded a significant increase of over 490% in the period 2018-2024, from 2,276 hectares in 2015 to 13,467 in 2024.

Keywords: organic farming, agricultural indicators, organic agriculture operators, Romania.

ROMANIA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS

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Abstract. This paper examines Romania's role and challenges in the context of the ongoing global food crisis. The study begins with a brief overview of the factors contributing to rising food insecurity worldwide, including climate change, supply chain disruptions, and geopolitical tensions. Romania, as a significant agricultural producer in Eastern Europe, presents a unique case for analyzing how national policies and local production systems interact with global market pressures. Understanding Romania's situation is important because the country both contributes to and is affected by international food markets. Despite its agricultural potential, Romania faces structural challenges, such as outdated infrastructure, unequal land distribution, and limited access to modern technology, which exacerbate vulnerabilities during periods of global shortage. Addressing these issues can offer lessons for other countries with similar economic and agricultural profiles. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining statistical analysis of national and international agricultural production data with policy review and expert interviews. Key research questions focus on how Romania can maintain domestic food security, support sustainable agricultural practices, and adapt to fluctuations in global supply and demand. The findings indicate that while Romania has the capacity to buffer some impacts of the food crisis, targeted investment in infrastructure, technology, and strategic reserves is essential. The study highlights how local policies can mitigate risks and strengthen resilience against global shocks. Overall, this paper contributes to the understanding of national responses to global food insecurity by providing an in-depth case study of Romania. It offers actionable insights for policymakers, researchers, and international organizations seeking to improve food system resilience in Eastern Europe and beyond.

Keywords: global food crisis, food security, Romania, agricultural policy, sustainable agriculture.

SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION AND PLANT DEFENSE STRATEGIES: GENETIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract. Several complex issues, including increased plant pest and disease activity due to climate change, the development of pesticide resistance in pests, and toxicities caused in plants by air and soil pollutants globally, contribute to the unprecedented crisis facing sustainable food production. These difficulties lower the plant products' quality used for food, while also inhibiting plant growth, productivity, and yields. There is an urgent need to minimize plant stress, improve crop performance and yield, and adapt plants and agroecosystems to global changes due to the growing population's demand for higher-quality foods. For sustainable food production and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations in the post-2020 era, effective management of plant stress is, therefore, essential. Plant defense mechanisms arise from complex interactions between genetic, physiological, and environmental factors enabling plants to resist biotic and abiotic stresses. Defense responses include the secondary metabolites synthesis such as phytoalexins, flavonoids, and terpenes, the activation of oxidative enzymes, the production of antimicrobial proteins, and the reinforcement of physical barriers like thickened cell walls and cuticles. Structural and regulatory genes encode proteins and enzymes controlling these processes, while transcription factors and signaling pathways, including WRKY, MYB, bHLH, salicylic acid, and jasmonic acid pathways, facilitate coordinated spatial and temporal regulation of defense responses. This study aims to investigate the factors influencing enhanced plant defense, including genetic variability, hormonal regulation, signaling responses to pathogens and abiotic stresses, as well as the role of the microbiome and epigenetic mechanisms. Environmental factors such as light, temperature, humidity, and nutrient availability modulate the defense responses' effectiveness and the synthesis of protective metabolites. Understanding these mechanisms enables plant selection and development of varieties with increased resistance, improved adaptive capacity, and greater potential for sustainable production, contributing both to agricultural productivity and the preservation of plant bioactive properties.

Keywords: sustainable food production, plant defense, secondary metabolites, genetic regulation, stress responses.

ECONOMIC POTENTIAL OF CROP PRODUCTION USED AS BIOMASS IN ENERGY GENERATION

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Abstract. Human civilization is facing a constantly growing demand for energy. Unfortunately, in current time, availability, volume, and distribution of offered energy worldwide is mainly affected by many issues, as are frequent energy and price shocks, energy shortage, or environmental and climate change impacts. In accordance with the concept of sustainable development, production of energy at global level is rapidly moving toward the renewable sources. Although the wind, hydro, and solar energy are recognized as a leading renewable, biogas, or more closely, biomethane could be found as suitable alternative in energy generation, particularly in regions with developed agriculture. The objective of the research is to perceive the economic potential of commonly grown field crops in Serbian agriculture, both in a dry farming system or a system that implies irrigation, as the source for further energy production. By the use of analytical calculations based on variable costs (contribution margin), it has been proved that preselected crop rotation applied at the pilot area of 30 ha could generate profit to farmer oriented to crops growing intended for biomethane production. Performed research has to deepen available knowledge about the crops growing and their later use in energy production at the national level. Besides, the gained research results have to encourage the small farmers and local authorities to facilitate the transfer of energy production from fossil energy sources to renewable energy sources available in agriculture.

Keywords: crops growing, biomass, energy production, contribution margin.

MINITRACK: INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS

Chairs:

- **Oana POPOVICI, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania**
- **Cristiana TUDOR, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania**
- **Vahid J. SADEGHI, Aston Business School, Birmingham, United Kingdom**
- **Razieh (Rosie) SADRAEI, Aston University, Birmingham, United Kingdom**

The minitrack welcomes theoretical and empirical contributions addressing contemporary issues in international business and economics, including but not limited to:

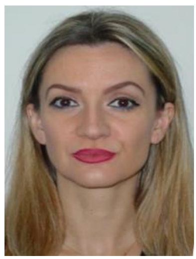
- Economic growth, business cycles, inflation, and macroeconomic policy
- International trade, globalization, and economic integration
- International business strategy, competitiveness, and firm internationalization
- Entrepreneurship, innovation, and digital platforms
- Digital transformation, digital economy, and emerging technologies
- SMEs, export performance, and international market development
- Sustainability, ESG, circular economy, and the green transition
- International finance, financial markets, and cross-border capital flows
- Financial stability, risk management, and crisis resilience
- Geopolitical risk, economic security, and global supply chains
- Taxation, public policy, governance, and institutional quality
- Energy economics, climate policy, and sustainable development
- Regional development, economic convergence, and European integration
- Contemporary challenges and future trends in international business and economics

Oana POPOVICI is a lecturer at the Faculty of International Business and Economics (REI) within the Bucharest University of Economic Studies (ASE). She teaches subjects related to international insurance, foreign international techniques, and international negotiation. Oana is also a scientific researcher at the Institute for Economic Forecasting within the Romanian Academy. After graduating from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies in 2008, she enrolled for Master studies, followed by a PhD under the same institution from which she successfully graduated in 2013.

Oana participated in research teams conducting studies in partnership with the European Institute of Romania on topics such as the impact of European initiatives in the Romanian economy, and with the Foreign Investors Council, where she was involved in the accomplishment of the two reports on the situation of foreign direct investments in Romania. She is experienced in drawing supporting documents for the design of public policies, as a result of collaboration with the Government and Parliament of Romania, where she has focused on various topics, such as the small and medium sized companies or circular economy.

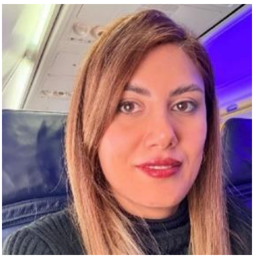
Her core competences are related to Foreign Direct Investments, Management of Risk, International Economics, Renewable Energy, Research, and Teaching.

She is also associate editor at the Romanian Journal of Economic Forecasting (currently indexed in Web of Science) and reviewer for different other journals. Her research activity was covered in several academic articles in journals and at dedicated academic conferences, being oriented towards analysis of foreign direct investment and diversified by topics such as the impact of renewable energies on the economy or the consequences of climate change in the European Union.



Prof. **Cristiana TUDOR**, Ph.D., CFA, CPA, is an economics professor with over 23 years of international academic and research experience. She has contributed to the CFA Program curriculum as a member of the Education Advisory Committee/Practice Analysis Working Bodies, served as the first president of Romania's audit oversight body (ASPAAS), and helped establish two research centers at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. Prof. Tudor is also a member of the advisory board of the European Corporate Governance Institute and the Asian Economic and Social Society, thus contributing to the development and implementation of corporate governance and economic policies and practices at an international level. An award-winning researcher, CFA charter holder, and chartered accountant, Prof. Tudor is also an active journal editor and prolific reviewer, with over 200 verified reviews for leading Web of Science journals. Since 2025, she has served as editor-in-chief of the Journal of Economic and Social Measurement (SAGE). She is also an Editorial Board Member of Scientific Reports (Springer Nature), Digital Health (SAGE), and Sustainable Finance Review (Emerald).

Vahid J. SADEGHI, PhD, is an Associate Professor in International Entrepreneurship and the Director of the PhD Programme at Aston Business School. He is an active researcher in international entrepreneurship, particularly in the area of SME internationalization. Vahid is the chair of the 50th Academy of International Business UK & Ireland Chapter (AIB-UKI) Conference (2024) and a member of the organization committee of The Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship (ISBE) 2023 conference, hosted by Aston Business School. He has published papers in leading international journals and edited various books in Springer, Routledge, and Emerald and has served as track chair and presenter for several international conferences.



Dr. **Razieh (Rosie) SADRAEI** is a researcher in Business and Entrepreneurship at Aston University, specializing in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), internationalization, and sustainability. Her work examines how SMEs enhance their global competitiveness through networks, sustainable strategies, and knowledge-sharing. Rosie has published widely in reputable ABS-ranked journals, and her research has been cited internationally. As Principal Investigator of a UKRI ESRC-funded project on SME sustainability, she engages with managers and policymakers to translate academic insights into practice. Her work bridges theory and practice, advancing understanding of how SMEs can innovate and operate sustainably in global markets.

AUDIENCE SOPHISTICATION AND ENTREPRENEURIAL NARRATIVES IN DIGITAL MARKETS

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Abstract. Recent research suggests that vulnerability in entrepreneurial communication can enhance authenticity and attract stakeholder support. However, digital platforms expose entrepreneurs to diverse audiences with varying evaluative capabilities, raising important questions about when such strategies succeed or fail. This study examines how different forms of vulnerability and audience characteristics shape responses in digital entrepreneurial communities. Drawing on signaling theory and audience heterogeneity perspectives, we distinguish between emotional vulnerability (e.g., fear, anxiety, self-doubt) and functional vulnerability (e.g., operational failure, resource constraints). We further examine how the audience's cognitive complexity and emotional intelligence influence reactions to these disclosures. Using a computational text analysis of 29,620 entrepreneurial posts and 1.9 million comments from Reddit communities (2015–2024), we analyze how different audiences evaluate entrepreneurial communication in large-scale digital environments. The findings reveal a clear asymmetry: emotional vulnerability increases community support, while functional vulnerability reduces it. More importantly, higher levels of cognitive complexity and emotional intelligence consistently decrease supportive responses across both types of vulnerability. These results suggest that more sophisticated audiences prioritize competence and risk signals over authenticity cues when evaluating entrepreneurial communication. This study contributes to research on digital entrepreneurship and communication by demonstrating that audience heterogeneity fundamentally shapes the effectiveness of signaling strategies. It highlights that digital platforms are not uniformly supportive environments, but instead amplify evaluative differences across audiences. The findings offer practical implications for entrepreneurs by showing that communication strategies that emphasize authenticity may be effective only under specific audience conditions, while disclosures of operational challenges can undermine perceived competence in public digital settings.

Keywords: digital platforms, entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial communication, audience sophistication.

THE REEMERGENCE OF INFLATION IN THE U.S. ECONOMY: PRICE INERTIA, LONG-TERM MONETARY EXPANSION, AND INFLATIONARY PRESSURE

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Abstract. This study undertakes a long-term examination of the overall price behavior from 1965 to 2025, with the objective of identifying the factors that contributed to the reemergence of inflation beginning in 2021. Inflation is an inherently complex phenomenon; both diagnosing its causes and identifying effective remedies are analytically demanding tasks. Owing to this complexity, isolating the full set of forces responsible for sustained changes in the price level is particularly challenging. A long-run perspective reveals that inflation exhibits inertia. Once inflation is brought under control after a period of dangerously high levels, it tends to remain subdued for an extended duration. However, this apparent stability may mask accumulating pressures. The analysis suggests that a prolonged and intensive reliance on monetary expansion can eventually undermine price stability, acting as a major trigger for the subsequent resurgence of inflation. In this framework, inflation reemerges not as an abrupt anomaly, but as a delayed consequence of long-term policy dynamics interacting with price inertia.

Keywords: inflation inertia, monetary expansion, inflationary pressure.

HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY: A CASE STUDY IN BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION AND RETAIL GLOBALIZATION

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Abstract. The use of case studies in management courses is an effective and increasingly widespread pedagogical practice. This paper presents the case of the Hudson's Bay Company (CBH). *Case Description:* The HBC is not only a chain of stores, but also one of the oldest chartered companies in the world and one of the oldest businesses in North America. The 2nd of May, 1670, marks the signing of the Royal Charter by Charles II, officially establishing the HBC. Over the centuries, the company has grown in the sectors of fur trading, land, and retail. Hudson's Bay reached its peak in the 20th century, when the store served as a one-stop shop for Canadians seeking quality clothing, cosmetics, and household goods. Its decline began in the late 1990s, accelerating in the 2000s and especially after the arrival of the pandemic. On March 7th, 2025, the Bay filed for creditor protection in order to restructure. March 2025 marks the end of CBH, when it files for bankruptcy protection. According to some experts, the retailer suffered from being too large and failing to adapt to consumer demand. These consumers prefer to shop online or in beautiful and modern stores focused on customer experience. *Target audience:* The case could be suitable for students enrolled in undergraduate or graduate programs in business management or international management. *Learning Objectives:* To inform students about the role of Hudson's Bay in the creation and development of Canada, to raise readers' awareness of the role of decision-making in various organizational development strategies, and to encourage students to reflect on adapting to change in various stages of an organization's life, especially when the organization's activities span several decades, if not several centuries.

Keywords: educational case study, Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), organizational development strategies, retail management.

EXPORT MARKET RETRENCHMENT IN UK SMEs: HOW KNOWLEDGE HIDING UNDERMINES INNOVATION AND DRIVES DE-INTERNATIONALIZATION

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Abstract. The de-internationalization of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) has become an important research issue as firms increasingly face uncertainty, resource constraints, and pressure to reconsider their international market engagement. While existing research has examined SME internationalization and de-internationalization, less attention has been given to how internal knowledge-related behaviors may be associated with reductions in export-market involvement. This study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between knowledge hiding and SME de-internationalization, focusing on three dimensions of knowledge hiding: evasive hiding, playing dumb, and rationalized hiding. The study asks whether these knowledge-hiding behaviors are associated with SME de-internationalization, whether innovation mediates these relationships, and whether a competitive work environment strengthens the association between knowledge hiding and de-internationalization. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted with 250 decision-makers in UK-based SMEs that had experienced at least a 20% reduction in export-market involvement during the previous three years while remaining active in at least one foreign market. The data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modelling in SmartPLS 4. The findings show that all three knowledge-hiding dimensions are positively associated with SME de-internationalization and negatively associated with innovation. Innovation is also negatively associated with de-internationalization and partially mediates the relationships between each knowledge-hiding dimension and de-internationalization. However, the moderating role of the competitive work environment is not supported. The study contributes to SME internationalization and knowledge management research by showing how internal knowledge-withholding behaviors may undermine innovation and be associated with export-market retrenchment.

Keywords: knowledge hiding, de-internationalization, innovation, SMEs, competitive work environment.

CARBON PRICING AND FINANCIAL STABILITY IN THE ENERGY TRANSITION: THE ROLE OF SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP AND CLIMATE POLICY COORDINATION

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Abstract. The transition toward low-carbon economies has increased the importance of coordinating climate policies with financial stability objectives, particularly within energy-intensive sectors. As carbon pricing mechanisms, such as emissions trading systems (ETS) and carbon border adjustment instruments, expand globally, concerns regarding market volatility, investment risks, and regulatory uncertainty have become increasingly relevant in sustainability and energy transition research. Understanding how climate policies influence financial systems, while also being affected by macroeconomic pressures, represents a major challenge for policymakers and researchers. This study investigates the relationship between carbon pricing mechanisms and financial stability in different institutional and regulatory contexts. The analysis focuses on seven jurisdictions – Germany, France, Canada, California (USA), South Korea, China, and Brazil as a control case – during the 2021–2024 period. Methodologically, the research employs a Panel Vector Autoregression (PVAR) framework to examine the dynamic and bidirectional interactions between carbon markets, financial volatility, inflation, unemployment, and policy uncertainty. The study addresses two main research questions: how carbon pricing influences macro-financial stability and how financial pressures affect sustainability-oriented policy decisions. The results indicate that transparent and progressively implemented climate leadership contributes to reducing financial instability and financing pressures within the energy sector. The findings also reveal important cross-country differences, highlighting the role of institutional capacity, policy credibility, and market maturity in shaping the effectiveness of carbon pricing systems. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that sustainable leadership principles – such as predictability, transparency, and stakeholder engagement – are essential for balancing ambitious climate objectives with economic resilience. The paper contributes to the existing literature by integrating sustainable leadership, carbon pricing governance, and financial stability into a unified analytical framework to understand energy system transformation.

Keywords: carbon pricing, emissions trading systems, financial stability, sustainable leadership, energy transition.

POLITICAL SHOCKS AND THE EUROPEAN EQUITY HIERARCHY: VOLATILITY REGIMES, DYNAMIC CORRELATIONS, AND MULTI-HORIZON SPILLOVERS FROM THE UNITED STATES TO WESTERN AND CEE MARKETS

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Abstract. Political shocks have become a central source of financial instability in globally integrated equity markets, yet their transmission across Europe remains unevenly understood. This paper examines how identifiable U.S. political shocks reshape volatility regimes, dynamic correlations, and spillover networks across a regional system composed of the S&P 500, three major Western European indices, and three Central and Eastern European equity markets. The topic is particularly relevant because recent political and geopolitical episodes have shown that uncertainty is not only priced locally, but also transmitted across borders through market co-movement, contagion, and changing diversification benefits. The study addresses two main research questions: whether U.S. political shocks propagate uniformly across Europe, and whether Western European markets act as regional amplifiers while CEE markets behave primarily as receivers. Using daily data from 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2026, the empirical framework combines Markov-switching EGARCH models, DCC-GARCH correlations, TVP-VAR connectedness, and frequency-domain spillover decomposition. Eleven pre-specified stress events are analyzed through symmetric event windows. The results reveal a clear hierarchical transmission structure. Western European markets, especially DAX, CAC 40, and FTSE MIB, emerge as dominant net transmitters, while WIG20, BUX, and BET are persistent net receivers. Cross-market connectedness rises sharply around major shock windows, with COVID-19, Brexit, and the April 2025 U.S. tariff announcement generating particularly strong amplification. Frequency decomposition shows that most spillovers are concentrated within the 1–5-day band, indicating fast, information-driven contagion rather than gradual structural adjustment. The paper contributes by integrating volatility regimes, dynamic correlations, directional spillovers, and frequency connectedness into a unified event-driven framework, offering new evidence on how U.S. political shocks are filtered through Europe's internal financial hierarchy.

Keywords: U.S. political shocks, financial connectedness, European equity markets, volatility spillovers, CEE markets.

CROSS-COUNTRY FINANCIAL RISK AND THE EU TRIPLE TRANSITION: A DYNAMIC PANEL VAR ASSESSMENT OF STOCK MARKET SPILLOVERS

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Abstract. The European Union is currently navigating a complex period of structural change, driven simultaneously by green, digital, and innovation agendas. For policymakers and the investment community alike, mapping exactly how these broad macroeconomic shifts ripple through financial markets has become essential. Much of the current literature tends to analyze these transitions in isolation. Consequently, a clear gap remains in understanding their systemic and interactive effects on stock market performance within a deeply integrated economic zone. We investigate how these three core transitions dictate equity performance and volatility across the 27 EU member states from 2010 to 2024. Addressing the short time dimension and inherent endogeneity of macroeconomic data, we apply a Dynamic Panel Vector Autoregression (PVAR) estimated via Two-Step System GMM. Short-term dynamics and extended structural effects are mapped using Orthogonalized Impulse Response Functions and Forecast Error Variance Decompositions. The results demonstrate that the renewable energy infrastructure acts as a highly persistent long-term economic anchor. We also observe a short-term growth paradox: rapid GDP expansion dampens equity returns, reflecting underlying monetary tightening pressures. Baseline market volatility consistently drags down overall performance. Meanwhile, digitalization and research-driven innovation integrate into the financial ecosystem at a noticeably slower pace than green infrastructure. Ultimately, this paper contributes a rigorous, ecosystem-level map of the EU's triple transition, offering empirical proof that regional markets can successfully digest major sustainability and technological overhauls without losing fundamental macroeconomic balance.

Keywords: macroeconomic transitions, stock market performance, dynamic panel VAR, system GMM, European Union integration.

TAXATION, GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES, AND ECONOMIC GROWTH: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GREECE AND ROMANIA

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Abstract. The paper presents a systematic and comparative examination of the tax systems of Greece and Romania, concentrating on three core components of taxation: (a) personal income tax, (b) corporate income tax, and (c) consumption-based taxes. The primary objective of the study is to assess the structural design, efficiency, and redistributive capacity of these two tax frameworks, while also examining their broader implications for economic performance, investment attractiveness, and tax compliance behavior. Methodologically, the research adopts a comparative institutional approach, supported by a quantitative evaluation of selected fiscal and macroeconomic indicators. This dual framework enables a comprehensive assessment of both the formal characteristics and the functional effectiveness of the tax systems under consideration. Particular attention is given to revenue composition, statutory tax rates, compliance levels, and administrative efficiency. The study contributes to the international literature on comparative taxation by emphasizing the decisive role of administrative capacity, regulatory stability, and institutional credibility in determining fiscal outcomes. It argues that tax policy effectiveness extends beyond nominal rates and statutory provisions, depending substantially on governance quality and enforcement mechanisms. Finally, the findings provide an empirically grounded foundation for policy recommendations aimed at enhancing competitiveness, strengthening transparency, improving revenue collection performance, and ensuring long-term fiscal sustainability within evolving European economic conditions.

Keywords: taxation, economic performance, Southeastern European countries.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN MOTION: RO E-TRANSPORT'S FIGHT FOR COMPLIANCE AND INTEGRITY

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Abstract. The implementation of the RO e-Transport system in Romania aims to monitor the transport of goods in order to reduce tax evasion and increase transparency. This study analyzes the perceptions and experiences of companies in various economic sectors, based on a set of responses collected through a questionnaire. The results indicate a high level of knowledge of legal obligations, but the impact on processes within companies is perceived mainly negatively, being associated with the slowdown of operations and increased bureaucracy. The main difficulties reported include the difficult technical interface, the lack of legislative clarity, and the additional time required for reporting. Although the system is constantly used by most large and medium-sized companies, the perception of efficiency in reducing tax evasion remains low. The recommendations aimed at simplifying procedures, integration with other digital systems, flexibility in data correction, and technical support for SMEs. The conclusions underline the need to optimize the platform and the legislative framework in order to transform RO e-Transport into an efficient and friendly tool for the business environment.

Keywords: RO e-Transport, tax evasion prevention, digital compliance systems, supply-chain process impact, e-transport challenges.

THE ROLE OF INSURANCE IN SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENT UNDER GEOPOLITICAL RISK

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Abstract. Escalating geopolitical fragmentation, exemplified by the recent Iran-centered shock to Gulf security and maritime chokepoints, is reshaping the risk frontier for cross-border investment and the insurance architecture that enables it. This paper analyzes how insurance functions as a dual instrument of risk transfer and commitment, sustaining international investment by reducing loss severity, improving lender confidence, and converting uninsurable uncertainty into priced, contractible exposures. We argue that today's geopolitically correlated hazards, sanctions and compliance risk, supply-chain interruption, cyber escalation, and political violence accumulation, weaken traditional diversification in (re)insurance and propagate into "non-war" lines that investment depends on, including marine, energy, trade credit, aviation, and project cover. The forward-looking contribution is a framework linking geopolitical risk shocks to three margins of insurance supply, capacity, wording, and price, and to firms' investment choices, entry modes, and financing terms. We anticipate a structural shift toward tighter exclusions and shorter tenors, higher war and contingent business interruption premia, greater use of parametric triggers and portfolio aggregates, and expanded public–private guarantee capacity for strategic corridors and projects.

Keywords: geopolitical risk, political risk insurance, FDI, reinsurance capacity, sanctions.

THE MYTH OF THE AUTOCHTHONOUS NATIONAL MINORITIES VOTE: REASSESSING EXTERNAL VOTING AND ELECTORAL IMPACT IN HUNGARY

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Abstract. This article explores the widely circulated narrative that the Hungarian autochthonous national minorities (Hungarian ethnics residing in neighboring states) exert a decisive influence on electoral outcomes in Hungary. Based on the theoretical frameworks of transnational citizenship, external voting, and diaspora politics, the aim is to explore the Hungarian case within a broader comparative perspective on electoral participation beyond national borders. Methodologically, the analysis combines previous electoral data, institutional design regulation, and a review of the academic literature to evaluate both the scale and the systemic impact of diaspora voting. The findings indicate that despite its heightened symbolic salience and frequent usage in political discourse, diaspora voting remains quantitatively limited by structural factors, including turnout boundaries, electoral system mechanics, and vote distribution patterns. Consequently, its capacity to influence electoral outcomes is significantly more limited than often suggested in public narratives. The article calls into question the dominant assumptions of diaspora engagement in the Hungarian electoral system. Also, it contributes to a better understanding of hybrid electoral systems. At the same time, it highlights the necessity of a critical re-evaluation of the link between symbolic forms of political mobilization and their electoral effects.

Keywords: autochthonous national minorities voting, Hungary, political marketing, transnational citizenship, electoral systems.

ANALYSIS OF FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO A FASTER TRANSITION TO A CIRCULAR ECONOMY IN EUROPEAN UNION MEMBER STATES

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Abstract. One of the main objectives of the European Green Deal is the transition to a circular economy, to reuse, repair, and recycle products so that we reduce the amount of waste and conserve natural resources as much as possible. To achieve this main objective, the European Union has developed an action plan, along with targets to be achieved by member countries by 2030 and 2050. These targets include doubling the consumption of recycled materials from the total materials used between 2020 and 2030, compared to the 2010 level of 10.7%. Preliminary analysis shows that the faster transition to the circular economy in the European Union Member States is determined by the existence of sound legislative frameworks, coherent national strategies, adequate financing and economic incentives, technological innovation and new business models, responsible consumer behavior, cooperation between levels of government, the development of resource recovery infrastructure, and investment in relevant education and skills. This analysis draws on the specialized literature, statistical data, and public policy frameworks. It highlights the reasons why certain EU member states are ranked last in meeting circular economy targets, compared to those at the top of the ranking. The research results indicate that, although these states have made some progress in the last decade in the field of product recycling, the pace of implementing European measures remains lower than that of the high-performing states, necessitating a significant acceleration to reduce the gaps and achieve the assumed objectives.

Keywords: circular economy, resource conservation, European Union action plan, European Green Deal.

THE ROLE OF DIGITALIZATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF EUROPEAN SMEs: ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract. Digital transformation represents a key driver of competitiveness and development for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the European Union. The aim of this study is to analyze the impact of digitalization on SME performance from both an economic and a social perspective, using turnover and employment as core indicators. The research adopts a quantitative approach and is based on a balanced panel dataset covering 25 European countries, excluding Cyprus and Portugal to preserve the consistency and balance of the panel dataset, over the period 2021-2025, resulting in a total of 125 observations. Four digitalization indicators were leveraged: the degree of artificial intelligence adoption, the share of e-commerce in turnover, the proportion of SMEs selling online, and the level of digital intensity, all derived from the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI). The econometric models are estimated using panel Estimated Generalized Least Squares (EGLS) regression with random effects. The empirical results indicate a positive and statistically significant impact of artificial intelligence adoption on SME turnover, as well as a positive effect of digital intensity on employment. Indicators related to e-commerce do not show statistically significant effects over the analysed period. The study highlights the differentiated impact of digitalization on SME performance and underlines its relevance for public policy design.

Keywords: digital transformation, SMEs, economic performance, employment, European Union.

CLOUD COMPUTING ADOPTION IN EU FINANCIAL PROFESSIONS: HOW DIGITAL SKILLS, ICT EMPLOYMENT, AND ENTERPRISE SIZE INFLUENCE UPTAKE AMONG SMEs

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Abstract. The current article aims to study the impact of digital skills, ITC employment, and enterprise size on cloud computing adoption among SMEs in the EU. The research focuses on 16 EU countries between 2016 and 2025, utilizing a methodology focused on linear regression analysis with 3 independent variables quantifying and characterizing financial professions within EU SMEs (Basic and above digital skills – BADS, Enterprises that employ ICT specialists - EEICTS and Employment by main industry - ER). The dependent variable of the research is represented by Cloud computing services adoption by size class of enterprise (CCSA). The main research results indicate that the strongest correlation is identified between the variable measuring Basic and above digital skills – BADS and the dependent variable (0.9), followed by the Enterprises that employ ICT specialists and the CCSA (0.48). Lastly, the weakest correlation was identified between the Employment by main industry and CCSA (0.24). All the correlations results indicate positive impact of the independent variables of the study on the dependent variables (CCSA), which reveals that any increase in the independent variables will generate an increase in the CCSA. The linear regression results suggest that the fluctuation of the independent variables of the study explains 86% of the variation in the cloud computing adoption among the SMEs from the 16 EU countries analyzed. The research findings contribute to the existing literature by quantifying the importance of the human capital-related factors (particularly basic and advanced digital skills) over purely technical determinants in driving the SMEs digital transformation via cloud technologies.

Keywords: EU, SMEs, digital skills, ICT.

ENERGY SUPPLY CHAINS VULNERABILITIES: MANAGING GEOPOLITICAL RISK DURING THE IRANIAN CRISIS

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Abstract. Energy supply chains are linked by design to geopolitical trade agreements and the vulnerabilities that come with them. Geopolitical power struggles and realignments directly influence disruptions affecting critical transit routes and production facilities. Driven to a new boiling point by US-Israel attacks on Iran at the beginning of 2026, the Iranian crisis highlighted the deep-rooted weaknesses of energy supply systems around the world and brought discussions on import diversification to the forefront of public agendas in Europe. The paper explores the fundamental geopolitical risks that challenge traditional energy trade agreements by looking at the specific risks that the Iranian crisis has caused and the subsequent impact on global energy security, with a focus on the EU. The research integrates qualitative (Trend Impact Analysis -TIA) with quantitative (Time Series Analysis) analytic methods to map the effects of the Iranian crisis effects on energy market dynamics and supply chain stability. Using time-series data on crude oil prices, global energy trade flows, and trend impact analysis on crude oil export routes and facilities, the paper measures the magnitude and persistence of the event-driven disruptions. TIA is applied to develop future scenarios by incorporating the probability and potential impact of geopolitical events affecting strategic transit routes. The research findings indicate a strong impact of geopolitical events on energy price volatility, trade volumes, shipping routes security, and showcase an amplification of supply chain risks. The analytical outcomes recommend supply chain diversification, strategic reserves building across the world, and coordinated policy responses to strengthen energy supply chain resilience and mitigate its effects on the EU economy.

Keywords: Iran, energy supply chain resilience, geopolitical risk, energy security.

GLOBAL TRADE AND INVESTMENT INTEGRATION OF MUSLIM-MAJORITY ECONOMIES: EVIDENCE OF STRUCTURAL GAPS IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS PARTICIPATION

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Abstract. This article explores the relationship between Islamophobia and the global economic integration of Muslim-majority economies within the contemporary international economic system. The study aims to investigate whether Muslim-majority states occupy structurally disadvantaged positions in global trade, investment flows, the digital economy, and, in general, in the global image of economic relations. To empirically assess this issue, the paper introduces the Muslim Global Integration Index (MGII), a composite indicator constructed using secondary data on trade openness, foreign direct investment inflows, high-technology exports, ICT service exports, and service export performance. By comparing Muslim-majority economies with structurally comparable non-Muslim developing economies, the analysis examines whether significant disparities in global economic integration persist after controlling for development levels. The aim is to assess if many Muslim economies remain underrepresented in high-value global sectors, particularly technology-intensive exports and digital services, important industries in today's economy. The findings are interpreted through the lens of economic discrimination and geopolitical perceptions associated with Islamophobia, highlighting how historical hierarchies and contemporary political narratives may shape unequal participation in globalization.

Keywords: Islamophobia, discrimination, technology, globalization.

THE RELATION BETWEEN ENERGY MARKETS AND GEOPOLITICAL UNCERTAINTY

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Abstract. In this paper, we aim to investigate the effect of geopolitical uncertainty on energy markets in European Union countries, considering the unexpected rises in energy prices following the recent pandemic crisis and geopolitical conflicts, such as the war in Ukraine. The evolution of energy prices is closely related to geopolitical uncertainty, and we try to identify volatility spillovers from geopolitical crisis to energy sectors. We will utilize data for the index of geopolitical uncertainty and data regarding the energy markets, employing the wavelet technique to investigate the relationship between variables on short-term and long-term intervals. Wavelet coherence analysis allows to distinguish the interdependencies between variables using different scales and frequencies. The transition to renewable energy and the gradual replacement of fossil fuels with clean energy sources requires an analysis of the effect of geopolitical conflicts on the energy markets. Geopolitical tensions are also closely related to financial stability, and therefore the necessity to ensure the financing for implementing more sustainable energy sources, ensuring thus resilient economic growth, in compliance with environmental sustainability goals.

Keywords: energy market, geopolitical uncertainty, environmental sustainability goals.

DIGITALIZATION AND THE SHADOW ECONOMY: THE MODERATING ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract. The shadow economy thrives in gray areas where formal institutions are rigid, regulations are ineffective, and trust in the state is eroded. Digitalization, in turn, has a dual impact on the shadow economy, creating a paradox. On the one hand, digitalization facilitates tax evasion by expanding the possibilities for undeclared work, and, on the other hand, it increases the transparency of payments and makes it easier for authorities to monitor the tax environment. The purpose of our paper is to explore the relationship between digitalization and the shadow economy, when the quality of institutions plays a mediating role. The analysis is based on panel data for the 27 European Union countries, for the period 2013-2022. The model is based on five composite indices that capture digitalization, institutional quality, and the social, economic, and fiscal context. We used a model with unidirectional fixed effects and Driscoll-Kraay standard errors, to correct for cross-sectional dependence and time-series autocorrelation of errors. The results indicate that the effects of digitalization on the informal economy are limited in the absence of other controlling factors. However, when we test the interaction between digitalization and institutional quality, a significant negative influence on the informal sector emerges ($\beta = -1.443$, $p<0.001$). Thus, we have identified a context in which the digitalization paradox can be explained, successfully achieving our goal. We also found that there is an inflection point, with a value of -0,72 standard deviations of the institutional index, above which digitalization begins to reduce the shadow economy. The results contribute to the existing literature by capturing the moderating effect of institutions in the context of reducing the shadow economy through digitalization. To benefit from the effects of reducing the informal economy, digitalization must be accompanied by strong institutions that enforce regulations and discourage evasive behavior through surveillance and sanctions.

Keywords: shadow economy, digitalization, institutional quality, European Union.

PRECARIOUS COMPETITIVENESS: FISCAL CONSOLIDATION, PUBLIC INVESTMENT GAPS, AND CONVERGENCE FAILURE IN THE EUROPEAN SEMI-PERIPHERY

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Abstract. The European Union's competitiveness crisis has renewed debates about the structural conditions enabling sustained economic convergence across member states. The Draghi Report (2024) diagnoses a chronic public and private investment gap as the EU's core competitiveness deficit, prescribing coordinated investment mobilization as the path forward. Yet this prescription assumes relatively symmetric fiscal capacity, an assumption that breaks down at the semi-periphery. This paper addresses a gap in the existing literature on EU economic governance: the asymmetric impact of fiscal consolidation imperatives on lower-capacity member states and the structural contradiction this creates between EU-level competitiveness objectives and national-level fiscal constraints. While the dependent market economy and semi-periphery frameworks have theorized the structural position of Central and Eastern European economies within European capitalism, their implications for the post-Draghi governance agenda remain underexplored. Using Romania as a primary case study, the paper applies a mixed methodological approach combining fiscal data analysis, public investment indicators, and convergence metrics to examine how the 2024-2025 Bolojan austerity package, implemented under EU fiscal consolidation pressure, systematically undermines the investment capacity the Draghi Report identifies as essential. The central research question follows directly: does compliance with EU fiscal rules reproduce, rather than resolve, the semi-periphery's competitiveness trap? The findings suggest that the Draghi framework, while analytically compelling at the aggregate EU level, contains a structural blind spot regarding peripheral member states. The paper contributes to debates on EU economic governance, asymmetric integration, and the political economy of convergence by demonstrating that fiscal consolidation and competitiveness upgrading are in direct tension for semi-peripheral economies under current institutional arrangements.

Keywords: EU economic governance, fiscal consolidation, dependent market economies, public investment, semi-peripheral convergence.

SUBREGIONAL PATTERNS IN THE GREATER MIDDLE EAST AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ECONOMIC SECURITY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract. The evolving geopolitical and geoeconomic landscape of the Greater Middle East is increasingly shaping the economic security of the European Union. This paper examines the region through a subregional lens, recognizing that the diverse economic, political, and infrastructural dynamics of the Gulf, the Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa, and the Levant exert differentiated impacts on European economic stability. Understanding these patterns is critical to formulating policies that ensure secure energy supplies, resilient trade routes, and sustainable investment flows. Despite extensive research on EU–Middle East relations, current studies often adopt a monolithic regional perspective, overlooking the internal heterogeneity of the Greater Middle East. By focusing on subregional distinctions, this study provides a nuanced understanding of how specific economic corridors, energy dependencies, and trade networks influence EU economic security. The research employs a qualitative-analytical methodology, combining regional economic data, trade and investment flows, and strategic infrastructure mapping to address key questions: How do subregional dynamics affect EU energy and trade security? What roles do emerging corridors and economic partnerships play in shaping EU strategic resilience? The findings indicate that each subregion presents unique opportunities and vulnerabilities. The Gulf emerges as a central energy and investment hub; the Eastern Mediterranean provides alternative energy sources and transport linkages; North Africa remains pivotal for energy diversification and migration management; and the Levant functions as a strategic transit zone with geopolitical sensitivities. These differentiated patterns require tailored EU strategies that account for subregional specificities rather than uniform regional approaches. This paper contributes to the field by introducing a subregional analytical framework for assessing the EU economic security, offering policymakers a more precise tool to anticipate risks, leverage strategic opportunities, and strengthen the EU's external economic resilience in a rapidly changing global environment.

Keywords: Greater Middle East, European Union, economic security, subregional analysis, trade and energy corridors.

MINITRACK: INNOVATIVE MARKETING

Chairs:

- **Georgiana GRIGORE, University of Leicester, Leicester, United Kingdom**
- **Ștefan CĂESCU, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania**

The aim of this mini-track is to create a friendly and accessible environment for worldwide scientists, university members, PhD students, researchers, and marketers. Together they will debate and innovate in the field of marketing, ensuring a sustainable development of the domain.

The main topics covered by the hereby call for papers are related (but not limited) to:

- Marketing Research
- Sustainable Marketing
- Ethical Marketing
- Relationship Marketing
- Customer Relationship Management
- Experiental Marketing
- Global Marketing
- Online and AI Marketing
- Interactive Marketing
- Business to Business Marketing
- Marketing Communications
- Brand Management and Consumer Behavior
- Business Strategy
- Corporate Social Responsibility
- Entrepreneurship
- Sustainable Development and Economic Growth

Dr. **Georgiana GRIGORE** is Associate Professor in Marketing and Deputy Head of the School of Marketing and Strategy at the University of Leicester, UK. Georgiana's research explores new ways of thinking about and practicing responsible business, particularly in digital contexts. She has worked with practitioners and academics across Europe on research and consultancy to explore how organizations construct, communicate, and implement responsibility, especially within complex cultural or organizational contexts. She has published articles in journals such as Annals in Tourism Research, Journal of Business Ethics, Marketing Theory, Organization, Journal of Business Research, Management Learning, Internet Research, Journal of Marketing Management, or Journal of Strategic Marketing. She is a chair of an annual International Conference in Social Responsibility, Ethics and Sustainability (ICSR), which she co-founded in 2012. Her research has received external funding, including from the Innovate UK, the British Academy/Leverhulme, and the Arthur W. Page Center in two consecutive years. She completed a doctorate in Marketing at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies where she used relationship marketing theory to examine the impact of corporate responsibility on stakeholders. Prior to her doctorate, she received a master's degree in Strategic Marketing and a bachelor's degree in Marketing from the same university.

Ștefan CĂESCU is Professor at Bucharest University of Economic Studies, specialized in marketing management, business-to-business marketing, and strategic marketing and Vice-Dean of the Marketing Faculty. He is author and co-author of more than 30 articles related to marketing communication, consumer behavior, healthcare marketing, sports marketing, strategic marketing, and business-to-business marketing. He has also been a manager or member of more than 20 research projects or European financed projects.

THE INFLUENCE OF AI-GENERATED ADS ON CONSUMER-BRAND RELATIONSHIPS AND PURCHASE INTENT AMONG GEN X AND GEN Z

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Abstract. The evolution of AI (artificial intelligence) in recent years has significantly reshaped marketing communication, along with the production and distribution of advertising materials. The use of AI in generating both static and video advertisements has led to the emergence of a type of "synthetic" advertising, as defined in the literature review, based on automatically generated and modified content. In this context, it is essential to understand how these synthetic materials influence consumer perception, but especially their relationship with brands. This study is designed to clarify how advertising generated using AI can reshape the dynamics of the relationship between brands and consumers, but it also aims to highlight the role of generational differences in this process. The research is based on a quantitative experimental approach, involving two groups from Generation X and two groups from Generation Z: one experimental group exposed to an AI-generated advertisement and one control group exposed to traditional advertisement. After viewing the advertisement, the participants complete a structured questionnaire measuring different variables influencing purchase intention, allowing for the comparison of responses across advertisement types and generations. The results show that, for Generation Z, the use of AI in marketing presents an opportunity to increase engagement and interest in the brand. At the same time, Generation X does not reject new communication approaches, but requires continuity of the relationship with the brand, along with elements that build trust. Furthermore, the research showed that the risk perceived by consumers did not influence purchase intent, indicating a growing acceptance of AI-generated content and a possible transformation of uncertainty into curiosity and interest. By bringing together the new ideas of AI with relationship marketing, this paper contributes to the development of literature on the use of AI in marketing and provides a conceptual basis for future research in a rapidly evolving field.

Keywords: AI-generated advertising, brand-consumer relationship, Generation X, Generation Z.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE DISCLOSURE AND MAGICAL PERCEPTION: EFFECTS ON CONSUMER TRUST IN CHATBOT INTERACTIONS

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Abstract. The integration of AI-powered chatbots into commercial settings has created a disclosure dilemma: regulatory frameworks increasingly mandate transparency about chatbot identity, yet disclosure consistently undermines consumer trust and engagement. While prior research has focused on cognitive mechanisms such as reduced perceived competence, the affective pathways through which disclosure shapes consumer responses remain underexplored. Drawing on dual-process theory and the concept of magical perception, this research proposes that AI identity disclosure functions as a demystification cue, shifting consumers from intuitive to analytical processing, and reducing perceptions of AI as magical. Two between-subjects online experiments (total N ≈ 200) examine this mechanism through complementary operationalizations: Study 1 manipulates disclosure timing (before vs. after a simulated chatbot interaction), while Study 2 manipulates disclosure framing (technical/demystifying vs. ambient/minimal labeling). Both studies employ an objective AI literacy test, a standardized interactive chat simulation, and validated scales for magical perception, trust. AI literacy is explored as a moderating variable. This research seeks to bridge the chatbot disclosure and AI perception literatures by introducing magical perception as a novel mediating mechanism, offering insights into designing disclosure strategies that balance transparency with consumer engagement.

Keywords: AI disclosure, chatbot, magical perception, consumer trust, AI literacy.

ARTIFICIAL VS. HUMAN INFLUENCERS: A PERSUASION KNOWLEDGE PERSPECTIVE ON CONSUMER RESPONSES

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Abstract. The rapid adoption of artificial intelligence (AI)-generated influencers has transformed digital marketing, raising important questions about how consumers cognitively process algorithmic endorsers. While prior research has compared virtual and human influencers in terms of attitudes and purchase intentions, limited attention has been given to the psychological mechanisms underlying these effects. Drawing on the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM), this study examines whether AI-generated and human influencers differ in activating persuasion knowledge within social media contexts. Using a controlled between-subjects experimental design (N = 100), participants were randomly exposed to an Instagram-style endorsement featuring either an AI-generated or a human influencer promoting the same product. The study investigates whether consumers' recognition of persuasive intent differs when exposed to AI-generated versus human influencers. It is anticipated that the influencer type will be associated with differences in consumers' recognition of persuasive intent. By integrating behavioral theory into the emerging literature on virtual influencers, this research seeks to advance a mechanism-based understanding of consumer responses to AI-generated endorsers and to inform strategic decisions regarding their use in digital marketing.

Keywords: AI influencers, persuasion knowledge, influencer marketing, consumer cognition, experimental research.

BARRIERS AND MOTIVATIONS IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR FOR THE TRANSITION TO CLEAN ENERGY

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Abstract. Renewable energy plays a key role in combating climate change and in the transition to a sustainable energy model. In the context of European initiatives, this research explores the behavior of Romanian consumers in relation to the adoption of green energy. The study is based on a sample of 306 respondents and tracks the level of consumer awareness and their willingness to pay an additional cost for the use of renewable energy. The results indicate that 46.1% of the respondents declare that they are largely familiar with the subject of renewable energy, and 52.9% would accept to pay more for the consumption of green energy. Also, 72.5% of respondents declare themselves familiar with the concepts associated with renewable energy, reflecting the positive impact of awareness campaigns. The study contributes to the specialized literature on consumer behavior in the field of sustainable energy and offers practical recommendations for marketing strategies and public policies aimed at promoting renewable sources.

Keywords: renewable energy, consumer behavior, sustainability, green marketing.

CONSUMER ATTENTION AND PERCEPTION IN BOOK PUBLISHING ADS: INSIGHTS FROM AN EYE-TRACKING STUDY

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Abstract. In today's technology-driven world, the publishing industry faces increasing challenges in capturing and maintaining consumer attention. Understanding how people interact with online content has become essential for publishers operating in a highly competitive digital environment. In this context, eye-tracking offers a valuable alternative to traditional research methods, as it provides objective data on where users look and how they engage with online advertisements.Traditional approaches to marketing research and digital promotion are no longer sufficient to fully explain consumer behavior or to effectively stimulate intentions for buying. Therefore, this study adopts a neuromarketing perspective, focusing on the differences between what consumers say and what they actually do when exposed to advertising content. The study adopts an experimental design, using eye-tracking as the primary observational measure, and examines two independent variables related to social media ad structure. The results show that the participants allocated substantial visual attention to the promotional text. However, post-exposure interviews suggest that this element was not perceived as a key driver of overall ad evaluation. At the same time, variations in text structure were associated with differences in purchase intention. This pattern indicates a misalignment between visual attention, self-reported perceptions, and behavioral outcomes.The findings provide valuable insights into how consumers process advertising content in the publishing industry and offer practical implications for creating more effective and data-driven marketing campaigns.

Keywords: neuromarketing, eye-tracking, consumer behavior, digital marketing.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ADOPTION AND SERVICE QUALITY. PERSPECTIVES FROM MARKETING MANAGERS

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Abstract. The integration of artificial intelligence into service operations has changed the way companies manage client relationships and deliver value in ways that were difficult to anticipate even a decade ago. In sectors where trust and personal interaction define the quality of the service – real estate being a clear example, understanding how AI tools affect what clients actually experience has become a genuine concern for both managers and researchers. This paper investigates how marketing managers in Romanian real estate companies perceive the role of artificial intelligence in shaping service quality. The research draws on a qualitative methodology, based on semistructured interviews with 15 marketing managers working in real estate companies from major Romanian urban centers, primarily Bucharest and Cluj-Napoca, where digital adoption and market competition are most pronounced. The participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in terms of company size, market segment, and professional background. The data were analyzed through thematic analysis, allowing recurring patterns and managerial perspectives to surface from the empirical material. The findings contribute to the literature on service quality and AI adoption in service industries, while offering grounded insights into the distance that often exists between the potential of these technologies and their actual use in day-to-day operations.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, service quality, marketing managers, real estate.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN MARKETING: REGULATORY CHALLENGES AND POLICY DIRECTIONS

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Abstract. This paper explores the legal implications of artificial intelligence (AI) in digital marketing, focusing on the tension between rapidly evolving technological innovation and existing regulations. As AI becomes crucial to marketing practices, it raises significant legal and ethical concerns. The piece adopts a case study methodology to analyze the ways in which current laws and regulations apply to AI-driven marketing and where gaps remain. It starts with the foundations of AI in marketing and evaluates their benefits and risks, with an emphasis on the trade-off between efficiency and privacy. It then reviews major legal frameworks and particular attention is given to data protection, consumer protection, and intellectual property issues. Empirical insights are provided through case studies, including Meta Platforms investigations and the StabilityAI controversy, illustrating how legal interventions can restrict AI systems. The analysis highlights key legal challenges, including liability, lack of transparency, manipulation, and a decline in consumer trust. The paper identifies structural limitations in current legal frameworks, such as fragmentation across jurisdictions and ambiguity in liability. It concludes with the proposal of policy recommendations, including stronger requirements for transparency and improved consent mechanisms. The findings point towards that, as the legal systems remain reactive, an effective governance of AI in marketing requires a more integrated and anticipatory approach.

Keywords: AI in marketing, legal, ethics.

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AS A MEDIATING FACTOR IN INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVENESS

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Abstract. This research investigates the function of customer behavior as a moderator in the success of integrated marketing communication (IMC) in the digital environment. Technological advancements and the rapid advancement of Internet platforms have substantially transformed the connection between organizations and customers, with the latter taking an active role in the processes of communicating, understanding, and disseminating marketing messages. Consumer interactions in the digital environment are rapidly influencing organizations' communication tactics, making the topic significant in the present context of marketing and social science research. Social media, online reviews, and digital interactions have elevated consumers to the status of essential stakeholders in the communication ecosystem, calling into question the efficacy of integrated communication strategies. The purpose of this study is to look into how consumer behavior influences the relationship between a brand's integrated communication strategy and its efficacy. The paper is based on a review of the specialized literature in the disciplines of consumer behavior and integrated marketing communication, which is reinforced with exploratory empirical research using a questionnaire distributed to active online consumers. The study's goal is to find out how digital engagement, trust in online sources, and interactions with brand material affect the process of getting marketing messages. According to the proposed analysis, consumer engagement in the digital environment, as well as interactions with various types of online communication, might influence how integrated marketing messages are viewed and evaluated. In this way, customer behavior can act as a link between an organization's communication strategy and its effectiveness. This paper's contribution is to highlight the importance of consumer behavior in evaluating the efficacy of integrated marketing communication, as well as to emphasize the need to adjust communication methods to the dynamics of digital interactions.

Keywords: consumer behavior, integrated marketing communication, digital marketing, consumer engagement.

INVESTIGATING COGNITIVE BIASES IN ADVERTISING: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY ON WINE CAMPAIGN PERCEPTION

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Abstract. Price is widely recognized in marketing and consumer behavior research as an important external cue influencing perceived quality, value, and purchase intention. This role is particularly relevant for experience and hedonic goods such as wine, where consumers face uncertainty and rely on cognitive shortcuts when evaluating quality before consumption. Prior research highlights several behavioral biases affecting purchase decisions, including price bias - the belief that higher price signals higher quality, the anchoring effect - the influence of initial price information on subsequent evaluations, and confirmation bias, through which consumers seek information that supports existing expectations. However, these biases are rarely examined in the context of advertising materials where the price is displayed alongside visual and informational cues. This study addresses this gap by examining whether the price displayed on a print advertising banner influences consumers' perceptions of the advertisement, the promoted product, and their purchase intentions. The research evaluates perceptions of the banner in terms of attractiveness, clarity, and differentiation; analyzes perceived product value based on the information shown in the advertisement; measures purchase intention; and examines the role of price in quality evaluation, including minimum and maximum willingness to pay. The advertising stimulus consists of a single banner presenting the wine bottle design, a communication message, the producing winery, and a displayed price that varies across three conditions: lower than the real price, equal to the real price, and higher than the real price. The study uses a quantitative experimental survey design. Three questionnaires with identical items but different price levels were administered to 60 respondents, with 20 participants in each condition. A non-probabilistic quota sampling method ensured demographic balance. The findings show that the displayed price significantly influences perceived value, quality judgments, and advertising effectiveness, highlighting price as an important communicative element in marketing communication.

Keywords: price perception, cognitive biases, consumer behavior, communication campaign, behavioral economics.

THE IMPACT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ON SPORTS MARKETING COMMUNICATION: INTEGRATING PRACTITIONER EVIDENCE AND CONTEMPORARY ACADEMIC RESEARCH

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Abstract. Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming marketing, particularly in the domain of sports marketing communication, where organizations engage, try to persuade, and build relationships with audiences. Prior research has focused extensively on analytics and automation, but the communicative implications of AI, such as message creation, personalization, conversational interaction, and trust, remain underexplored. Traditionally, marketers have faced a trade-off between scale and relevance (mass communication enables reach, while personalized communication enhances relevance but is costly). This article synthesizes practitioner-oriented evidence recently published, with contemporary peer-reviewed academic research on AI and sports marketing communication. Based on these sources, the paper shows how AI changes sports marketing communication across five layers: data unification, insight generation, content creation, conversational interaction, and governance. The findings show that AI significantly enhances personalization and engagement capabilities but introduces new risks, such as: credibility, privacy, and algorithmic transparency (manipulative fears). The article concludes with research propositions and managerial implications for responsibly integrating AI into communication centric sports marketing strategies.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, sports marketing communication, content creation, generative AI, data unification.

SUSTAINABLE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN THE DIGITAL AGE: THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA NARRATIVES

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Abstract. Sustainable consumer behavior has become increasingly intertwined with digital communication environments where social media platforms shape not only purchasing decisions, but also broader understandings of environmental responsibility. While existing research has documented the growing influence of digital marketing and online advocacy on sustainability-oriented consumption, less attention has been directed toward the narrative mechanisms through which sustainability gains legitimacy and behavioral relevance in everyday digital interactions. This study examines how social media narratives influence sustainable consumer behavior, focusing on the roles of perceived authenticity, emotional engagement, and narrative credibility. Adopting a mixed-methods research design, the research combines a survey of 312 digitally active consumers with 18 semi-structured interviews conducted among individuals regularly exposed to sustainability-related social media content. The findings indicate that social media narratives contribute to the normalization of sustainable consumption practices primarily through emotional resonance, peer influence, and perceived behavioral consistency rather than through informational persuasion alone. At the same time, the results reveal persistent tensions between sustainability advocacy and commercial branding, as consumers frequently navigate competing perceptions of authenticity and performativity. The study extends current understandings of sustainable consumption by positioning social media narratives as active interpretative frameworks that shape how environmental responsibility is understood, negotiated, and enacted in digitally mediated contexts. Practical implications are discussed for organizations, marketers, and sustainability advocates seeking to foster meaningful consumer engagement without reinforcing superficial forms of sustainability communication.

Keywords: sustainable consumption, social media, consumer behavior, digital marketing, narratives.

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN PERFORMING ARTS: THE CASE OF OPERA AUDIENCES

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Abstract. Consumer behavior within the cultural sector has attracted increasing attention in recent years, particularly in the context of performing arts institutions that depend strongly on audience participation. Opera houses, theaters, and concert halls represent cultural organizations whose sustainability relies on understanding audience motivations, cultural engagement, and participation patterns. As cultural consumption evolves in the global economy, performing arts institutions must adapt to changing audience expectations and new forms of cultural participation. This paper explores consumer behavior in performing arts, focusing specifically on opera audiences. Opera represents one of the most complex and historically significant forms of performing arts, combining music, theater, visual design, and cultural tradition. Despite their artistic importance, opera institutions face challenges related to audience development, generational change, and competition from alternative forms of entertainment. The study examines the motivations and experiences that influence the attendance at opera performances and participation in performing arts events. Particular attention is given to factors such as cultural interest, education level, cultural identity, and the perceived value of artistic experiences. The research also discusses the role of cultural institutions in promoting audience engagement and cultural participation. The findings highlight that opera audiences are motivated not only by entertainment, but also by intellectual curiosity, aesthetic appreciation, and cultural identity. Understanding these motivations is essential for cultural institutions seeking to develop effective audience engagement strategies and ensure the long-term sustainability of performing arts organizations.

Keywords: consumer behavior, performing arts, opera audiences, cultural consumption, audience engagement.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS A MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM FOR SERVICE MARKETING INNOVATION

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Abstract. This paper develops an integrative conceptual framework that explains how artificial intelligence can be embedded within Management Information Systems to support innovation in service marketing strategies. The study responds to a growing need for conceptual integration between three research streams that have often developed in parallel: artificial intelligence in marketing, Management Information Systems and decision support, and service marketing theory. While recent literature has expanded rapidly after the emergence of generative AI, much of it still treats artificial intelligence either as a set of operational tools for automation and personalization or as a general technological disruption. Less attention has been paid to the systemic role of AI as an information-processing and decision-support capability embedded in organizational MIS and oriented toward service value creation. The paper adopts a structured integrative literature review, rather than a narrow systematic literature review, because the objective is theoretical integration in heterogeneous literatures. The reviewed corpus combines recent contributions published mainly from 2023 onward with selected foundational works on service-dominant logic, relationship marketing, service encounters, customer experience, AI in services, and decision support systems. The analysis identifies five thematic domains: AI-enabled marketing and generative AI, AI-enabled customer experience, AI-based decision support and MIS, service marketing theory, and trust, ethics, and transparency in AI-mediated service encounters. The main contribution is a revised conceptual framework that links service data inputs, MIS integration, AI analytical capability, decision-support quality, service marketing adaptation, and customer-value outcomes. The model is articulated through testable research propositions and operational indicators, thereby addressing the need for a framework that is not merely descriptive but empirically extendable. The study contributes to the literature by positioning AI not as an isolated marketing instrument, but as a structural component of service-oriented MIS that can support adaptive personalization, service recovery, customer trust, relationship continuity and data-driven marketing innovation.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, management information systems, service marketing, decision support, marketing innovation.

COGNITIVE, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND PSYCHOSOCIAL CHANGES IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract. The rapid proliferation of digital technologies (Industry 4.0) has transformed consumer behavior and expanded it beyond the observable purchasing actions to cognitive, emotional, and psychosocial processes. Through a systematic literature review (SLR) approach and a bibliometrics analysis, this study contributes from an interdisciplinary perspective at the interface of consumer psychology, behavioral decision theory, psychosociology, and digital marketing. The results demonstrate the reshaping of decision-making through heuristic processing, emotional activation, and social validation mechanisms as well as the role that information overload, algorithmic mediation and social interaction play in driving this process. These dynamics contribute to the emergence of new consumer needs centered on authenticity, meaningful experiences, and emotional relevance, while also emphasizing the importance of generational differences in shaping responses to digital environments. This study contributes by providing a unified framework that links cognitive, emotional, social, and technological domains of consumer behavior. In practical terms, the research offers marketing specialists valuable insights and help the development of adaptive, humanistic, and emotions involved strategies that are aligned with the progressive dynamics of digital consumer behavior.

Keywords: digital consumer behavior, cognitive processes, emotional engagement, social validation, consumer decision-making.

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ONLINE PURCHASE DECISIONS: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM ROMANIAN CONSUMERS

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Abstract. This study investigates how social media platforms shape consumer satisfaction in online purchase decisions through a quantitative cross-sectional design (N = 149). Applying a comprehensive methodologcal battery - Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA, PAF, Varimax), Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Fornell-Larcker criterion, HTMT ratio, OLS-HC3 regression, K-Means clustering, bootstrap mediation, moderation analysis, and Random Forest — we identify five distinct latent constructs explaining 61.96% of total variance. The regression model accounts for 30.0% of satisfaction variance ($R^2 = 0.30$; Cohen $f^2 = 0.43$, large effect). Social media influence (FS1: $\beta = 0.265$, $p < .001$) and online information seeking (FS5: $\beta = 0.153$, $p = .002$) are significant positive predictors, while pre-purchase evaluative behavior (FS3: $\beta = -0.102$, $p = .007$) negatively affects satisfaction. Age moderates the SM influence pathway, with effects significant only among younger consumers (18–35 years). K-Means segmentation ($k = 8$, Silhouette = 0.46) identifies eight psychographic segments with significant satisfaction differences (ANOVA: $F = 11.39$, $\eta^2 = 0.361$). Random Forest validation (Accuracy = 78.9%) confirms convergent predictive validity. The findings align with SOR theory, U&G theory, and recent social commerce literature (2020-2026), extending empirical evidence to the Romanian digital market context.

Keywords: social media marketing, online consumer, satisfaction, digital commerce, Romania.

THE RISE OF AI IN DIGITAL MARKETING: PERSONALIZATION, ETHICAL CONCERNS, AND REGULATORY DEVELOPMENTS

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Abstract. As the environments of online marketing become more and more competitive, organizations are pushed towards relying on AI technologies for analyzing significant volumes of user data around behavioral patterns, purchasing preferences, and intentions. The transition from traditional audience-segmentation marketing to data-driven, highly personalized communication has significantly improved targeting accuracy and consumer engagement. AI-Driven systems are enabling marketers to automate content generation, therefore delivering custom-made recommendations through end-to-end touchpoints. The rapid integration of Artificial Intelligence in the marketing field raises important ethical concerns around the opacity of decision-making done by algorithms, risks related to data collection and processing, as well as the risk of amplifying harmful or discriminatory outcomes. The paper also highlights some of the current ethical debates and regulatory developments facing these challenges. By analyzing contemporary ethical risks and institutional responses, for instance, Amazon in this case, the study highlights the need for companies to implement structural ethical practices, data governance, system auditing, and employee training. The findings put an emphasis on the fact that the sustainable integration of AI in marketing requires a balance between technological innovation, regulatory oversight, and the protection of consumer rights.

Keywords: AI in marketing, ethics, responsible AI, data protection.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE SOLUTIONS IN HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM BRANDS

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Abstract. The integration of artificial intelligence in the hospitality sector has led to a series of technological and strategic innovations, shaping a new concept – Smart Hotels. This paper investigates how innovative technologies contribute to the creation of unique experiences within brands in the hospitality industry through online observation. The findings highlight the applicability of these technologies and the differentiating characteristics that that drive customer satisfaction and improve brand management. Data was collected using an observation grid, analyzing key tourism news platforms and brand websites, to assess the implementation of artificial intelligence. This research contributes to the understanding of branding strategies in the hospitality industry, by correlating AI technology usage with branding strategies The emerging AI tools, such as virtual assistants and booking platforms, serve customers' needs for information, travel, and accommodation bookings, while more complex AI-based management solutions are developed to automate tasks, monitor business processes, and support premium and luxury brands in their environmental missions. These insights allow brand managers to adopt suitable technologies aligned with their brand objectives, influencing consumer journeys and online strategies. For researchers, the exploratory nature of the study provides valuable insights for future exploration of different types of emerging AI technologies in marketing.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, smart hotels, hospitality industry, hotel branding, customer experience.

TO WHAT EXTENT WOULD AI TAKE OVER THE ROLES OF SPECIALISTS IN THE MARKETING INDUSTRY IN ROMANIA?

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Abstract. This paper investigates the degree to which AI is poised to take over specialized roles within Romania's marketing industry, a sector currently undergoing a digital metamorphosis. Given the lack of localized empirical data, this study is vital for understanding how emerging markets navigate the tension between technological efficiency and human creativity. Adopting a quantitative research methodology, the study surveyed 400 marketing specialists across Romania. The research questions aimed to identify which core competencies are most vulnerable to automation and how practitioners perceive their future job security. The findings are sobering: over 68% of respondents anticipate a major replacement of standard marketing duties by AI-driven systems. The paper contributes to the development of understanding of professionals' opinions on the probability AI replacing them in the field of marketing sciences, in Romania.

Keywords: marketing, artificial intelligence, quantitative research.

GLOBAL PLATFORMS, LOCAL VOTES: THE IMPACT OF ULTRA-SHORT POLITICAL VIDEOS ON ELECTORAL TURNOUT AND VOTING INTENTION

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Abstract. This paper examines how ultra-short political video messages of less than 20 seconds influence electoral turnout and voting intention in the context of social-media-driven campaigning. Situated at the intersection of political marketing, media studies, and behavioral research, the study addresses a growing gap in the literature: while social media has been widely studied as an electoral communication channel, less attention has been paid to the persuasive effects of compressed video formats shaped by platform algorithms, attention scarcity, and emotionally charged visual storytelling. The paper proposes a theory-driven analytical framework connecting attention economy, peripheral information processing, parasocial interaction, and algorithmic visibility to electoral behavior. It argues that ultra-short videos do not simply transmit political information; they function as affective triggers that can increase candidate recall, perceived authenticity, emotional engagement, and, ultimately, intention to vote or participate. Particular attention is given to the role of image-first communication, rapid symbolic cues, and repeated exposure in shaping voter perceptions under low-information conditions. Methodologically, the paper outlines an empirical research design focused on voters exposed to short-form political video content on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts. The proposed analysis combines political marketing theory with measurable behavioral indicators, including turnout intention, candidate preference, and perceived credibility. By linking global platform logics to local electoral behavior, the study contributes to current debates on digital transformation, democratic participation, and the future of electoral communication. It also offers practical relevance for campaign strategists and normative relevance for scholars concerned with the quality of democratic choice.

Keywords: political communication, electoral marketing, short-form video, voter behavior, perceived authenticity.

CSR IN THE BANKING SECTOR: IMPLICATIONS FOR CUSTOMER PERCEPTION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become an increasingly important element of modern business strategies, particularly in the context of globalization, environmental challenges, and rising stakeholder expectations. This study examines the role of CSR in the banking sector and explores how socially responsible practices influence customer perceptions and attitudes toward financial institutions. The research combines a theoretical analysis of CSR with an empirical investigation based on a customer survey. The literature review highlights the evolution of CSR from a predominantly philanthropic concept into a strategic management approach that contributes to long-term value creation, improved corporate reputation and stronger relationships with stakeholders. Previous empirical studies also demonstrate that strong CSR performance can influence investment decisions, reduce perceived risk, and enhance organizational competitiveness, particularly in sectors characterized by high levels of public trust, such as banking. The empirical component of the research is based on a questionnaire administered to 108 respondents who are clients of banking institutions. The survey aimed to assess customers' perceptions of CSR initiatives implemented by banks, their awareness of such initiatives and the potential influence of CSR on customer loyalty and recommendation behavior. The findings indicate that respondents generally perceive CSR as an important dimension of banking activity and expect banks to contribute to environmental protection, sustainable financing and community development. Furthermore, the results suggest that CSR engagement can strengthen customer trust and positively influence loyalty and recommendation intentions. Overall, the study confirms the growing strategic importance of CSR in the banking sector and highlights its potential to support sustainable development while consolidating relationships between financial institutions and their stakeholders.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility, banking industry, sustainable finance.

THE ETHICS OF PRECISION: BALANCING ALGORITHMIC POWER AND CONSUMER AUTONOMY

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Abstract. The increasing reliance on artificial intelligence in consumer analytics has enabled unprecedented levels of personalization in marketing, transforming how firms interact with and influence customers. By leveraging advanced data processing and predictive modeling, organizations can now tailor offerings, communication, and user experiences with remarkable precision. However, this intensification of AI-driven personalization raises critical ethical concerns regarding data privacy, informed consent, and consumer autonomy. As personalization becomes more pervasive and less transparent, the boundary between value creation and perceived manipulation blurs, generating tensions that affect consumer trust and long-term relational outcomes. This study explores the dynamic relationship between AI-driven personalization, consumers' ethical perceptions, and market performance outcomes. Grounded in privacy calculus theory and relationship marketing, it proposes an integrative conceptual framework through which individuals evaluate trade-offs between the perceived benefits of personalized services and the risks of data disclosure. Methodologically, the study adopts a quantitative design combining large-scale consumer data analysis with experimental survey methods, enabling behavioral observation and causal inference. Structural modeling techniques examine the interdependencies between personalization intensity, perceived intrusiveness, trust formation, and key performance indicators such as engagement, satisfaction, and purchase intention. The findings are expected to show that while hyper-personalization enhances engagement and sales performance, it may simultaneously erode trust when consumers perceive data practices as intrusive or opaque, revealing a critical inflection point beyond which marginal benefits are offset by ethical concerns. The study thus advances an ethical-performance trade-off model conceptualizing AI as both a driver of value creation and a source of relational risk. Theoretically, it contributes by embedding ethical considerations into performance-oriented personalization frameworks. Managerially, it offers insights for designing transparent, ethically responsible personalization strategies, emphasizing trust-building and data governance for sustaining competitive advantage.

Keywords: AI marketing, personalization, consumer analytics, ethics, data privacy.

MINITRACK: MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Chairs:

- **Katarina VALASKOVA, University of Zilina, Zilina, Slovak Republic**
- **Oana Matilda SABIE, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania**
- **Cezar-Petre SIMION, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania**

The objective of the minitrack entitled Management and Public administration is to bring together academicians with the representatives of the public and private organizations from different domains, such as: human resource management, public services, business environment, management of private organizations, public management, development of public strategies and public policies, project management, etc. The minitrack will allow both the presentation of new research from the participants and also discussions about the new challenges faced by the actors involved in the transformation of the two sectors in the 21st century sustainable growth context.

The main topics covered by the hereby call for papers are related (but not limited) to:

- Enhancing the capacity for innovation in Governance and Public Management;
- Technological challenges for public organizations sustainable growth;
- Innovation in the management of private organizations;
- New ways of collaborating and communicating between different stakeholders after COVID-19 (secure future communication systems and networks for public and private organizations; platforms for market support to SMEs, etc).

The minitrack welcomes papers and research in the previously four mentioned large topics but is also open for researchers and practitioners bringing research papers or use cases in other related topics falling under the broader context of Technological challenges for sustainable development of public and private organizations in the 21st century.

Assoc. prof. Dr. **Katarina VALASKOVA** teaches financial economics and risk management at the University of Zilina, Slovakia. She has long been devoted to the trilogy of fundamental financial management issues: i) prediction of the financial health of companies, ii) earnings management, and iii) quantification and diversification of risks. She has published 94 original scientific papers registered in international databases Web of Science and Scopus. 13 publications are included in the first two quartiles, several of them were published by renowned publishers such as Taylor & Francis, Springer, or Elsevier. Significant scientific-research and publishing activities, documented by exact and relevant scientometric values in the research field, are confirmed not only by citations to her publications, but also by wide international cooperation or several requested lectures at international scientific conferences organized by Bucharest University of Economic Studies (Romania), South-West University Neofit Rilski (Bulgaria), WSB University (Poland), Institute of Technology and Business (Czech Republic), and OTH Regensburg (Germany). In addition to publishing and scientific research, she has been engaged in review and editorial activities, as evidenced on Publons and membership in the editorial boards of several journals registered in the SCOPUS or Web of Science databases.

Oana Matilda SABIE studied Public Administration within the Faculty of Management at Bucharest University of Economic Studies and got a PhD degree in 2008 in economics, specialty of management within Bucharest University of Economic Studies (ASE). Before joining ASE, she collaborated with the Romanian Government, the Ministry for Public Information, within the Department of Communication and Public Image. Now she is a university lecturer and vice-dean of the Faculty of Administration and Public Management (FAMP), Department of Administration and Public Management. Her research interests cover the Management of Public Services and Organizational Behavior. During her teaching activity, she has published as an author or co-author 7 specialized books, 14 articles in journals indexed in international databases and 34 articles in the volumes of international conferences. She has been involved throughout her career in more than 23 research projects.

Cezar-Petre SIMION has a PhD in economics since 2008 in the specialty of management. He has been working for 15 years at the Faculty of Management within the Bucharest University of Economic Studies in the Management Department. During his teaching activity he has published as an author or co-author 6 specialized books, 31 articles in journals indexed in international databases, and 20 articles in the volumes of international conferences. He has been involved throughout his career in more than 50 scientific research projects. In parallel with his teaching activity, he worked for 10 years as a scientific researcher at INCD URBAN – INCERC, the period in which he was for 4 years the head of the Construction Economics department. Also, in parallel with the teaching activity, he was involved in the management teams within the Bucharest University of Economic Studies as director of the Research and Innovation Management Department and vice-dean of the Faculty of Management.

WHEN CREATIVITY STOPS BEING ENOUGH: HUMAN ADVANTAGE IN AI INTENSIVE WORKPLACES

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Abstract. The increasing integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into knowledge-based work environments is transforming the skill set necessary for effective human performance. With AI increasingly automating idea generation, analysis, and routine decision-making processes, it is essential to understand which human skills are necessary for an effective adaptation. This study examines the role of creative thinking, AI anxiety, and technology readiness in determining individuals' adaptability to AI and overall readiness for the future workforce. Expanding on human capital theory and on the complementarity between human and AI, we propose a structural model that highlights adaptability to AI as a mediating mechanism between psychological and technological factors, as well as overall readiness. Using established and validated scales for all constructs, we conducted a survey of a broad range of employees and university students, and analyzed the results using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling. The results show that creative thinking and technology readiness have positive effects on adaptability to AI, while AI anxiety has a negative effect on it. The adaptability to AI is a strong predictor of the overall readiness for the future workforce, and creative thinking and technology readiness have direct positive effects on it. These results advance the literature as they clarify the psychological and technological factors of AI adaptability, offering meaningful insights for organizations that are interested in developing human capabilities in today's workplaces.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, workforce readiness, creative thinking.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF EXTENDED REALITY TO INNOVATION IN TOURISM AND THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

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Abstract. The rapid development of digital technologies has generated significant transformations within the tourism and hospitality industries, encouraging the adoption of innovative solutions capable of improving service quality and improving tourist experiences. Among these technological advancements, extended reality (XR) has emerged as an important driver of innovation in tourism environments. The purpose of this study is to explore the contribution of extended reality technologies to innovation in tourism and the hospitality industry. The research combines a conceptual analysis of extended reality technologies with a case study focused on the potential integration of XR solutions within Radisson Blu Hotel Bucharest. The literature review highlights the defining characteristics, advantages, and limitations of XR technologies, as well as the rapid growth of the global extended reality market driven by technological advancements and increasing demand for immersive digital experiences. The study also examines the main areas of application of XR technologies in hospitality services, including digital marketing, reservation processes, tourist information, and in-room entertainment. The case study illustrates how extended reality technologies could enhance the guest experience, support innovative marketing strategies, and strengthen the competitive positioning of hotels within the tourism market. The conceptual framework developed in this research outlines several potential applications of XR technologies in hotel environments and evaluates their estimated impact on customer engagement, service quality, and brand perception. The findings emphasize the growing role of immersive technologies in shaping the future of tourism innovation and highlight the opportunities that XR integration creates for hotels seeking to adapt to the evolving expectations of digitally oriented travellers. The study contributes to the understanding of extended reality applications in hospitality and offers perspectives for the development of technologically advanced tourism services.

Keywords: extended reality, augmented reality, virtual reality, mixed reality, tourism innovation.

OCCUPATIONAL STRESSORS IN PUBLIC HEALTHCARE SETTINGS

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Abstract. Stressors in the healthcare system represent a major global concern, as they significantly affect the well-being of healthcare professionals and patient care quality. High workload, staff shortages, extended working hours, administrative demands, and the pressure of critical clinical decision-making are among the most important contributors to occupational stress, particularly in public healthcare systems where limited resources further intensify job demands. Within this context, understanding how stress is experienced and structured among healthcare workers has become an essential research priority. This topic's importance is reflected in its strong connection to burnout, job satisfaction, and patient safety. Recent research emphasizes that healthcare environments characterized by a chronic imbalance between demands and available resources are more likely to generate emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced professional efficacy. Therefore, identifying specific stressor patterns is crucial for developing effective organizational and individual-level interventions aimed at improving working conditions and maintaining workforce sustainability. This study investigates the main stressors perceived by healthcare professionals working in a public hospital in Bucharest. The research uses the Maslach Burnout Inventory to measure stress across three dimensions and is guided by the Job Demands–Resources model, which categorizes stressors into job demands, such as workload, time pressure, and emotional strain, and job resources, like organizational support, autonomy, and teamwork. The study examines the structure of these factors and how they relate to different dimensions of professional exhaustion. The findings suggest that organizational and emotional stressors, including high patient flow, suffering exposure, administrative overload, and ethical decision-making pressure, will emerge as the most prominent sources of stress. Job demands are also expected to be perceived as significantly more intense than available resources. The study contributes to a better empirical understanding of stressors in healthcare settings and supports targeted interventions development aimed at reducing stress and improving employee well-being and healthcare system performance.

Keywords: stress, healthcare, resources, workload.

WOMEN LEADERSHIP AND SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS PRACTICES: EVIDENCE FROM ROMANIAN SMEs

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Abstract. Gender diversity in leadership is associated to improved sustainability performance and innovation, but there is limited empirical evidence from small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in emerging European economies. This study has the objective to explore the relationship between women leadership and the adoption of sustainability practices in Romanian SMEs. The research investigates correlations between women leadership, sustainability, and innovation practices, using Spearman correlation analysis, based on primary data gathered through a survey. The results reveal statistically significant positive correlations across all variables, highlighting that higher women leadership presence is associated with higher engagement in sustainability initiatives. Findings suggest that women leadership acts as a facilitator for both sustainability and innovation integration within Romanian SMEs. The presence of women in leadership is associated with sustainable development, environmental responsibility, digitalization, and innovation of business strategies. Promoting women leadership within SMEs can be a viable path towards sustainable, competitive, and resilient economies. This study contributes to the scientific literature on gender diversity, sustainable management and women leadership by providing empirical evidence from an underexplored national context, offering guidance to policymakers, SME managers, researchers, and students interested in the field.

Keywords: women leadership, sustainability, innovation, Romanian SMEs.

BARRIERS TO FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN THE GREEN ECONOMY: EVIDENCE FROM A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract. Female leadership in business and the green economy remains constrained by a complex interplay of structural, sociocultural, and institutional barriers. This paper presents a systematic literature review based on the Scopus database, with the selection conducted in December 2025 using the keywords: "woman", "leader", "green business/economy", "barriers", and "limits". Following a rigorous filtering and data analysis process, 55 relevant sources were retained and examined. The findings reveal a multidimensional framework of barriers affecting women's access to and performance in leadership roles. Structural constraints include limited access to finance, particularly for green initiatives, high investment costs, and weak institutional and policy support. Sociocultural factors, such as persistent gender norms, social expectations, and exclusion from strategic decision-making processes, continue to restrict women's leadership opportunities. Additionally, gaps in education, training, and entrepreneurial self-efficacy further limit women's capacity to lead and innovate. At the organizational level, challenges such as weak professional networks, lack of inclusive governance structures, and organizational cultures insufficiently oriented toward sustainability exacerbate these barriers. The review also highlights constraints specific to the green economy, including technological gaps, inadequate digital infrastructure, and fragmented innovation ecosystems. Psychological and behavioral factors, along with market uncertainty and inconsistent policy environments, further reinforce these limitations. The paper contributes by integrating gender and sustainability perspectives into a comprehensive framework of barriers to female leadership. It also provides implications for policymakers, educators, and practitioners, emphasizing the need for inclusive policies, targeted financial mechanisms, and stronger support ecosystems.

Keywords: female leadership barriers, green economy, green entrepreneurship.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF PUBLIC SERVICES THROUGH SOCIAL NETWORKS: PERSPECTIVES ON INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND CO-PRODUCTION

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Abstract. In the context of the profound transformations generated by the digitalization of public administration, a rethinking of the way in which public institutions, respectively administrative authorities, interact with citizens is required. Social networks have become key tools for institutional communication, enabling rapid, transparent information dissemination and citizen participation. Studying the role of these platforms is topical and important for assessing how digitalization influences the functioning of public administration and for identifying modern solutions that lead to the efficiency of institutional activities, improve the quality of public services and promote a more responsive administration that is more connected to the community's needs. The importance of this topic results from citizens' increasingly demanding expectations regarding transparency, accessibility, and accountability of public services, and digitalization is emerging as an essential factor in meeting these needs, playing a crucial role in the development of a modern, efficient, and responsive administration. The purpose of the research is to analyze the role of using social networks in the provision of public services, through the processes of informing citizens, co-production of public services, two-way communication between public administration and the general public, as well as through the process of consolidating the institutional image. The research is a mixed one, using both questionnaire and interview. The interpretation of the collected results highlighted both the advantages of using social networks in the provision of public services and the limitations faced by public administration in adapting to these digital tools. Citizens recognize the essential role of these platforms in increasing the accessibility and transparency of administrative processes, facilitating more direct and rapid communication. Moreover, the employees interviewed reported various difficulties in the process of using social networks, like managing an intense flow of comments and messages, combating misinformation, and the need to constantly adapt to changes in social network algorithms.

Keywords: digital transformation, public services, social networks, co-production, communication.

AN ETHICAL APPROACH ONTO THE FORMS OF UNAPPROPRIATE CONDUCT IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract. Growing managerial interest in ethical issues has also influenced universities, where ethics is increasingly associated with institutional responsibility, social mission, and public trust. Ethical conduct strengthens universities' reputation and legitimacy, regardless of whether they operate in the public or private sector. This study aims to provide university managers with practical tools for addressing organizational ethical issues through ethics management and management ethics. Its main objective is to identify methods and practices that support ethical decision-making and contribute to a fair and responsible work environment. Among the most important organizational instruments are codes of ethics and related ethical structures, which encourage appropriate behaviour, prevent misconduct, and support teaching and research activities. Although public and private universities differ in their organizational models, both share the fundamental missions of education and research, making similar ethical measures applicable. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative component supports the selection and interpretation of data, while the quantitative analysis assesses the prevalence of ethical issues and identifies trends. Data collection included a literature review, case studies, and anonymous questionnaires. The study addresses three main questions: the prevalence of unethical conduct in universities, the gap between actual and formally reported misconduct, and the role of ethical instruments in managerial decision-making. The findings indicate that inappropriate conduct is generally a low-to-moderate phenomenon in universities, although it is often overemphasized by the media. The most frequently identified issues include abuse, harassment, favoritism, conflicts of interest, bullying, and mobbing. The results also reveal a noticeable difference between confidentially identified cases and those formally reported. Consequently, the study recommends strengthening ethical governance through a more effective use of codes of ethics, social responsibility policies, and organizational structures, such as ombudspersons, to support managers' decision-making processes and promote an ethical organizational culture.

Keywords: codes of ethics, ethical structure, ethical management, ethical conduct.

DIGITAL GOVERNANCE AND INNOVATION IN PUBLIC BANKING: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SOCIODIGITAL USABILITY AND INSTITUTIONAL TRUST IN TÜRKIYE AND ROMANIA

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Abstract. Amid rapid digital transformation of public services in the 21st century, mobile banking has emerged as a critical interface between citizens and state institutions, necessitating a move beyond purely technical evaluation models. This research aims to demonstrate that mobile banking usability in the public sector is not merely an engineering outcome, but a socially constructed phenomenon. The study seeks to explain why identical technical performances elicit divergent user evaluations across different national contexts by investigating the interplay between institutional trust, digital literacy, and sociocultural expectations. By integrating the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) with institutional trust theory and sociodigital behavior perspectives, the study addresses the gap in traditional frameworks that overlook how state ownership shapes user experience. Empirical analysis compares the public banking sectors of Türkiye and Romania. The Turkish dataset consists of 260,352 Google Play reviews (2014–2024), analyzed via supervised topic modeling and BERT-based sentiment analysis across eight usability dimensions: efficiency, satisfaction, effectiveness, error management, developability, ease of use, responsiveness, and accessibility. The Romanian study utilizes marketplace data for CEC Bank and Exim Banca Românească as of April 2025. Findings reveal a massive "engagement gap"; adjusted for population size, Turkish users post reviews at a rate 27 times higher than Romanians. While Romania is an EU member with 31% Internet banking penetration, Türkiye's 108.8 million mobile users indicate a greater digital maturity. The study shows that high aggregate ratings in Romania (CEC Bank's 4.8/5) often rest on a review base too thin for reliable profiling, whereas Turkish feedback is dominated by critical evaluations of error management (21.2%) and responsiveness (14.3%). These results contribute to public management by introducing the concept of "sociodigital usability." A primary limitation is the current data asymmetry, suggesting that future research should apply advanced sentiment modeling to the Romanian sector as its digital ecosystem matures.

Keywords: digital governance, public management, mobile banking, sociodigital usability, institutional trust.

SUSTAINABLE HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: LINKING EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

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Abstract. Sustainable human resource management (HRM) practices are increasingly recognized as strategic drivers of organizational performance, reflecting a shift from short-term efficiency toward long-term value creation grounded in employee well-being and organizational sustainability. As organizations face rising pressures related to workforce retention, engagement, and productivity, the integration of sustainability principles into HRM has emerged as a critical area of inquiry. However, despite growing interest, there remains limited empirical clarity regarding the mechanisms through which employee well-being translates into measurable performance outcomes. This study examines the relationship between employee well-being and organizational performance, with a particular focus on the role of sustainable HRM practices in shaping this linkage. Employing a quantitative research design, the study utilizes survey data collected from employees across multiple organizations and sectors. Statistical analysis techniques are applied to assess the relationships between key HR practices – such as work-life balance initiatives, employee development programs, and supportive leadership – and indicators of both well-being and productivity. The theoretical framework integrates HRM theory with sustainability perspectives, conceptualizing employee well-being as a multidimensional construct encompassing physical, psychological, and social dimensions. Within this framework, sustainable HRM practices are viewed as organizational investments that enhance human capital and foster long-term performance advantages. The findings are expected to demonstrate a strong positive correlation between employee well-being and performance outcomes, suggesting that organizations that prioritize well-being achieve higher levels of productivity, engagement, and overall effectiveness. Furthermore, the study anticipates identifying specific HR practices that are particularly influential in strengthening this relationship. The study contributes to HR literature by providing empirical evidence on the performance implications of sustainable workforce management. Practically, it offers actionable recommendations for organizations seeking to design HR strategies that balance employee well-being with performance objectives, thereby supporting sustainable organizational development in increasingly complex and competitive environments today.

Keywords: HRM, sustainability, employee well-being, performance, organizational behavior.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION: REDEFINING E-GOVERNMENT FOR A SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT FUTURE – A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract. Artificial intelligence is rapidly becoming a structural component of public administration, redefining how governments design services, allocate resources, and engage citizens. Within the European Union, this shift overlaps with the twin digital and green transitions, placing e-government at the crossroads of innovation, sustainability, and institutional resilience. Although the literature has extensively examined digital public administration as a vehicle of modernization, the integration of artificial intelligence into the e-government architecture remains fragmented, with limited conceptual clarity regarding its functional roles, sustainability implications, and governance risks. A coherent framework is needed to understand how artificial intelligence reconfigures public value creation and to inform policy responses that protect accountability, equity, and public trust. The paper addresses two research questions: how is artificial intelligence currently embedded in the e-government architectures of European Union member states and how can artificial intelligence-enabled e-government be aligned with sustainability and resilience objectives. The methodology combines a systematic literature review of publications issued between 2020 and 2026 with a comparative qualitative analysis of selected European Union digital public administration initiatives, supported by secondary data from the European Commission, Eurostat, and the Digital Economy and Society Index. The analysis yields a typology of four artificial intelligence functions in e-government – predictive, allocative, interactive, and regulatory – each with distinct sustainability and resilience implications. It further identifies three critical governance risks –algorithmic opacity, data sovereignty erosion, and digital inequality – that may undermine the legitimacy of artificial intelligence-driven public services. The paper contributes an original conceptual framework linking artificial intelligence functions to public value outcomes, advances the debate on technological challenges for sustainable growth in public organizations, and formulates policy recommendations for an inclusive, accountable, and future-oriented e-government model, thereby enhancing the capacity for innovation in European governance.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, e-government, public administration, sustainability, resilience.

RETHINKING THE PUBLIC MISSION OF UNIVERSITIES: PUBLIC VERSUS PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract. This study examines how public and private universities conceptualize and operationalize their public mission through formal academic ethics codes. In the context of increasing marketization and globalization of higher education, institutions face growing pressure to balance traditional public-good responsibilities – such as knowledge production, social inclusion, and academic integrity – with competitive and performance-driven logics. The topic is highly relevant within current higher education research, as recent studies highlight a growing tension between institutional differentiation and convergence in governance standards. International frameworks such as the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and the OECD guidelines have intensified the standardization of ethical norms, raising questions about whether public and private institutions still differ meaningfully in their ethical governance structures. The research adopts a qualitative comparative content analysis of ethics codes from a purposive sample of European public and private universities. The study is guided by four research questions: (1) What structural and thematic differences exist between ethics codes in public and private universities? (2) How do these codes reflect core dimensions of the public mission, including integrity, transparency, equity, and accountability? (3) To what extent are ethical norms clearly defined and enforceable? (4) Is there evidence of institutional convergence under international research integrity frameworks? The main findings suggest a general convergence in the formal structure of ethics codes across institutional types, largely driven by international standards. However, differences persist in the depth of implementation, enforcement mechanisms, and the degree of institutional accountability embedded in practice. While ethical principles are widely shared, their operationalization varies significantly across contexts. The study contributes to the field by providing a systematic comparative framework for evaluating ethics governance in higher education and by highlighting the gap between formal convergence and practical implementation in public versus private universities.

Keywords: academic ethics codes, public universities, private universities, public mission.

DECISION AUGMENTATION AND ALGORITHMIC GOVERNANCE IN HIGH-STRESS ENVIRONMENTS: A COMPLEX ADAPTIVE SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE ON MANAGERIAL RATIONALITY

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Abstract. The rapid integration of artificial intelligence into organizational processes is reshaping managerial rationality and performance dynamics in high-stress environments. Existing research emphasizes efficiency gains from AI adoption but inadequately addresses how decision augmentation transforms managerial behavior under sustained uncertainty and systemic complexity – a gap with direct consequences for AI governance policy. Drawing on Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) theory, this study conceptualizes algorithmic governance and decision augmentation as emergent properties of high-stress team performance, producing hybrid decision regimes – organizational configurations in which human rationality and algorithmic logic co-evolve under structural and cognitive constraints. A sequential mixed-methods design combines qualitative insights from fourteen managers across four high-stress institutional sectors in Romania with quantitative data from 100 professionals, analyzed using PLS-SEM in SmartPLS 4. The findings confirm a governance-mediated performance architecture through five structural paths. Decision augmentation predicts hybrid decision regime quality ($\beta = 0.849$, $R^2 = 0.720$) and situational awareness ($\beta = 0.438$). Hybrid decision regimes shape perceived decision adaptability ($\beta = 0.841$, $R^2 = 0.707$) and situational awareness ($\beta = 0.462$), while perceived decision adaptability is the sole proximal predictor of operational performance ($\beta = 0.824$, $R^2 = 0.679$). Augmentation influences performance exclusively through this sequential chain ($\beta = 0.588$); all paths are significant at $p < 0.001$. These findings reframe hybrid decision regimes as active governance assets and establish perceived decision adaptability as the cognitive mechanism linking governance quality to operational outcomes. The study extends CAS-based performance management theory to algorithmically mediated environments, with implications for resilience, accountability, and governance design in AI-driven organizations.

Keywords: decision augmentation, algorithmic governance, complex adaptive systems, managerial rationality, high-stress environments.

EVALUATING INCLUSION THROUGH QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN EDUCATION, HEALTHCARE, AND THE WORKPLACE

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Abstract. This article examines how quality management, as applied in three key areas – health, education, and the organizational environment – influences social inclusion within the Romanian labor market. Given the current context, in which social equity and digital transformation have gained momentum, social inclusion is gradually becoming a key indicator of service quality and internal regulations. Thus, this study aims to assess the degree of inclusion perceived by individuals working in fields such as education and health, including those from vulnerable groups, to determine the quality of education, health services, and organizational regulations oriented toward inclusion and diversity. Methodologically, we conducted quantitative research using a Likert-scale questionnaire distributed to a representative sample of respondents from the educational sector – primarily students and teachers – who are part of an organizational setting and also utilize health services. After collecting the data, we used multiple linear regression to analyze and interpret it, highlighting the relationships among the variables: the degree of inclusion as the dependent variable and the quality of education, organizational quality, and the quality of health services as independent variables. Based on the results obtained after processing the data in IBM SPSS, we observed a significant influence of the quality of educational processes, organizational practices, and access to health services on the degree of inclusion in the Romanian labor market. The conclusions highlight the need to implement mechanisms that continuously monitor social inclusion within the healthcare system, the education system, and the organizational system, while simultaneously aligning quality standards across these domains.

Keywords: perceived inclusion, quality management, healthcare accessibility, organizational policies, inclusive education.

CORRUPTION AND THE QUALITY OF PUBLIC EDUCATION: EVIDENCE FROM BALKAN YOUTH SATISFACTION

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Abstract. Education satisfaction is a key indicator of the perceived quality and effectiveness of educational systems, particularly in contexts marked by social inequality and governance challenges. Recent research has emphasized the role of structural and institutional factors, such as socioeconomic status, perceived corruption, and regional disparities, in shaping public attitudes toward education. However, empirical analyses that jointly examine these influences remain limited. This study addresses this gap by analyzing the determinants of education satisfaction among young people in Southeast Europe. The study uses data from the Youth Studies Southeast Europe 2023/2024 survey conducted by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. Education satisfaction is measured as an ordinal dependent variable, and an ordinal logistic regression model is employed to assess the effects of perceived corruption in education, education status, social grade, rural–urban residence, age, and gender. The central research question asks „How does perceived corruption in education affect education satisfaction among young people in Southeast Europe?" The findings indicate that perceptions of corruption in education, social grade, rural–urban residence, and gender are statistically significant predictors, while age has no significant effect. Lower perceived corruption is associated with higher satisfaction, whereas individuals in lower social grades are less likely to report high satisfaction compared to those in the highest category. Respondents in rural and less urbanized areas report higher satisfaction than city residents, and gender differences are also observed. Education status shows a partial effect, with only intermediate categories differing significantly from the highest group. These results underscore the importance of structural inequalities, governance perceptions, and spatial context in shaping education satisfaction. They suggest that policymakers should prioritize reducing corruption, addressing socioeconomic disparities, and considering regional differences to improve educational experiences and outcomes.

Keywords: education system, corruption in education, quantitative analysis, youth.

DIGITAL HEALTH SERVICES SOLUTIONS FOR MORE EFFECTIVE THERAPEUTIC MANAGEMENT

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Abstract. Digitalization is transforming healthcare delivery and therapeutic management through the use of mobile technologies, digital platforms, and data-based tools for diagnosis, treatment, and patient monitoring. This research examines the benefits of digitization in therapeutic management, focusing on patient engagement, data-driven decision making, and communication among healthcare providers. Based on a review of recent literature, the study highlights that digital tools, such as mobile health applications, telemedicine, electronic health records, and clinical decision-support systems, can improve healthcare quality and accessibility. Patients benefit from greater involvement in their own care through self-monitoring, easier access to health information, and personalized feedback, which may strengthen treatment adherence. For healthcare providers, digitalization supports faster and more informed decisions through better use of patient data and clinical guidelines. It can also improve coordination and communication among professionals, contributing to more efficient and integrated care. At the organizational level, digital systems may enhance operational efficiency and resource management. However, important challenges remain, including unequal access to technology, digital skills gaps, privacy concerns, and fragmented systems. Addressing these barriers is essential for successful implementation. The research contributes to understanding how digitization can improve therapeutic management and offers insights for policymakers, healthcare managers, and practitioners seeking more efficient and patient-centered healthcare systems.

Keywords: digital health, therapeutic management, patient engagement, healthcare innovation, clinical decision support.

PRIVACY CHALLENGES IN THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF HEALTHCARE SERVICES

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Abstract. The increasing use of digital technologies in healthcare has significantly changed how medical information is managed and how services are delivered. Electronic records, online platforms, and integrated information systems can improve efficiency, support better clinical decisions, and provide patients with easier access to their own health data. These developments create important opportunities for modern healthcare systems, but they also raise concerns regarding privacy and data protection. The current research explores the challenges of data privacy and security in the context of healthcare digitalization. As medical information becomes easier to store, transfer, and share, risks such as unauthorized access, cyberattacks, data leaks, and misuse of sensitive information become more relevant. Because health records contain personal and confidential data, maintaining security is essential for both legal compliance and public trust. Drawing on recent academic literature, the study indicates that concerns over privacy and security can reduce confidence in digital healthcare systems among patients and healthcare professionals. A lack of trust may slow the adoption of new technologies and limit their potential benefits. In addition, security incidents may increase administrative pressure, stress, and workload for healthcare staff. The findings underline that digital progress in healthcare must be accompanied by strong security frameworks, clear regulations, employee training, and continuous monitoring of information systems. Effective governance and awareness programs are necessary to protect sensitive data and encourage a greater acceptance of digital solutions. This research contributes to current discussions on sustainable healthcare innovation by examining how privacy and security issues influence digital transformation. The results are relevant for policymakers, healthcare managers, and technology developers seeking to combine innovation with responsible data protection.

Keywords: data privacy, cybersecurity, healthcare services, digital transformation, patient trust.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND IT RECRUITMENT: EMERGING COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS IN THE ROMANIAN LABOR MARKET

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Abstract. This paper explores how AI adoption is influencing IT organizational profiles and the competencies that are prioritized, and how recruitment strategies should adapt to these changes. Drawing on a multi-method research strategy, including a review of recent literature and qualitative insights from IT recruiters and HR professionals in Romania, the study highlights a structural shift from single specialized competencies toward hybrid and multi competency profiles. The integration of Artificial Intelligence into organizational processes is transforming the structure of competencies required in the actual business environment. The automation of repetitive tasks, and the automation of operational workflows are transforming both technical and functional roles, generating significant pressure on recruitment strategies. Traditional technical qualifications remain important, but emerging competencies like the familiarity with Artificial Intelligence tools and continuous learning are becoming decisive factors in the recruitment process. This has transformed the IT labor market from an employee-driven market, as it was in previous years, into an employer-driven market, where demand for talent exceeds supply. The study highlights that successful adaptation of IT recruitment to the new AI era, involves not only evaluating technical skills but also assessing candidates' capacity to thrive in AI-integrated roles. By providing empirical insights from the Romanian IT publications, this research contributes to understanding how the actual labor market demands and HR strategies evolve under AI-driven transformation.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, IT recruitment, workforce transformation.

EXCELLENCE QUALITY MODELS AND HUMAN RESOURCE SUSTAINABILITY IN ROMANIAN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract. Quality management and excellence models such as Total Quality Management, European Foundation for Quality Management, and Common Assessment Framework come as an answer to the evolved citizen needs for improved quality services of the public sector. As service performance depends on the stability and capabilities of public employees, there is a growing interest in the literature to examine the impact of these models on the sustainability of human resources. Thus, the objective of this article is to identify the conceptual links between quality management and excellence models and human resource sustainability in public sector institutions. The methodology followed in the research is based on secondary data analysis, it integrates academic literature review and structured document analysis on Romanian public institutions which implemented a quality management and excellence model. The study of the selected literature and related information that is exposed in this investigation indicate employee involvement, continuous learning, and leadership commitment as key dimensions for human resources sustainability. Although, the alignment between excellence frameworks and systematic human resource sustainability strategies in Romanian public institutions is limited and is inconsistently applied. The value of this research lies in the reinterpretation of excellence models not just as instruments for improving the quality of public services, but as potential mechanisms to support employee retention and institutional attractiveness in the public sector.

Keywords: CAF model, HRM, public sector.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN ROMANIA'S PUBLIC SECTOR: CASE STUDIES, EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVES, AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE INFERENCES

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Abstract. Digital transformation is currently a strategic means to modernize the public administration in Western Europe and USA. Although this represents a confirmed necessity across these regions, in Romania and Eastern Europe, this area is underexplored, given that its effects on organizational culture and – especially – employee motivation in the workplace remain very little explored or not analyzed at all. We have five detailed case studies – Cluj-Napoca City Hall's integrated document management system, the national e-Health platform, the National Agency for Fiscal Administration portal, the online Trade Register, and Bucharest City Hall's document management system – that serve as demonstration for the digital transformation's benefits and advantages: reductions in paperwork processing times by 30-40%, leading to increases in citizen satisfaction of 25–30% and up to a 40% improvement in perceived transparency among citizens. These quantitative data are supported by citizen surveys (n=136). An additional study is analyzing 92 semi-structured interviews with public employees, and was processed via NVivo through an open, axial, and, of course, selective coding. Following these studies, six key themes emerged: enhancements in workplace productivity and efficiency, technological issues and training barriers, data security concerns, implications for work-life balance, organizational adaptability, and the need for cultural transformation. The results indicate that although digital transformation significantly improves the administrative performance and the public services centred on citizens, the long-term sustainability requires simultaneously a significant investment in the development of the workforce, of the infrastructure and a new approach in the cultural change management. The study contributes to e-government scholarship while providing empirical evidence from an Eastern European context and offers practical policy directions as to how to balance the technological adoption and implementation with strategies having the people as the center of their focus in public institutions, be it the employees or the citizens.

Keywords: digital transformation, e-government, public administration, organizational culture, employee motivation.

THE FUTURE OF ELITE MILITARY ORGANIZATIONS: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE ON MOTIVATION-BASED TALENT RETENTION MODELS

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Abstract. Elite military organizations face significant challenges in talent retention in a geopolitical context characterized by intense competition for highly skilled professionals. This literature review study systematically examines the existing academic corpus on motivation-based talent retention models in elite military structures, offering a comparative global perspective. The review of specialist literature identifies the evolution of theoretical and empirical approaches in military human resource management, analyzing the transition from traditional paradigms centered on financial compensation to multidimensional models that integrate intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors. The study synthesizes international research exploring the impact of continuous professional development, decision-making autonomy, team cohesion, value alignment, and merit recognition on the decision to remain in service. Comparative analysis reveals significant differences between models applied in diverse cultural contexts: Western approaches that privilege individualization and flexibility, versus Asian models that emphasize collective cohesion and organizational honor. The examined literature also highlights the growing role of technology, work-life balance, and specialized training opportunities in elite personnel retention. The study contributes to a comprehensive understanding of factors influencing retention in high-performance and high-risk organizational contexts, offering a useful conceptual framework for public administration decision-makers. The conclusions suggest the necessity of adapting talent management strategies to the motivational profile of new generations of military professionals and to the dynamics of the contemporary security environment.

Keywords: talent retention, elite military organizations, motivation, human resource management.

THE IMPACT OF TAXPAYERS' VOLUNTARY BEHAVIOR ON THE ACHIEVEMENT OF PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

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Abstract. The impact of voluntary taxpayer behavior on achieving performance indicators (KPIs) of public tax services is profoundly positive, being a major strategic objective for optimizing revenue collection and reducing administration costs. The voluntary compliance of taxpayers to fulfill legal obligations (declaration and payment) correctly and on time, without being constrained by enforcement measures, leads to an increase in the following performance indicators: increasing the degree of tax collection, reducing the fiscal gap, optimizing administration costs and improving the relationship with taxpayers. Maximizing the positive impact on performance is carried out through tax education and tax assistance, the digitalization of tax services and the professional development of civil servants, which will determine an increase in the level of taxpayer trust in public tax services. Voluntary behavior is a strategic "resource" for tax public services, as when taxpayers comply "voluntarily", performance indicators improve, as resources are redirected from repressive control to facilitation, resulting in higher revenues at lower costs.

Keywords: performance indicators, public services, taxation.

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING EFFICIENCY MEASURES IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR, AS AN ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM

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Abstract. Any reform requires an effort to modernize the public sector, by reducing costs and increasing the quality of services offered to citizens. Thus, the aim is to introduce market mechanisms, such as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), to measure the success of public policies based on results, not just procedures, and to develop the sector for digitizing repetitive and manual operations with automated processes. In practice, efficiency measures have a financial impact, essential for reducing the budget deficit, influence the level of performance, by introducing new standards based on digital skills and oriented towards results, which leads to innovation in the public sector and promotes the experimentation of new solutions that have obtained positive results in the private sector. The existing "technological islands" in the public sector will communicate through an IT system with a communicative and unitary role, unitary websites, and/or unique platforms "friendly" to taxpayers and civil servants. The unitary implementation of efficiency measures in the public sector, as an administrative reform, is done gradually, through "pivot" public entities, which will use "administrative flexibility", meritocracy, selection, and structural reorganization. Institutional auditing, "horizontal" structures, outsourcing of services offered to citizens will take into account political and social opportunities and threats and will lay the foundations for a redesign of the entire system of processes, namely, strategic vision, organizational culture, motivation, accountability and innovation. Public management must be active and participatory, becoming the foundation of administrative reform, alongside all components of the public sector, becoming a symbiosis between behavior and responsibility and not one decided and practiced in a restricted and unknown framework, which would lead to a decrease in productivity, to "hidden" costs for the budget and to the degradation of the public service-citizen relationship.

Keywords: public management, public services, performance indicators, administrative reform.

TRUSTED CROSS-BORDER DIGITAL SERVICE PROCUREMENT IN EUROPE: GOVERNANCE ARCHITECTURE AND OPERATIONAL WORKFLOWS OF THE DOME MARKETPLACE

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BEIA Consult International, Bucharest, Romania

George SUCIU
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Abstract. This paper examines how federated digital marketplaces, specifically the DOME Marketplace, support trusted and procurement-ready access to cloud, edge, and AI services in Europe. It addresses persistent challenges including marketplace fragmentation, limited cross-border visibility, and difficulties in assessing service trustworthiness and compliance. Based on a qualitative case study of DOME's operational model, the findings show DOME structures service publication for federated visibility, embeds credential-based trust and compliance, and supports flexible procurement pathways. DOME is conceptualized as a federated governance and procurement environment, offering a design-oriented contribution to the literature on cross-border digital procurement.

Keywords: DOME, federated marketplace, platform governance, trust and compliance.

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT IN MODERN BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract. In the context of rapid economic change, technological advancement, and intensified global competition, strategic management has become a central determinant of business success. This paper examines the role of management in modern business organizations, with particular emphasis on strategic decision-making, organizational efficiency, and sustainable value creation. Management is analyzed as a coordinated process that aligns organizational resources, capabilities, and objectives with changing market conditions. The relevance of this topic is reflected in the growing pressure on companies to remain competitive while simultaneously addressing challenges related to innovation, productivity, and human capital management. In contemporary business environments, traditional managerial approaches are increasingly inadequate, making strategic and adaptive management essential for long-term performance and stability. The research methodology is based on qualitative analysis, incorporating a review of key management concepts and an examination of business-oriented strategic practices. The study focuses on core managerial functions and strategic tools that support effective planning, leadership, and control within organizations. The findings indicate that firms achieving superior performance are characterized by clearly defined strategies, effective leadership structures, and strong alignment between organizational goals and market demands. Strategic management enhances decision-making quality, improves operational efficiency, and strengthens organizational resilience in uncertain economic conditions. This paper contributes to the field of business economics by providing insights into the strategic role of management in contemporary organizations and by highlighting key factors that influence sustainable competitiveness and long-term business success.

Keywords: strategic management, leadership, organizational efficiency, competitiveness, business economics.

MINITRACK: BUSINESS AND TOURISM

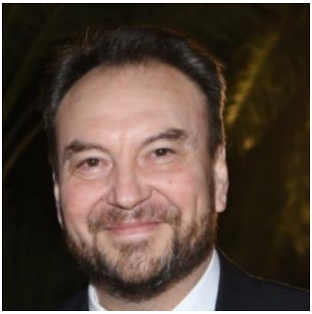
Chairs:

- **Mike IVANOF, University of the Fraser Valley, Abbotsford, Canada**
- **Gabriela ȚIGU, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania**
- **Olimpia STATE, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania**

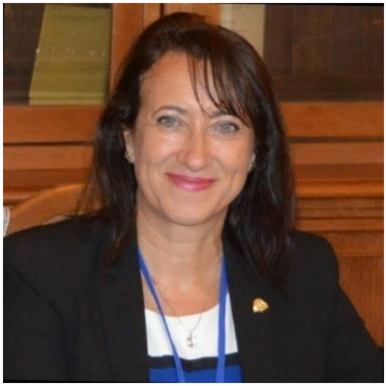
Recent economic and social changes show how adaptable the business environment is to radical and sudden changes. Some companies are able to either adapt harder or leave the market, while others manage to reinvent themselves quickly, using management strategies that are often adopted along the way. While governments and international institutions are looking for solutions to support businesses, workers, and communities, companies are having to develop new business models, reinvent their HR policies, and even reposition themselves to meet market demands. Even business models are taking on new dimensions. On the other hand, current global developments have once again shown that the technology-based but sustainable business model must remain the key to development and recovery.

The main topics covered by the hereby call for papers are related (but not limited) to:

- Systems and methods for revitalizing business and education
- Development of tourism communities through digitalization
- Redevelopment planning in the context of a tourism community
- Assessment of socio-economic and environmental sustainability
- Systems in relation to climate change
- Innovation as an alternative approach to improve sustainability
- The promotion of economic recovery
- The business model in the context of technology
- The impact of digitalization on the economy
- The metaverse concept beyond entertainment
- Change, globalization, and economic recovery
- Strategies for managing structural change

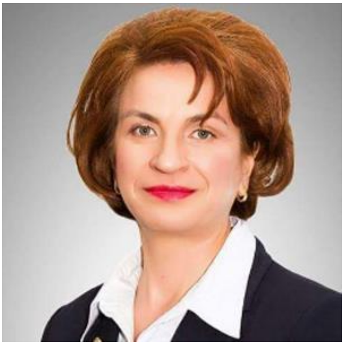


Dr. **Mike (Mihai) IVANOF**, CGA, BSc. Eng, MBA, DBA/PhD, is a distinguished Associate Professor at the University of the Fraser Valley's School of Business, where he leverages his extensive academic and professional background to shape the next generation of business leaders. With a strategic mindset that transcends national boundaries, Dr. Ivanof excels in teaching critical subjects such as Strategy and Strategic Management, Innovation Management, International Business, International Marketing, and Entrepreneurship. His global perspective is not only a hallmark of his teaching but also informs his research and program development initiatives. In his previous role as Director of the School of Business, Dr. Ivanof demonstrated a remarkable ability to conceptualize, design, and implement advanced academic programs, including Master's degrees, MBAs, Executive MBAs, and Global MBAs. His expertise in program management is complemented by a strong foundation in finance, budgeting, and performance management, enabling him to align educational offerings with current global market demands. Dr. Ivanof's commitment to fostering innovation and entrepreneurship is evident in his active involvement in curriculum development and his dedication to enhancing student learning experiences through practical applications of theory. Dr. Ivanof's research interests and projects often focus on pressing global issues, positioning him as a thought leader in the fields of international business and strategic management. His proficiency in data analysis and portfolio management further enhances his ability to guide students and professionals alike in navigating the complexities of today's business landscape. Through his multifaceted role at the University of the Fraser Valley, Dr. Ivanof continues to inspire and equip future business leaders with the skills necessary to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world. Dr. Mike Ivanof is a Global citizen with a career that spans more than a dozen countries on four continents. His career combines substantive industry experience in finance and business development, and over a decade in academia. His academic research interests revolve mainly around Corporate Governance and Corporate Social Responsibility.



Gabriela ȚIGU, Professor, Ph.D., is the Dean of the Faculty of Business and Tourism at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies since 2020 and Professor and PhD Coordinator in the Department of Tourism and Geography. Her areas of specialization are Tourism Operations Management, Destination Management, Ecotourism and Sustainable Development, Business Ethics, and Human Resources Management in Tourism. She is the author of 22 published books, more than 150 articles and scientific papers, and 34 national and international research assignments dealing with tourism issues. She has successfully managed two postgraduate programs, namely Strategic Hospitality Management and Manager of Tourism Destination.

Gabriela Tigu is also a tourism journalist and Vice President of the Tourism Press Club FIJET Romania; member of the Advisory Board of the Romanian Competition Council, Director of the Academic Association for Research in Tourism and Services CACTUS; Member of CNATDCU (National Council for the Accreditation of Titles, Diplomas, and Certificates), since 2011; Member of the Transylvanian Thermal Tourism Cluster; Advisor to the Romanian Ministry of Tourism, 2011 and 2019-2020; and Member of the World Committee for Tourism Ethics within UNWTO, between 2019 and 2023.



Olimpia STATE is a professor at the Department of Tourism and Geography, Faculty of Business and Tourism at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, specialized in Human Resources Management in Tourism, involved into national and international projects, member of international and national research teams. She graduated from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies with a bachelor's and a master's degree.

The same university awarded her a PhD in business administration in 2001. She has 30 years of expertise in university teaching and research, and she frequently gives lectures as a specialist in human resources management, operational tourism techniques, and organizational culture. She has become a member of the Faculty Council since 2008; as a former Chancellor within the Faculty of Commerce in 2008-2012 and also a Vice-Dean in charge with researching activity and international relationship of the Faculty of Commerce (the Faculty of Business and Tourism at present) since 2012 until today.

TOURISM AND INNER AREAS IN SARDINIA (ITALY): A QUANTITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF DESTINATION PROFILES AND TERRITORIAL PERIPHERALITY

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Abstract. Characterized by municipalities located at varying distances from urban centers (and therefore from services and infrastructure) as well as by distinctive geographical and socio-economic diversity, Italy's inner areas are strongly rooted in local identity and heritage, calling for appropriate forms of responsible valorization. This issue is particularly relevant in contexts such as Sardinia, an island that stands out internationally for its seasonal and coastal tourism, but hosts a substantial number of inner areas that embody the core of its insular heritage. Considering Sardinia as a case study, the present exploratory research investigated the relationship between municipal tourism vocation (as defined by the Italian National Institute of Statistics - Istat) and the degree of territorial peripherality, as defined within the framework of the National Strategy for Inner Areas. Using a quantitative research design applied to all municipalities in the region (N = 377), contingency analyses between tourism categories and peripherality levels were conducted through Chi-square-based association tests, allowing for the identification of differentiated territorial patterns. In addition, correspondence analysis was applied to further explore the structure of the associations between peripherality levels (intermediate, peripheral, and ultra-peripheral municipalities) and tourism categories. Overall, the results suggested a structured yet non-uniform relationship between tourism typology and degree of peripherality. Intermediate and peripheral municipalities were predominantly associated with generic or non-specialized tourism categories, whereas ultra-peripheral municipalities appeared more strongly linked to forms of tourism rooted in territorial specificity. Further research is therefore recommended to support governance approaches that are consciously oriented toward the stewardship of regional heritage in inner areas that convey more authentic territorial identities.

Keywords: tourism categories, inner areas classification, correspondence analysis.

WORKFORCE, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF DESTINATION MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATIONS IN RURAL TOURISM: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract. Rural tourism is increasingly recognized as a means of revitalizing rural areas by providing authentic visitor experiences while supporting local economies and traditions. However, the sector faces significant structural and organizational challenges. This paper explores the current dynamics and future prospects of rural tourism in Romania through a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews, which allowed the researchers to obtain open answers and additional details where respondents considered them necessary. The study, carried out within the Erasmus+ project „#AGRI&TOUR - Boosting Agritourism with Youth Power", analyzes three fundamental pillars: workforce, community involvement, and public-private collaboration. The main conclusions indicate a major discrepancy between the authentic potential of destinations and the quality of services provided, caused by a lack of professional training and poor digitalization. The results also reveal structural barriers such as weak distribution systems and insufficient promotion at the international level. The strategic importance of Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) as a link between authorities and the business environment is highlighted. The paper contributes to the ongoing debate on rural tourism development by emphasizing the need for coordinated strategies combining professional education, digital transformation and community-based initiatives. It also recommends adopting good practice models to prevent the loss of rural identity due to excessive modernization.

Keywords: rural tourism, community involvement, professional education, digital transformation, destination management organizations.

THE ROMANIAN WINE SECTOR: STRUCTURE, CONCENTRATION AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR WINE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract. This article aims to evaluate the potential directions and development prospects for wine companies, component area of agrotourism in Romania, country where winemaking represents an historic and traditional activity. This article analyzes the current state of the wine tourism sector, focusing on the number of companies involved and providing several assessments based on data available from the Topfirme.com database. In Romania, there are two NACE codes relevant to the wine industry: "121 - Grape cultivation" and "1102 - Manufacture of wine from grapes". Under these 2 NACE codes 575 companies are registered, generating 550.1 million euros turnover and 5,033 employes. For the NACE codes: "121 - Grape cultivation", the top five companies represent 48,86% of the total turnover and for the NACE code "1102 - Manufacture of wine from grapes", the top five companies represent 72% of the total turnover. These findings indicate significant market concentration, particularly in wine production. These results suggest that wine tourism, a subsector of agrotourism, represents a viable direction of development for the multitude of small and medium-sized enterprises engaged in cultivation or manufacture of wine. Diversification into tourism-related activities could enhance their competitiveness and economic sustainability. As presented in Global WineTourism Report 2025 (a study byHochschule Geisenheim University), out of 1,310 wineries from 47 countries, 88% offer wine tourism activities, with 46% having more than 10 years of experience in this field, being small wineries. This fact is observed also at the top Romanian's wine companies, regarding the turnover, which includes this activity in their offer.

Keywords: wine companies, agrotourism, development prospects.

THE IMPACT OF TRAVEL INSURANCE ON PERCEIVED SAFETY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL COMFORT IN INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

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Abstract. This study examines how travel insurance influences international travelers' perceptions of safety and psychological comfort. It focuses on the motivational and perceptual factors that shape consumer behavior, as well as the impact of past experiences and sociodemographic characteristics on decision-making. The study used a quantitative methodology with a descriptive and explanatory approach. Data were collected through a direct survey using an electronic self-administered questionnaire among a non-probabilistic sample of Romanian residents (n = 100). Research hypotheses were tested using statistical techniques, including Spearman's rank correlation, Chi-square tests, and independent samples t-tests. The results indicate that the respondents had a high level of risk awareness and the primary reason for purchasing travel insurance was medical security. Previous negative travel experiences are strongly positively correlated with both purchase frequency and future purchase intention. While price sensitivity remains consistent across consumer segments, occupational status significantly affects perceived utility and risk awareness. The findings highlight that travel insurance plays a crucial role in enhancing psychological security by reducing anxiety and increasing perceived control during international travel. Consumer behavior reflects a balance between subjective risk perception and economic rationality. The study provides practical recommendations for improving communication strategies about medical coverage and for clearly distinguishing between travel insurance and the European Health Insurance Card.

Keywords: travel insurance, risk management, psychological comfort, EHIC versus private insurance.

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BUSINESS PILLARS OF EMERGING TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION AMONG GENERATION Z: EVIDENCE FROM A UTAUT-BASED STUDY

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Abstract. Artificial intelligence, automation, and digital platforms are transforming service sectors and changing the way our up-and-coming generations are interacting with the digital environments. This research examines the factors that influence technology adoption of Generation Z students and young professionals performing service-oriented academic and professional tasks. The study is based on the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) model which examines relationships between performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, facilitating conditions, behavioral intention, and actual use behavior. The data were collected using an online questionnaire completed by 215 respondents from the Faculty of Business and Tourism at Bucharest University of Economic Studies, employing the partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) method. The findings show that performance expectancy and social influence positively affect behavioral intention, while behavioral intention and facilitating conditions significantly impact actual use behavior. In contrast, effort expectancy does not significantly influence adoption intention. The results also reveal gender differences: female respondents place greater emphasis on perceived usefulness, while male respondents are more sensitive to effort expectancy and facilitating conditions. The study extends the applicability of the UTAUT framework to emerging digital technologies and offers practical insights for organizations and educational institutions undergoing digital transformation.

Keywords: emerging technologies, UTAUT, technology adoption, service industries, Generation Z.

BUSINESS RESILIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION IN COMMERCE DURING GEOPOLITICAL CRISES: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract. This paper provides a systematic literature review of the relationship between geopolitical crises and the adoption of emerging technologies in commerce, over the period 2000-2025. The primary objective is to understand how external shocks influence technological innovation and diffusion in commercial contexts. Methodologically, the study is based on a structured search of the Web of Science database, resulting in a final sample of 109 relevant articles, analyzed through both quantitative and qualitative lenses. The findings reveal a rapidly growing research field, particularly after 2020, driven by major global events such as the US-China trade war and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The systematic literature review highlights five dominant thematic areas: trade wars and geoeconomic rivalry; technology, innovation, and control; geopolitical risks and economic resilience; war, security, and military technology; and institutions, governance, and public opinion. The review demonstrates that geopolitical crises act as both catalysts and constraints for technological adoption. On the one hand, they accelerate investments in critical technologies – such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, semiconductors, and green energy – enhancing firm resilience and strategic autonomy. On the other hand, they introduce barriers including regulatory fragmentation, restricted access to technologies, and increased uncertainty. This paper offers an integrated, interdisciplinary framework that connects geopolitics, innovation, and commerce dynamics. Critical research gaps are identified, and a research agenda is proposed.

Keywords: geopolitical crises, commerce, technology, systematic literature review.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS A DRIVER OF E-COMMERCE TRANSFORMATION: INSIGHTS FROM A ROMANIAN COMPANY

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Abstract. Artificial intelligence (AI) has become a key driver of change in the eCommerce sector, shaping the ways in which companies rethink their business models, improve operational processes, and generate value. As markets become increasingly data-driven, understanding how firms integrate AI into both strategic and operational activities is gaining growing importance. The objectives of this paper are to analyze the motivations behind AI adoption, examine its main areas of application, assess its strategic implications for e-Commerce business models, and identify the challenges encountered during implementation. The research is based on a qualitative approach and draws on a semi-structured interview with a senior management representative of Naratix, a Romanian company operating in the field of AI-driven digital solutions. The findings show that AI extends beyond operational efficiency and functions as a strategic capability that supports informed decision-making, strengthens value creation, and enables the development of more adaptive and flexible business models. In parallel, the study points to several challenges related to data quality, ethical concerns, transparency, and regulatory requirements. By offering practical insider perspectives from a Romanian organization, this paper contributes to research on AI-driven change in e-commerce and provides useful insights for both scholars and practitioners.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, e-commerce, business model transformation, value creation.

MAPPING TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION IN TOURISM: COVID-19 BIBLIOMETRIC INSIGHTS

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Abstract. This paper adopts a bibliometric analysis approach to explore the adoption of emerging technologies in tourism amid the COVID-19 crisis. We emphasize science mapping to reveal research structures, dominant topics, and citation patterns. Our theme is relevant today, as the pandemic has lingering effects that reshape tourism, especially related to digital transformation used for resilience, sustainability, and competitiveness. Moreover, the current environment is highly turbulent with frequent disruptions such as health emergencies and geopolitical crises, making our study useful for understanding how technologies can be used to leverage future shocks in tourism. Data were obtained from Web of Science, using keywords such as "COVID-19", "tourism", "technology" and "hospitality"; by screening titles and abstracts for relevance, we found 243 relevant articles from a total of 852. VOSviewer analysis was employed to uncover patterns, identifying keywords and citation clusters. Dominant topics revolve around digital innovation and transformation, including artificial intelligence, big data, service robots, and emerging technologies like virtual or augmented reality, which drove adaptation and efficiency in this crisis context. Overall, studies support user attitudes, motivations, intentions, and behavioral shifts toward immersive virtual tourism and smart solutions. Most influential papers and institutions emphasize technological innovation diffusion and geographical hubs appear, with strong Asian and Western contributions. Our analysis reveals technology as a strong catalyst for tourism adaptation, though strategies such as personalizing tourism experiences, improving trust in service robots, and encouraging sustainable digital behaviors.

Keywords: tourism, bibliometric, technology adoption.

SMART TOURISM ECOSYSTEMS: DIGITAL PLATFORMS, EXPERIENCE CO-CREATION AND DESTINATION COMPETITIVENESS

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Abstract. The digital transformation of tourism has accelerated the emergence of smart tourism ecosystems in which digital platforms play an increasingly central role in shaping tourist experiences and destination competitiveness. While previous research has extensively examined the technological foundations of smart tourism, less attention has been devoted to understanding how platforms mediate experience co-creation processes and influence broader competitive outcomes. This study addresses this issue by investigating the relationship between digital platforms, experience co-creation, and destination competitiveness within contemporary smart tourism ecosystems. A mixed-methods research design was employed, combining survey data collected from 412 international tourists with 26 semi-structured interviews conducted with destination management representatives, hospitality managers, digital service coordinators, and tourism innovation consultants across four European smart tourism destinations. The analysis integrates quantitative techniques, including factor and regression analysis, with qualitative thematic interpretation. The findings indicate that digital platforms contribute significantly to destination competitiveness by enhancing responsiveness, personalization, service integration, and stakeholder coordination. At the same time, the results reveal a more complex picture of co-creation than commonly assumed in the literature. Many forms of participation were found to be passive and algorithmically mediated rather than genuinely collaborative. Furthermore, increased platform integration did not always correspond to stronger perceptions of authenticity, with some respondents reporting experiences characterized by standardization and reduced spontaneity. The study contributes to smart tourism research by conceptualizing digital platforms as active socio-technical actors rather than neutral technological infrastructures. It further demonstrates that competitiveness depends not only on digital efficiency but also on the ability of destinations to balance technological innovation with experiential openness and meaningful visitor engagement. These findings offer practical insights for destination managers seeking to develop adaptive and competitive tourism ecosystems under conditions of increasing platformization.

Keywords: smart tourism, digital platforms, experience economy, co-creation, competitiveness.

RETHINKING CIRCULAR BUSINESS STRATEGIES: THE ROLE OF DIGITAL HUMAN CAPITAL AND RESOURCE PRODUCTIVITY IN EU MEMBER STATES

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Abstract. The circular economy is a central component of the European Union's sustainability agenda, yet the relationship between circular material use, resource productivity, economic development, and digitalization remains insufficiently clarified at Member State level. This paper provides an exploratory cross-sectional assessment of the associations between Circular material use rate (CMU) and selected Eurostat indicators for the 27 EU Member States. The analysis uses annual data for 2020–2024, averaged at country level, and examines Resource productivity, Purchasing power adjusted GDP per capita, high-speed internet coverage, ICT specialists, and enterprise internet access. Most indicators were transformed using base-10 logarithms, while Resource productivity was retained in its original averaged scale. The methodological approach combines descriptive statistics, Pearson and Spearman correlation analysis, graphical correlation assessment and multiple linear regression with backward elimination. The results show that CMU is most consistently associated with Resource productivity, confirming the relevance of resource-use efficiency for circular economy performance. Among digitalization indicators, ICT specialists appear more informative than high-speed internet coverage or enterprise internet access, suggesting that digital human capital is more closely related to circular material use than basic connectivity indicators. In the reduced exploratory regression model, Resource productivity, GDP per capita and ICT specialists retain statistical relevance, whereas Internet and Internet enterprise do not provide significant additional contributions. The findings should be interpreted as exploratory between-country associations, not as causal or predictive effects. The paper contributes to the literature by distinguishing between infrastructure-based and skills-based digitalization in relation to circular economy performance.

Keywords: circular economy, circular material use, resource productivity, digitalization, ICT specialists.

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SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATIONS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL EUROPE: THE ROLE OF HERITAGE TRAILS

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Abstract. Heritage trails such as the Via Transilvanica in Romania and the Camino de Santiago in Spain have emerged as innovative instruments for sustainable rural development. This paper investigates how these cultural routes contribute to the socio-economic transformation of the rural communities they traverse, beyond the direct economic effects of tourism. Using publicly available European regional datasets (Eurostat, EEA, and OpenStreetMap) combined with spatial econometric methods, the analysis examines variations in local employment, entrepreneurship, and environmental indicators between trail and non-trail rural areas. Results highlight that proximity to heritage routes is associated with more diversified local economies, increased social capital, and enhanced environmental awareness. By integrating insights from development economics and environmental sustainability, the paper demonstrates how cultural heritage can serve as a lever for inclusive and resilient growth in peripheral regions.

Keywords: heritage trails, sustainable rural development, Camino de Santiago, Via Transilvanica, socio-economic transformations.

FACTORS AFFECTING DOMESTIC TOURISTS' POSITIVE WORD-OF-MOUTH INTENTION IN AN ECOTOURISM DESTINATION: THE CASE OF THE RU CHA MANGROVE FOREST AREA, HUE CITY, VIETNAM

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Abstract. Ecotourism has become an important development trend in Vietnam as tourists increasingly seek sustainable, nature-based, and authentic travel experiences. The Ru Cha Mangrove Forest Ecotourism Area in Hue City is a unique ecological destination with a rare primary mangrove forest ecosystem, rich biodiversity, and attractive natural landscapes. However, despite its tourism potential, the destination still faces several challenges related to infrastructure, service quality, and destination promotion. In this context, positive word-of-mouth from domestic tourists plays an important role in attracting new visitors and strengthening destination image. This study aims to identify the factors affecting domestic tourists' positive word-of-mouth intention at the Ru Cha Mangrove Forest Ecotourism Area. Five factors were examined, including destination beauty, tourist satisfaction, authenticity of tourism experience, tourism facilities and infrastructure, and human factors. Data were collected from 160 domestic tourists using a structured questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale. The data were analyzed using SPSS through Cronbach's Alpha, Exploratory Factor Analysis, and multiple linear regression. The results show that human factors, authenticity, tourist satisfaction, and destination beauty significantly influence PWOM intention, while infrastructure has no significant effect. Human factors have the strongest impact. The findings provide practical implications for improving tourist experiences and promoting sustainable ecotourism development in Ru Cha.

Keywords: positive word-of-mouth, intention, tourist, Hue City, Vietnam.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURAL TOURISM IN QUANG BINH PROVINCE, VIETNAM: A DEMAND-SIDE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the factors influencing the development of agricultural tourism in Quang Binh province within the context of sustainable development and the increasing demand for experiential travel. Based on a synthesis of theoretical foundations and previous studies, the research proposes a model incorporating key factors, including tourism resources, human resources, facilities and infrastructure, collaboration and marketing, technology and innovation, sustainable practices, as well as support from the government and local authorities. The study employs a combination of literature review and practical approaches to clarify the role of each factor in the development of agricultural tourism. The findings indicate that these factors are closely interrelated and have significant impacts on the effectiveness of agricultural tourism development in the locality. This research contributes to providing a scientific basis for policy formulation and the development of sustainable agricultural tourism strategies, while also proposing solutions to enhance product quality, strengthen linkages, and optimize resource utilization in Quang Binh.

Keywords: agricultural tourism, demand-side perspective, Quang Binh, Vietnam.

REFRAMING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM: A COMPARATIVE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK WITH POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR VIETNAM

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Abstract. Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has been widely endorsed as a sustainable development strategy. However, the results remain highly uneven across countries, largely due to disparities in institutional autonomy, cultural agency, and internal organizational capacity. This paper introduces a novel triadic framework grounded in institutional theory, cultural sociology, and organizational studies to analyze CBT sustainability. Drawing on Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), it explores CBT configurations in Nepal, Thailand, Peru, and Bhutan, and applies the findings to Vietnam. The study defines a "triple deficit" in Vietnam's CBT as a structural misalignment where communities lack (i) legal empowerment, (ii) cultural authority, and (iii) organizational systems. Rather than isolated variables, the study demonstrates that long-term CBT success depends on the mutual reinforcement of these three dimensions. It contributes theoretically by offering a configurational model of CBT, and provides practical recommendations for Vietnam to transition from externally driven models to legally empowered, culturally grounded, and self-sustaining community tourism.

Keywords: community-based tourism, institutional empowerment, cultural identity, organizational capacity, QCA.

INTEGRATING CULTURAL HERITAGE PRESERVATION AND LIVING STANDARD DEVELOPMENT THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM: THE CASE OF THE CO TU POPULATION IN HOA BAC, DA NANG

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Abstract. In the context of ethnic minority communities in Vietnam facing increasing pressure from cultural erosion and livelihood transitions, this study explores the role of community-based tourism (CBT) as an intermediary mechanism linking cultural preservation with sustainable livelihood development. The case study focuses on the Co Tu community in Hoa Bac commune, Da Nang city, a peri-urban area undergoing a shift from subsistence agriculture to tourism. Employing a qualitative approach and an expanded Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), the study conducted 30 semi-structured interviews, participant observations of cultural activities, and secondary data analysis. The findings indicate that CBT contributes to the revival of traditional cultural practices (festivals, brocade weaving, Gươl house architecture), while also diversifying livelihood opportunities, enhancing the roles of women and youth, and strengthening social and human capital within the community. However, the model still faces institutional, technical, and seasonal constraints, as well as risks of cultural commodification. Based on these insights, the study proposes the inclusion of "institutional capital" and "cultural capital" as dynamic elements within the SLF to better capture transformative and coordinating capacities. Policy recommendations are offered at the community, local, and inter-regional levels to enhance the sustainability and adaptability of CBT models in peri-urban ethnic minority areas.

Keywords: community-based tourism, cultural heritage preservation, sustainable livelihoods, Co Tu People, institutional capital.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE GREEN ECONOMY

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Abstract. This article examines the issues of tourism development in the Central Asian countries within the framework of the green economy. The study analyzes the importance of the efficient use of natural resources, environmental protection, and the implementation of environmentally friendly technologies in the development of the tourism sector. It also explores the main opportunities and directions for sustainable tourism development in the region, including the use of natural and cultural heritage, the development of eco-friendly tourism infrastructure, and the attraction of green investments. The article analyzes the experience of Central Asian countries in implementing the principles of the green economy in tourism and highlights its role in ensuring sustainable economic development, increasing employment, and preserving natural resources. As a result, recommendations are proposed for improving public policy and expanding ecological tourism in the countries of the region.

Keywords: tourism, green economy, sustainable development, ecotourism, Central Asia.

MINITRACK: ACCOUNTING AND MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Chairs:

- **Ewa W. MARUSZEWSKA, University of Economics in Katowice, Katowice, Poland**
- **Camelia Iuliana LUNGU, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania**
- **Sînziana-Maria RÎNDAȘU, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania**

The purpose of this conference track is to initiate and facilitate discussions around the current opportunities and challenges in the field of accounting and management information systems, as well as their global perspectives. Particularly the sustainability related issues and regulations, technological developments, and economic and social disruptions, significantly impact the accounting field nowadays, contributing to the necessity of an interdisciplinary research approach. Academics and PhD students are invited to present their work on the likely effects of these changes on financial and non-financial reporting, auditing, managerial accounting, management information systems, financial analysis, and valuation.

The main topics covered by the hereby call for papers are related (but not limited) to:

- International and local developments in corporate reporting and auditing requirements
- The professional skills of future accountants
- The role of the local context (culture, socio-economic environment) in accounting practices
- Automation of business processes and financial reporting
- The role of accounting and accounting profession in delivering the SDGs agenda
- Accounting education

Ewa W. MARUSZEWSKA is a professor of accounting at the University of Economics in Katowice (UEK), Poland. Dr. Maruszewska has been a teacher and researcher at UEK since 1999 and has in parallel practical experience, including the position of chief accountant and financial director in an international corporation (2003-2018), expert of the behavioral team in the Ministry of Finance (2018-2019, 2023-present), and economic advisor in the National Bank of Poland (2019-2020). She also takes participation in field tests performed by EFRAG (2020-2022). She has expertise in money laundering, cash flow analyses for prosecutor's offices and courts, and the scope of applying accounting regulations for the Supreme Audit Office. Her main research interests focus on ethics and decision-making in accounting, investigation of international financial reporting standards' application, and accounting for business combinations. She greatly appreciates cooperation with researchers from other countries interested in different areas of economics, allowing for broad perspectives and interdisciplinary research.

Camelia Iuliana LUNGU is a professor of accounting at the Faculty of Accounting and Management Information Systems and PhD coordinator at the Doctoral School of Accounting, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania. Dr. Lungu is also the Director of the Doctoral School of Accounting, as well as representative member of the Council for Doctoral Studies & the Council for Doctoral School of Accounting, member of European Accounting Association (EAA) and International Association for Accounting Education and Research (IAAER), and member of EAA 2024 Annual Congress Organizing Committee. With an experience of more than 20 years in accounting research topics, Dr. Lungu is scientific reviewer of prestigious academic journals (Accounting Forum, Accounting in Europe, Journal of Organizational Change Management, Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews, Journal of Risk and Financial Management, Sustainability, Administrative Sciences), associate editor of the Journal of Accounting and Management Information Systems, member of scientific committees of 14th IAAER World Congress of Accounting Educators and Researchers, European Conference on Management Leadership and Governance (ECMLG), and Acavent conferences (International Conference on Business, Management and Finance; International Conference on Applied Research in Business, Management and Economics).

Sînziana-Maria RÎNDAȘU is a lecturer at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, within the Department of Management Information Systems of the Faculty of Accounting and Management Information Systems and Vice Dean for International Relations and Research. She holds a PhD in Accounting, awarded in 2019 and teaches a range of subjects within the field of management information systems. Her research interests are focused on the digitalization of the accounting profession, accounting information systems, sustainability accounting and reporting systems, mobile applications, and cybersecurity. She carries out peer reviews for several publications in the field of accounting information systems.

ESG RATINGS AND FIRM FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE IN THE EUROPEAN TECHNOLOGY SECTOR: CORPORATE REPORTING IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract. Technology firms provide a unique context to examine the relationship between ESG and financial performance as they are innovation-driven, rely heavily on intangible assets, and face distinctive ESG challenges. Using a balanced panel of 142 technology firms observed between 2020 and 2025, this study analyzes the correlation between ESG performance and financial performance proxied through Tobin's Q. The findings reveal a significant negative relation between the aggregated value for ESG performance and financial performance. Additionally, when ESG is disaggregated, the negative effect is concentrated in the environmental and governance pillars. Further analysis reveals substantial heterogeneity across economic contexts, emphasizing that the negative relationship is primarily driven by environmental performance in countries with higher GDP values, while in lower-GDP settings, governance and social performance are negatively associated with financial performance, whereas the environmental effect is weaker. Overall, the findings suggest that the relationship between ESG and financial performance is not uniform across the technology sector, being dependent on the specific ESG dimensions and the macroeconomic environment.

Keywords: financial performance, ESG ratings, Europe, technology sector.

ESG WASHING AND FORENSIC ACCOUNTING: AN INVESTIGATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING CREDIBILITY

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Abstract. The expansion of ESG reporting has intensified concerns regarding the reliability and authenticity of non-financial disclosures, with ESG washing emerging as a significant challenge for stakeholders and regulators alike. Despite growing disclosure requirements, existing verification mechanisms remain inadequate for detecting manipulation, selective disclosure, and symbolic compliance. This paper examines the role of forensic accounting in identifying ESG washing practices and strengthening the credibility of sustainability reporting. The study adopts a qualitative, exploratory design based on a critical review of specialized literature and a conceptual analysis of ESG reporting vulnerabilities. The findings identify the main forms of ESG washing — including omissions, unverifiable claims, and metric exaggeration — and demonstrate that forensic accounting techniques offer an effective framework for their detection. The paper's key contribution is the integration of an investigative accounting perspective into the evaluation of sustainability disclosures, providing a conceptual basis for enhancing transparency, accountability, and trust in non-financial reporting.

Keywords: ESG, forensic accounting, ESG washing.

AN EARLY WARNING SCORE FOR FINANCIAL DISTRESS IN THE ROMANIAN GAMBLING INDUSTRY: AN ECONOMIC-FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract. This study proposes and tests an early warning score for financial distress within the Romanian gambling industry, based on annual financial statements from the 2017–2024 period. Data are sourced from reports published by the Ministry of Finance and are analyzed at the firm-year level using an unbalanced panel (854 firms; 4,393 observations), with models estimated on a complete-case subsample ($N = 2,291$). The probability of financial distress is estimated via logit/probit models using financial ratios (net margin, leverage, productivity, firm size) and year effects, while the risk score is defined as a 0–100 transformation of the predicted probability. The results demonstrate that leverage is the primary determinant of risk, whereas firm size reduces the probability of financial distress; net margin exhibits a weaker and context-dependent effect. Tests for institutional "shocks" confirm shifts in the risk profile post-2022 and 2023: the impact of leverage diminishes after 2022, while net margin becomes significant after 2023. The model exhibits an acceptable discriminatory capacity ($AUC = 0.74$), and for operational use in Management Information Systems (MIS), a 0.40 threshold is recommended, providing a favorable trade-off between sensitivity and specificity. The score can support internal audit and management through continuous monitoring, audit prioritization, and the definition of risk alerts.

Keywords: financial distress, early warning score, gambling industry.

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY PRACTICES IN SUSTAINABILITY ACCOUNTING: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract. This paper analyzes the relationship between digital technologies and the circular economy; the main objective of the research is the mapping of the current state of research and the identification on the main thematic directions for the recent literature. We build a database from Web of Science Core Collection (554 documents from the 2022–2026 period) filtered in relevant sustainability and management domains. The methodology that was used combines the structured literature review (SLR) and the PRISMA diagram with the bibliometric analysis that was carried out in VOS viewer (keyword co-occurrence, co-authorship, citation analysis, and bibliographic coupling). The results suggest the existence of a research core that is centered on the circular economy, connected to Industry 4.0 technologies such as IoT (Internet of Things), blockchain and artificial intelligence, especially in the context of the traceability of circular chains, sustainable product management and the transition towards circular business models. The critical analysis of the literature highlights that digitalization can accelerate some circularity through real-time data, operational and transparency optimization, however the gaps still persist regarding the standardization of indicators and the impact of empirical validation.

Keywords: circular economy, Industry 4.0, digitalization, artificial intelligence, bibliometrics.

AUDITORS IN THE AI ERA: SKILLS, EVOLVING ROLES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL BODIES

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Abstract. Artificial intelligence (AI) is fundamentally reshaping the auditing profession, challenging traditional competency frameworks and redefining the scope of the auditor's role. Beyond classical financial audit tasks, the contemporary auditor is increasingly expected to contribute to audit committee governance, sustainability and ESG assurance, as well as to the direct application of AI-based tools in audit engagements. Despite the growing academic and professional interest in AI adoption, a comprehensive and integrated framework capturing the full spectrum of AI-related competencies required across all auditor roles remains underdeveloped in the literature. This paper addresses this gap through a structured literature review (SLR), analyzing 22 peer-reviewed articles published between 2019 and 2025, identifying and synthesizing evidence on how AI reshapes auditor competencies across four interconnected roles: financial auditor, audit committee member, ESG assurance provider, and user of AI tools. Drawing on emerging literature in accounting, auditing, and digital transformation, the paper proposes an integrated competency framework for the AI-ready auditor, with direct implications for professional bodies, CPD programs, and certification requirements.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, audit, competency framework, ESG assurance, professional development.

IS GENDER DIVERSITY A DRIVER FOR FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE? A CROSS-REGIONAL INVESTIGATION OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE UNDER UNPRECEDENTED CHALLENGES

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Abstract. Enhancing gender diversity policies is an evolving concern in corporate governance landscape with potential significant benefits for stakeholders. The aim of this research is to investigate the impact of three specific gender diversity mechanisms on corporate financial performance, with an extended comparative analysis for European and Asian companies. The relationship is discussed considering potential contingency factors related to generic corporate governance mechanisms, company characteristics, country's regulatory conditions, and socio-cultural context. Various company and country-related datasets are collected and concatenated for the time frame 2020-2022. This period is chosen in order to cover a timespan of unprecedented challenges, excluding the ongoing military conflicts. Comparative univariate difference tests are employed to pinpoint the particular characteristics of companies in the two regions. Research hypotheses are tested using robust random-effects regression estimation. Mixed results, with notable differences across European and Asian companies are found. Diverse impact is depicted when socio-cultural background, regulatory context, economic freedom, national culture, and quality of life are considered. In these circumstances, gender diversity, treated as corporate governance mechanism, is regarded as a driver of financial performance and value creation for the stakeholders. The findings shed new light on the gender diversity - financial performance relationship, allowing comparative analysis and providing new and original evidence on underlying theories. This research adds to the body of knowledge, while it may be considered a valuable resource for academics and practitioners.

Keywords: corporate governance, gender diversity, financial performance, European and Asian companies, unprecedented challenges.

NATIONAL CULTURE AS MODERATOR OF DEI CORPORATE GOVERNANCE PRACTICES AND SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING PERFORMANCE

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Abstract. In an era of growing societal and regulatory pressure, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have emerged as a critical corporate governance mechanism influencing companies' attention towards sustainability outcomes, raising important questions about how different national cultural environments shape this nexus. This study addresses a research gap in corporate governance and sustainability literature by examining the influence of DEI practices on sustainability performance, with a specific focus on the moderating role of national culture. The data are collected from Refinitiv Eikon database for non-financial international companies, over the 2020-2024 period. Parametric and non-parametric tests for differences in means, correlation analysis, and fixed effects regression models with robust standard errors are employed to validate the research hypotheses. Using a sample of 4130 companies from 107 countries, the study establishes that the presence of DEI policies and practices enhances sustainability performance, and the strength of this relationship depends on the characteristics of the country in which a company operates. Significant statistical differences are found for European versus non-European companies. Specifically, the findings indicate that the effectiveness of DEI is particularly pronounced in cultural environments with higher power distance, more collectivist and feminine values, greater uncertainty avoidance, stronger long-term orientation, and a restraint-oriented culture. The findings offer both theoretical and practical insights by highlighting that national culture constitutes an important contextual factor influencing how DEI initiatives may contribute to the achievement of sustainability performance.

Keywords: diversity, equity, and inclusion, sustainability performance, national culture.

REDEFINE THE ACCOUNTING PROFESSION USING ERP SYSTEMS AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN ORGANIZATIONS: A GREENER AND SMARTER FUTURE

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Abstract. The relatively rapid technological progress of the last period, as well as the concerns of organizations to develop as sustainable as possible, have led to the evolution of ERP systems towards artificial intelligence and sustainability. Even though traditional ERP systems offered efficiency in terms of integrating all organizational processes, they were considered by practitioners as underdeveloped from the perspective of sustainability and data-driven sustainable decision-making. The article aims to explore how the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in ERP systems can redefine organizational management practices and contribute to building greener and smarter organizational ecosystems. The research in this paper focuses on a quantitative study based on a semi-structured questionnaire distributed to participants from various industries that use ERP systems within their organization, focusing mainly on assessing the impact of ERP systems on the processes within the organization and what is the perception of the respondents regarding the integration of AI within ERP systems to facilitate their efficiency in reporting performance and ensuring an eco-friendly environment. The case study proposed in this paper highlights the importance of redefining the functions of ERP systems by integrating artificial intelligence so that organizations can become green and smart businesses and can subsequently gain a number of benefits. Thus, this study provides vital information about ERP and AI systems to both academia and business by presenting the essential aspects that any organization should consider with regard to adapting to the continuous evolution of technology.

Keywords: ERP systems, artificial intelligence, digital transformation, sustainability, technological progress.

CORPORATE BOARD DIVERSITY AND FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE: EVIDENCE FROM PANEL DATA ANALYSIS

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Abstract. This study examines the impact of board diversity on firms' financial performance by adopting a multidimensional and econometrically robust approach, consistent with the existing literature. Using a sample of 73 companies listed on the Bucharest Stock Exchange over the period 2014–2024, the research moves beyond single analyses of board characteristics and constructs a composite index of board diversity that integrates gender, age, educational background, nationality, and professional experience. The study combines panel data techniques with a dynamic generalized method of moments (GMM) estimator, allowing for the control of unobserved heterogeneity, reverse causality, and omitted variable bias. In addition, the research tests for nonlinear effects of board diversity on firm performance, based on the hypothesis that while moderate levels of diversity enhance decision-making quality and strategic adaptability, excessive heterogeneity may generate coordination costs, ambiguity, conflicts, and inefficiencies. Firm performance is measured using accounting-based indicators: Return on Equity (ROE) and Return on Assets (ROA) and a market-based indicator, Tobin's Q, which reflects investors' expectations regarding future firm value. This study contributes to the literature in three key ways. First, it develops a multidimensional diversity index that captures the joint effect of multiple board characteristics. Second, it provides evidence from an under-researched emerging market, highlighting the institutional and governance context of Romania. Third, it applies advanced econometric techniques to address precision concerns, enhancing the robustness of the results. The findings offer important implications for firms and investors, suggesting that board diversity should be strategically calibrated rather than maximized in order to improve governance quality and sustain long-term financial performance. Moreover, board diversity is treated as an endogenous factor that must be aligned with firm-specific characteristics and strategic objectives in order to function effectively as a driver of financial performance.

Keywords: board characteristics, financial performance, board diversity, corporate governance.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN ACCOUNTING AND FINANCE: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW ON AUDIT TRANSFORMATION, FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

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Abstract. This paper examines the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in accounting and finance, emphasizing its increasing importance in the context of digital transformation. In recent years, the growing adoption of AI technologies has significantly reshaped traditional accounting practices, making this topic highly relevant in both academic research and professional environments. Despite the expanding body of literature, existing studies remain fragmented and lack an integrated perspective on how AI influences accounting processes. The main objective of this study is to identify key research trends, applications, and implications of AI in accounting, with a particular focus on auditing, financial reporting, and decision-making processes. To achieve this, the study employs a systematic literature review methodology, analyzing peer-reviewed articles from major academic databases such as Web of Science and Scopus, synthesizing current knowledge in the field. Existing studies indicate that AI technologies, including machine learning and robotic process automation, may enhance efficiency, accuracy, and fraud detection capabilities in accounting systems. At the same time, AI enables the use of large and complex datasets, improving predictive performance and supporting more informed decision-making. This study contributes to the literature by proposing a conceptual framework that integrates fragmented insights from prior research, providing a clearer understanding of AI adoption in accounting and outlining directions for future research.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, accounting, auditing, machine learning, systematic literature review.

SUSTAINABILITY RISK GOVERNANCE: INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES, CORPORATE STRATEGIES AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract. The shift toward sustainability has turned what were once “non-financial” concerns into core elements of corporate governance, strategic planning, and financial risk assessment. As regulators and stakeholders push for more accountability, how companies govern these risks has become a major point of interest where management, finance, and corporate responsibility meet. This paper looks into how the academic conversation around sustainability risk governance has matured, mapping out its main themes, the most influential sources, and the research patterns that are currently shaping the field. To get a clear picture of this landscape, the study uses a bibliometric approach (Biblioshiny and VOSviewer), analyzing a specific dataset of publications from Scopus. By using mapping techniques to look at publication trends, citation networks, and thematic clusters, the research provides a systematic overview of how the topic has evolved. This method makes it possible to see not just how much has been written, but how different concepts have linked up over time to define the current research environment. What emerges from this analysis is a clear consolidation of sustainability risk governance as its own field of study. Risk governance is not a monolithic topic: it is built around several key pillars, such as institutional oversight, ESG integration, risk disclosure, and the financial impact of strategic adaptation. The data also shows a growing link between how a company is governed and its overall resilience when facing the uncertainties brought by sustainability challenges. Ultimately, the literature has moved past seeing sustainability as just a reporting requirement. It is now understood as a structural governance and strategic issue with real financial weight. By laying out this “intellectual map”, the study clarifies where the field stands today and points toward the directions that will likely define future research.

Keywords: sustainability risk governance, ESG integration, Scopus, strategic adaptation.

THE ROLE AND RELEVANCE OF FORENSIC ACCOUNTING IN DETECTING AND PREVENTING FINANCIAL FRAUD

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Abstract. Forensic accounting represents a crucial discipline in the field of accounting and finance, which involves the use of specialized methods and techniques to investigate financial fraud and illegal economic activities. In the context of Albania, where economic and legislative challenges are numerous and complex, forensic accounting becomes an essential tool to ensure financial transparency and integrity. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of forensic accounting in detecting and preventing financial fraud in Albania. To fulfill the objectives, a combined approach of quantitative and qualitative methods was used. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and interviews with experts in the field. The data were analyzed using statistical techniques to identify key factors that affect the effectiveness of forensic accounting in the country. The findings of the study indicate that, although forensic accounting plays an important role in detecting financial fraud in Albania, there are significant challenges related to the lack of specialized training and the use of advanced technologies. To increase the effectiveness of forensic accounting, the study recommends improving professional training, enhancing regulations and procedures, and greater integration of technology in investigative processes. This study contributes to the existing literature by providing a detailed overview of the practices and challenges of forensic accounting in Albania and suggests concrete measures for improving this vital field for the country's economy and financial.

Keywords: forensic accounting, financial fraud, investigative technology, professional training.

COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE REGULATION AND ORGANIZATION OF INTERNAL PUBLIC AUDIT IN JORDAN AND ROMANIA

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Abstract. The scientific approach considers the current stage of regulation and organization of internal public audit in Jordan and Romania, as well as the evolution of this process in the context of the specific economic and political development of each country. In both countries, internal public audit has undergone significant transformations in response to local societal and political challenges, as well as global trends. The main objective of this paper is to analyze how the concept of audit has been developed and adapted in the two states, identifying the key factors that have influenced the legislative framework of internal audit in Jordan and Romania. The research emphasizes several theoretical aspects regarding the evolution of internal public audit and subsequently provides an overview of the differences and similarities between the two legislative frameworks, as well as their respective organizational structures. A detailed analysis of the legislation specific to each country highlights the need for revision in Jordan, as certain aspects are not fully addressed, while Romanian legislation is more detailed and complex. Nevertheless, in both countries, strengthening the application of existing legislation is required. The research study employs qualitative methods, mainly literature review, and utilizes diverse national and international bibliographic sources. The paper concludes with recommendations for improving the quality and performance of internal public audit, emphasizing the necessity of sharing best practices to lead to effective public governance in both Romania and Jordan.

Keywords: internal public audit, legal framework, public institutions, Jordan, Romania.

FINANCIAL ACCOUNTING PRACTICES IN THE PRODUCTION CRAFTS SECTOR

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Abstract. This paper investigates financial accounting practices within the craft production sector in Morocco, a strategically significant industry that generated MAD 96.35 billion in turnover and employed over 1.2 million people in 2022. Despite this remarkable economic weight, craft production units, predominantly very small firms, remain largely underequipped in terms of financial governance and accounting systems. Drawing on an extensive literature review of accounting practices in small enterprises, the study highlights that such firms tend to adopt accounting primarily for tax compliance rather than for managerial decision-making. Using a descriptive quantitative approach, data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to craft cooperatives in the Agadir region of Morocco and analyzed via IBM SPSS, applying Multiple Correspondence Analysis to identify patterns among variables. The findings reveal that most units rely on manual record-keeping, rarely prepare interim financial statements, and frequently outsource accounting tasks to external professionals without deriving strategic value from the process. These practices reflect a broader structural gap between the sector's economic dynamism and the maturity of its financial management. The paper contributes original empirical evidence on accounting behavior in a neglected sector and provides a basis for policy recommendations aimed at improving financial literacy, promoting digital accounting tools, and strengthening governance among Moroccan craft producers.

Keywords: craft sector, financial accounting practices, very small firms, Morocco, accounting information system.

MINITRACK: FINANCE AND BANKING

Chairs:

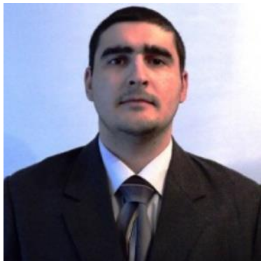
- **Mihaela IACOB, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania**
- **Ștefan-Cristian GHERGHINA, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania**
- **Adam P. BALCERZAK, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Olsztyn, Poland**
- **Yuriy BILAN, Rzeszów University of Technology, Rzeszów, Poland**

Overcoming economic, security and climate challenges, uncertainties, and risks, urge rethinking society requirements for current and future generation and rekindle cooperation and partnerships for a green growth in a new era. The driving force for finance and banking is to assess countries' progress moving to innovative, inclusive, sustainable, and resilient growth. Therefore, past policies, data, and scientific research results can boost the world today through the eyes of the future. Worldwide actions 'are not good today, if yesterday did not think of tomorrow.' In this context, research could provide scientific support to tackle society challenges mainly in the area of finance and banking.

The main topics covered by the hereby call for papers are related (but not limited) to:

- Risks and financial services
- Banking
- Capital markets
- Asset management
- Insurance
- Corporate finance
- Sustainable well-being
- Fiscal sustainability
- Public policies
- Trust, transparency, accountability in finance and banking
- Finance and banking for green growth

Mihaela IACOB is Associate Professor, PhD, and Vice-Dean for Scientific Research and Internationalization at the Faculty of Finance and Banking, the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. With a portfolio of disciplines featuring Public Finance, Prices and Competition, Budget and Public Treasury, and Public Financial Policies, she authored more than 50 scientific works, presented or published (inter)nationally. As well, she acquired extensive editorial experience, being coordinator of the OEconomica journal, while she also serves as expert at the Romanian Fiscal Council.



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EMPIRICAL STUDY ON THE DETERMINANTS OF DIRECT TAXATION IN ROMANIA. PARTICULAR CASE: CORPORATE INCOME TAX

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Abstract. Direct taxation, particularly corporate income tax, represents a pillar of fiscal policy, exerting a significant influence both on income distribution and on the investment decisions of economic agents, while also contributing to the maintenance of macroeconomic stability. The main objective of this paper is to identify and analyze the determinants of the dynamics of corporate income tax. To this end, the research uses a panel-type database covering the period 2007–2024, aiming to evaluate the influence of relevant variables on corporate income tax revenues in Romania, in a comparative context with other European Union member states. Methodologically, the study proposes the estimation of an econometric model centered on an indicator with a major impact on corporate income tax revenues, alongside a set of macroeconomic and institutional explanatory variables. Through the tests conducted over the mentioned interval, factors influencing the level of corporate income tax revenue in the public budget are identified, highlighting both the dependency relationships and their intensity. The research results emphasize the main determinants of corporate income tax collection and underlining the role of the institutional framework and administrative efficiency. In this context, the authors recommend accelerating the digitalization process of the public fiscal administration to facilitate the submission of tax declarations and to strengthen continuous and effective interaction between tax authorities and the business environment. Digitalization is considered a strategic measure aimed at increasing the collection of direct taxes and enhancing voluntary tax compliance.

Keywords: corporate income tax, direct taxation, determinants, fiscal policy, digitalization.

ECONOMIC RESILIENCE AND GOOD PUBLIC GOVERNANCE

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Abstract. This paper examines the relationship between good public governance and economic resilience by incorporating newly developed multidimensional indicators of economic complexity as measures for economic resilience, namely trade, technological, and research complexity. The main objective of the study is to determine whether improvements in governance quality influence different dimensions of economic complexity and to identify potential trade-offs between institutional development and economic resilience and performance. To address this objective, the study employs a comprehensive empirical analysis based on panel data from 101 countries over the period 2000–2023. Economic complexity is measured using three indices: economic complexity of trade (ECI_trade), economic complexity of technology (ECI_tech), and economic complexity of research (ECI_res). These are analyzed in relation to six dimensions of public governance, including control of corruption, government effectiveness, rule of law, political stability, regulatory quality, and voice and accountability. The methodology relies on dynamic panel regression models estimated the Generalized Method of Moments (GMM), ensuring robustness in the presence of endogeneity and unobserved heterogeneity. The findings reveal a nuanced relationship between governance and economic complexity. Specifically, improvements in control of corruption and rule of law are found to have a positive and significant effect on trade complexity, suggesting that stronger institutions enhance a country's capacity to produce and export sophisticated goods. However, these same governance factors exhibit a negative relationship with technological and research complexity, indicating the existence of trade-offs. The study contributes to the literature by extending the concept of economic complexity beyond trade and highlighting the multidimensional effects of governance. It provides important policy insights, emphasizing that governance reforms should be carefully balanced to avoid unintended consequences on innovation and research, thereby supporting more sustainable and resilient economic development.

Keywords: economic complexity, corruption control, rule of law, public governance.

ETHICAL AI IN FINANCIAL SERVICES: BALANCING INNOVATION AND REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

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Abstract. The deployment of artificial intelligence in financial services is accelerating rapidly, enabling enhanced efficiency, improved risk assessment, and highly personalized customer experiences. However, this technological advancement also raises significant ethical and regulatory challenges, particularly concerning transparency, accountability, algorithmic bias, and data protection. As financial institutions increasingly integrate AI into core operations, they face the complex task of balancing innovation with stringent compliance requirements in a highly regulated environment. Despite growing regulatory attention, there remains limited empirical insight into how firms operationalize governance mechanisms that align technological capabilities with ethical and legal standards. This study explores how financial service providers navigate the tension between innovation and compliance in the implementation of AI-driven systems. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study draws on multiple case studies of firms operating within the fintech and traditional banking sectors, complemented by an analysis of relevant regulatory and policy frameworks. This approach enables a comprehensive examination of organizational practices, governance structures, and decision-making processes related to responsible AI deployment. The theoretical framework integrates perspectives from ethics and financial regulation, conceptualizing AI governance as a multidimensional construct that encompasses normative principles, institutional constraints, and organizational capabilities. Within this framework, particular attention is given to mechanisms such as internal oversight structures, algorithmic auditing, transparency protocols, and stakeholder accountability. The findings are expected to highlight best practices for responsible AI implementation, including the development of adaptive governance models that balance flexibility with control. Furthermore, the study anticipates identifying key challenges related to regulatory ambiguity, cross-jurisdictional compliance, and the alignment of ethical principles with business objectives. The study contributes to theory by advancing the understanding of AI governance within regulated industries and offers practical insights for financial institutions seeking to implement ethically grounded and compliant AI systems in an evolving regulatory landscape.

Keywords: ethical AI, fintech, regulation, financial services, governance.

BEHAVIORAL BIASES IN DIGITAL FINANCIAL SERVICES ADOPTION: IMPLICATIONS FOR FINANCIAL INCLUSION IN EMERGING MARKETS

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Abstract. Digital financial services have been widely promoted as transformative instruments for advancing financial inclusion, particularly in emerging economies where traditional banking infrastructure remains limited and unevenly distributed. However, their effectiveness extends beyond issues of access and affordability, being significantly mediated by behavioral biases that shape how individuals perceive, adopt, and use digital financial platforms. Despite the rapid expansion of digital finance, the role of cognitive and emotional factors in influencing user engagement and financial decision-making remains insufficiently theorized and empirically examined within the existing literature. This study addresses this gap by systematically investigating how behavioral biases influence the adoption and utilization of digital financial services in emerging market contexts. Drawing on behavioral finance theory and technology acceptance models, the research develops an integrative conceptual framework that captures the interaction between psychological determinants and technology-enabled financial behaviors. Methodologically, the study employs a quantitative research design based on survey data collected from over 1,000 users of digital financial platforms. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) tests the relationships between key behavioral constructs - such as loss aversion, overconfidence, trust, and perceived ease of use - and observable patterns of financial engagement and decision-making. The findings are expected to demonstrate that behavioral biases exert a substantial influence on both adoption propensity and the quality of financial decisions. Specifically, loss aversion may discourage users from engaging with beneficial financial products due to heightened sensitivity to perceived risks, while overconfidence may lead to suboptimal financial choices driven by an inflated sense of competence. The access to digital financial tools does not automatically translate into improved financial outcomes, behavioral factors shaping meaningful inclusion. The study contributes to the literature by embedding behavioral insights into digital finance research, thereby extending conventional models of financial inclusion beyond structural and technological dimensions.

Keywords: behavioral biases, digital financial services, financial inclusion, emerging markets.

GLOBAL TRENDS IN FINANCIAL DEVELOPMENT: FROM MONETARY ECONOMICS TO THE ENERGY-FINANCE NEXUS

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Abstract. This paper investigates the evolution of "financial development" as a distinct academic field, tracing its trajectory from foundational monetary economics to its modern multidisciplinary scope. While historically analyzed for its capacity to reduce transaction costs and foster economic growth, the domain has significantly expanded in recent decades to encompass complex global challenges, including climate change and digital transformation. Given this expansion, a comprehensive analysis of the field's long-term lifecycle is essential to understand how economic theory is adapting to sustainable development goals. To map the global trends and intellectual structure of the domain, we analyzed a dataset of 8,689 articles published between 1957 and 2025, retrieved from the Scopus database. Utilizing Bibliometrix and VOSviewer tools, this study examines current publication trends, identifies influential contributors, and visualizes the evolution of the field's intellectual core. The results reveal a profound paradigm shift: the field is experiencing an exponential growth phase driven by the convergence of digitalization and sustainability, with 30% of all historical papers published in the last two years alone (2024–2025). Furthermore, a decisive geographic shift has occurred, with knowledge production migrating from traditional Western hubs to the Global South—specifically China, Pakistan, and Vietnam—while the thematic focus has transitioned from the neoclassical "Finance-Growth Nexus" to the "Energy-Finance Nexus," defined by "Green Finance" and "Carbon Emissions". This study contributes to the field by explicitly connecting the geographic migration of knowledge toward emerging economies with the thematic transition toward environmental sustainability, filling a critical gap left by previous bibliometric analyses.

Keywords: financial development, bibliometric analysis, economic growth, green finance, Sustainable Development Goals.

DIGITAL FINANCIAL INCLUSION AND BEHAVIORAL BIASES: EVIDENCE FROM EMERGING ECONOMIES

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Abstract. The rapid digitalization of financial services has significantly expanded access to formal finance in emerging economies. However, the extent to which this increased access translates into effective and sustained financial inclusion remains questionable, as behavioral biases often shape individuals' adoption and usage patterns. This study examines the relationship between digital financial inclusion and behavioral biases among users in four emerging economies: India, Nigeria, Vietnam, and Mexico. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines a quantitative survey of 1,147 valid responses with 42 semi-structured interviews. Digital financial inclusion was measured through a composite index capturing account ownership, usage frequency, and continuity of engagement. Behavioral biases were assessed using validated constructs including loss aversion, overconfidence, herd behavior, and trust instability. The findings reveal that while digital financial services substantially improve transactional access and convenience, they do not automatically generate behavioral confidence or reflective financial decision-making. Higher digital engagement is frequently associated with increased susceptibility to impulsive behavior and convenience dependency, while loss aversion and institutional distrust limit the adoption of advanced financial services, particularly among rural and lower-income users. Financial literacy positively influences initial adoption but shows limited effect on reducing behavioral inconsistencies once trust variables are considered. This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that digital financial inclusion is not merely a technological or infrastructural issue, but a deeply behaviorally mediated process. The results highlight the need for policies and platform designs that address psychological barriers alongside technological access. The practical implications for FinTech providers, regulators, and financial educators in emerging markets are discussed.

Keywords: digital financial inclusion, behavioral biases, behavioral finance, FinTech, emerging economies.

GREEN FINANCE AND INVESTMENT BEHAVIOR: THE ROLE OF ESG DISCLOSURE IN CAPITAL ALLOCATION

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Abstract. The increasing emphasis on sustainability has catalyzed the rapid development of green finance, positioning environmental, social, and governance (ESG) considerations at the core of contemporary investment strategies. Despite this growing prominence, the mechanisms through which ESG disclosures influence investor behavior and capital allocation decisions remain insufficiently understood, particularly in terms of how information is interpreted, valued, and incorporated into financial decision-making processes. This gap is especially relevant in the context of evolving regulatory frameworks and increasing demands for transparency and accountability in capital markets. This study examines the impact of ESG disclosures on investor behavior and capital allocation, with a focus on how the quality, clarity, and credibility of sustainability-related information shape investment decisions. Employing a quantitative research design, the study integrates large-scale financial data with survey responses from individual and institutional investors. Regression modeling techniques are applied to assess the relationships between ESG disclosure intensity, perceived risk, and investment allocation patterns across sectors and asset classes. The theoretical framework combines signaling theory and sustainable finance, conceptualizing ESG disclosures as strategic signals that reduce information asymmetry between firms and investors. Within this perspective, high-quality ESG reporting is expected to convey organizational commitment to sustainability, thereby enhancing investor confidence and influencing portfolio choices. The findings are expected to demonstrate that transparent and consistent ESG disclosures positively affect investment decisions by increasing trust and reducing perceived risk. Furthermore, the study anticipates identifying variations in investor sensitivity to ESG information, depending on experience, risk tolerance, and investment horizon. From a theoretical standpoint, the research contributes to the literature by clarifying the informational role of ESG disclosures in financial markets. Practically, it offers insights for firms and policymakers on designing effective disclosure frameworks that align sustainability objectives with capital market expectations in a rapidly evolving green finance landscape.

Keywords: green finance, ESG disclosure, investment behavior, sustainability, quantitative analysis.

A HYBRID AI FRAMEWORK FOR PERSONALIZED FINANCIAL EDUCATION: INTEGRATING DEEP KNOWLEDGE TRACING AND LARGE LANGUAGE MODELS

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Abstract. Financial literacy remains a persistent challenge in contemporary economies, with consequences for household savings, debt management, investment behavior, and long-term financial resilience. Traditional financial education systems typically rely on static curricula and uniform assessment structures, which limits their ability to respond to heterogeneous learner needs. This paper proposes a hybrid artificial intelligence architecture for personalized financial education that integrates Deep Knowledge Tracing (DKT) with Large Language Models (LLMs). The proposed system uses DKT to estimate a learner's evolving knowledge state from sequential interaction data, while an LLM generates personalized assessment items, explanations, and feedback conditioned on that knowledge state. A policy layer selects instructional actions by maximizing expected learning gain over candidate items. We formalize the learning process as a sequential decision problem, describe the architecture, define an experimental protocol using real educational datasets, and present a reproducible evaluation framework for comparing the proposed method against static, random, DKT-only, and LLMonly baselines. The paper contributes a technically grounded design for scalable adaptive financial education and identifies methodological requirements for validating such systems in real-world deployments.

Keywords: knowledge tracing, large language models, adaptive learning, educational data mining.

THE DIGITAL GREEN NEXUS: EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF CENTRAL BANK DIGITAL CURRENCIES ON GREEN FINANCE MOBILIZATION IN EMERGING ECONOMIES

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Abstract. The rapid evolution of financial technology has introduced Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs) as a transformative tool for monetary policy. Simultaneously, the global urgency to combat climate change has placed "green finance" at the forefront of banking priorities. This paper explores the intersection of these two domains, specifically examining how the implementation of retail and wholesale CBDCs can catalyze the mobilization of green capital in emerging economies. The significance of this topic lies in the current "financing gap" facing sustainable development goals. Traditional banking systems often struggle with transparency and high transactional costs when funding small-scale renewable projects. This research addresses the critical question: Can the programmable nature of CBDCs, via smart contracts, ensure that earmarked funds are strictly utilized for verified environmental projects? Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the study utilizes a comparative analysis of pilot CBDC frameworks (such as the e-Naira and Digital Yuan) alongside a simulation model of "Programmable Green Credit." The research investigates whether blockchain-integrated CBDCs reduce information asymmetry and "greenwashing" risks compared to conventional electronic fiat. Preliminary results suggest that CBDCs can significantly lower the barrier to entry for green bonds by automating compliance and impact reporting. The study highlights that the integration of "Green Smart Contracts" within a national digital currency framework can increase the efficiency of sustainable fund allocation by up to 15%. This paper contributes to the field by providing a conceptual blueprint for "Sustainable CBDCs," offering policymakers a dual-purpose strategy to modernize the banking sector while simultaneously achieving national carbon-neutrality targets.

Keywords: central bank digital currency (CBDC), green finance, sustainable banking, blockchain programmability, emerging economies.

ASSESSING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF SUB-NATIONAL PUBLIC DEBT IN EMERGING ECONOMIES: A CASE STUDY OF FISCAL RESILIENCE IN NORTHERN INDIA (2015–2025)

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Abstract. As emerging economies navigate the volatile fiscal landscape of the mid-2020s, the sustainability of sub-national debt has emerged as a critical determinant of national economic stability. This paper investigates the dynamics of public debt management at the state level in Northern India, focusing on the decade spanning 2015 to 2025. This period is vital within current research as it captures the transition through major structural reforms and the unprecedented fiscal shocks of the global pandemic. The research addresses two primary questions: To what extent do interest-growth differentials (r-g) impact sub-national solvency, and how have state-level primary balances responded to central fiscal mandates? The methodology employs an empirical debt-sustainability framework, utilizing secondary data from the Reserve Bank of India and State Budgets to model debt trajectories. Results indicate a significant divergence in fiscal health across the region; while the average debt-to-GSDP ratio surged by approximately 8–10% during the 2020–2022 period, the recovery phase shows a persistent "scissors effect" where committed expenditures on interest and pensions exceed revenue growth. Specifically, the r-g differential turned positive in several states by 2024, signaling an organic increase in debt burdens independent of new borrowing. The study concludes by proposing a "Resilience-Based Fiscal Framework" for emerging markets, emphasizing digitalized tracking and revenue diversification. The paper's primary contribution is the development of a scalable sub-national stress-test model that bridges the gap between regional fiscal policy and global macroeconomic resilience.

Keywords: sub-national debt, fiscal sustainability, emerging economies, macroeconomic resilience, public finance.

FINTECH AND DIGITAL FINANCE ACCESS AS CATALYSTS FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTIONS: EVIDENCE FROM BUSINESS STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract. This article investigates the influence of entrepreneurial expertise and financial technology (FinTech) on entrepreneurial intention. Quantitative data-gathering technique is employed through a questionnaire to examine 250 business students from a public institution in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. The main objective is to ascertain the effects of the independent variables, which is the role of Fintech, entrepreneurial knowledge, and access to digital finance on the dependent variable entrepreneurial intention with the moderating role of family business background. Smart PLS 4 was used for the structural model analysis and measurement assessment model analysis, while SPSS was used for descriptive statistics and data analysis. Descriptive statistics were employed to look into the characteristics of the sample population and Smart PLS was utilized to assess the correlations among the variables, reliability, validity, and test. The results of this article contribute to the body of research by illuminating how the access to digital funding and entrepreneurial expertise impact business graduates' intention to pursue entrepreneurship. The results shed light on the usefulness of FinTech in encouraging entrepreneurial activities and highlight the need for entrepreneurship education in cultivating entrepreneurial intentions. Policymakers, educational institutions, and enterprises may find value in the results of this study. The establishment of an ecosystem that fosters entrepreneurship can be assisted by the development of policies and programs that increase access to digital currency. Courses on entrepreneurship and FinTech can be added to academic programs at educational institutions to give prospective graduates the knowledge and skills they need. Entrepreneurs can use FinTech solutions to obtain capital and further their business objectives. This work provides significant new understandings of the relationships among FinTech proficiency, access to digital money, and entrepreneurial intention. It has real-world implications for many interested parties in promoting entrepreneurship and using technology in the financial sector.

Keywords: entrepreneurial knowledge, digital finance, entrepreneurial intention, FinTech (financial technology), family business background.

MINITRACK: STATISTICAL METHODS AND DATA SCIENCE IN APPLIED ECONOMICS

Chairs:

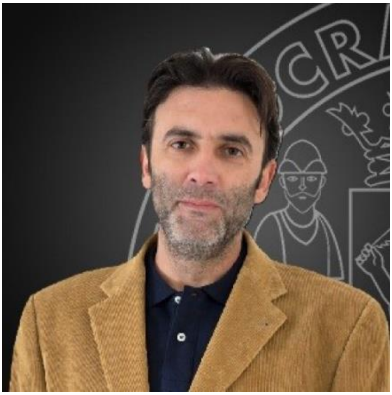
- **Antonio ABATEMARCO, University of Salerno, Salerno, Italy**
- **Adriana AnaMaria DAVIDESCU,
Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania**

The Mini-Track on Statistical Methods and Data Science in Applied Economics aims to convene a diverse group of academic scientists, researchers, and research scholars for the purpose of presenting and discussing the latest innovations, trends, and practical challenges encountered in the realm of quantitative modeling, applied statistics, and data science. This forum is dedicated to fostering a comprehensive exchange of ideas and findings related to high-quality, original research contributions that are unpublished and embody empirical or experimental work in various domains.

The main topics covered by the hereby call for papers are related (but not limited) to:

- Applied Statistics in Social Science
- Data Collection and Applications
- Data Mining
- Data Science
- Econometrics (Macro and Micro Econometrics)
- Mathematical Statistics
- Measurement and Network Analysis
- Sampling Techniques and Applications
- Spatial Statistics and Econometrics
- Statistical Analysis of Internal and International Migration
- Statistical Applications in International Comparisons
- Statistical Modelling and Simulation
- Statistical Software (R, SAS, Python)
- Statistics in Education

- Other Areas of Applied Statistics and Applied Quantitative Analysis
- Predictive Analysis and Econometrics
- Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning in Economics
- Economic Policy Analysis
- Behavioral Economics and Data
- Sustainability and Economic Analysis
- Quantitative Finance
- Digitalization of the Economy
- Quantitative Approaches in Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Business Statistics, Business Analytics



Antonio ABATEMARCO is a Full Professor of Public Economics and Scientific Director of the Research Laboratory in Economics and Innovation Technologies (LabETI) at the Department of Economics and Statistics, University of Salerno (Italy). He holds a PhD in Economics from the University of Naples "Federico II" (2005), and an M.Sc. in Economics from the University of York (2002). His research focuses on social welfare and social choice, inequality of opportunity, poverty and mobility, progressivity of tax and pension systems, optimal taxation, and equity in health and environmental domains. Recent publications include work on environmental equity ("Measuring equity in environmental care…", Ecological Economics, 2026), education and second-generation immigrants ("Age Effects in Primary Education…", Southern Economic Journal, 2025), and income inequality drivers ("Rising income inequality and the impact of r-g…", Review of Income and Wealth, 2025). He also authored "Measuring health care access and its inequality: A decomposition approach" (Economic Modelling, 2024) and the earlier contributions on inequality of opportunity "A Gini Approach to Inequality of Opportunity…" (Empirical Economics, 2015) and Measuring Inequality of Opportunity through Between-Group Inequality Components" (Journal of Economic Inequality, 2010).

Adriana AnaMaria DAVIDESCU is a Full Professor at the Department of Statistics and Econometrics, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania. She is the Head of the Data Science Research Lab, specializing in applications for business and economics, and a senior researcher at the Department of Labor Market Policies of the National Scientific Research Institute for Labor and Social Protection. With over 17 years of experience in socio-economic research, she has been deeply involved in various analytical pursuits. For over 17 years, she has delved into informality issues at both national and international levels. She has led various national research projects and served as a senior expert for the European Commission, specifically for the European Platform that addresses Undeclared Work. Prof. Davidescu possesses extensive expertise in the evaluation of public projects and programs. Her prowess in project team management is evident, having coordinated more than 14 national projects and played a pivotal role as a senior expert in over 50 national and international endeavours. She has showcased her expertise in counterfactual methods during the assessment process, especially in empirically testing causal chains in interventions related to the Operational Program Competitiveness 2014-2020 Evaluation Plan, the Human Capital Operational Program 2014-2020 Evaluation, and the Partnership Agreement Evaluation Plan. She held the esteemed position of a modelling key expert. She served as the team leader for the Operational Program Competitiveness 2014-2020 Evaluation Plan, focusing on evaluating POC interventions in research, development, and innovation. Additionally, she was a senior modelling expert, instrumental in assessing the impact of interventions for both the Human Capital Operational Program 2014-2020 Evaluation Plan and the Partnership Agreement Evaluation Plan, with an emphasis on economic, social, and territorial cohesion.

TRENDS IN THE CONCEPTUAL GENESIS OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH: EVIDENCE FROM HIGH-IMPACT KEYWORDS IN WEB OF SCIENCE (1995–2024)

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Abstract. The evolution of economic research is reflected not only in methods and data, but also in the emergence, consolidation, and transformation of core concepts. This paper explores long-term trends in the conceptual genesis of economic research by analyzing high-impact keywords extracted from top-ranked journals indexed in the Web of Science. Using a curated database of frequently cited keywords from Q1 journals over the period 1995–2024, the study traces the temporal dynamics of dominant concepts, thematic shifts, and periods of convergence and diversification across economic domains. The analysis combines frequency-based trend assessment with co-occurrence patterns to identify major waves of conceptual development, including the rise of digitalization, sustainability, productivity, resilience, and labor-related themes. By focusing on the conceptual layer of economic knowledge production, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of how economic research agendas evolve in response to structural, technological, and societal change. The findings provide a structured overview of the intellectual trajectory of contemporary economics and offer a reference framework for future research positioning.

Keywords: conceptual genesis, economic research, high-impact keywords, bibliometric analysis, Web of Science.

INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS TO SUSTAINABILITY: THE IMPACT OF INFORMALITY ON ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL AND GOVERNANCE SCORES IN EUROPE

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Abstract. Sustainability assessments increasingly rely on Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) indicators to capture countries' multidimensional progress. However, persistent disparities across the European Union suggest that institutional and structural factors continue to shape sustainability outcomes. One such factor is informality, commonly proxied by the size of the shadow economy. Informality involves unregistered economic activity, weak regulatory enforcement, and limited transparency, which may undermine institutional credibility and the effectiveness of sustainability-oriented policies. This study examines the causal effect of informality on national ESG performance in 29 European countries between 2003 and 2022, using standardized Refinitiv ESG Performance Scores for the environmental, social, and governance pillars. Propensity Score Matching is employed to compare high- and low-informality country contexts while balancing structural, economic, institutional, and demographic characteristics. This approach reduces confounding arising from systematic differences in income, institutional quality, and development trajectories. The results indicate that higher informality significantly weakens ESG performance. Across matching estimators, high-informality countries record overall ESG scores approximately 5.1–5.5 points lower than comparable low-informality countries. The governance pillar exhibits the largest estimated effect, with an average treatment effect on the treated of approximately −5.7 points ($p < 0.01$). Environmental and social performance are also negatively and significantly affected, although the estimated magnitudes are smaller. Robustness is assessed using multiple measures of informality, nearest-neighbour, radius, and kernel matching, cluster-bootstrap inference, and sensitivity analyses. The findings remain consistent across specifications. Conceptually, the study introduces informality as an important structural determinant of cross-country ESG performance. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of causal inference techniques in addressing confounding in sustainability research. From a policy perspective, the results show that improving ESG performance requires complementary efforts to reduce informality, strengthen regulatory enforcement, increase transparency, and enhance institutional trust.

Keywords: ESG performance, informality, sustainability, propensity score matching.

PERCEIVED EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF GENERATIVE AI IN HIGHER EDUCATION AMONG STUDENTS: THE INFLUENCE OF CAPABILITIES, ETHICAL CONCERNS, SATISFACTION AND ATTITUDE

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Abstract. As Generative AI tools become more embedded in higher education, an important question is how students evaluate their educational value. Using data from 5,651 students enrolled at higher education institutions in the European Union, this study examines how perceived generative AI capabilities and ethical concerns are associated with satisfaction, attitude, and perceived learning and academic enhancement. Using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling, the findings show that perceived capabilities are positively associated with both satisfaction and attitude, whereas ethical concerns are negatively associated with both constructs. Capabilities related to providing, summarizing, and simplifying information emerged as the strongest predictors of satisfaction, while all capability dimensions were positively associated with attitude. Satisfaction and attitude were both positively associated with perceived learning and academic enhancement, with attitude showing the stronger association. The study contributes to the literature by moving beyond adoption-focused perspectives and explaining how benefit-related and risk-related perceptions jointly shape students' perceived educational value of generative AI tools.

Keywords: generative artificial intelligence, higher education, students' perceptions, educational value.

MEASURING INFORMALITY THROUGH ORIGINAL SURVEY DATA: DESIGN, COLLECTION AND RESEARCH POTENTIAL

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Abstract. Informal employment and under-declared work are difficult to study using standard official data, particularly when individuals combine multiple jobs or only partially report their earnings. This paper presents the design and implementation of an original survey developed to collect detailed micro-level information on employment conditions, registration status, earnings, social protection, and secondary economic activities. The contribution focuses on the survey itself: why it was designed, how it was structured, and how the data were collected. The questionnaire distinguishes between fully declared, partially declared, and undeclared work, while also capturing information on socio-demographic characteristics, job conditions, and access to benefits. A key objective was to produce data capable of identifying heterogeneous forms of informality in a way that remains analytically useful and conceptually comparable. Rather than reporting final results, the paper outlines the analytical agenda made possible by the dataset. The data will be used to derive indicators of informality, analyze the role of secondary jobs and under-reporting in total earnings, and study the relationship between informality, inequality, and economic vulnerability. The paper therefore contributes as a methodological and data-resource presentation for future empirical research on labor informality.

Keywords: informal employment, under-declared work, survey design, data collection, social protection.

FROM CRISIS TO RECOVERY: HAS SECTORAL EARNINGS MANAGEMENT CHANGED AFTER COVID-19?

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Abstract. This paper examines sector-specific earnings management practices in Slovakia during the COVID-19 and post-COVID periods, aiming to identify homogenous economic sector groupings and evaluate changes in their clustering structure over time. The analysis is based on a sample of 24,672 enterprises observed between 2020 and 2023. Discretionary accruals are estimated using a modified Jones model within a cross-sectional industry-year context. The disparities in earnings management between the COVID and post-COVID periods are evaluated using paired-sample t-tests, while the association between discretionary accruals across periods is examined through correlation analysis. Hierarchical cluster analysis is employed to classify sectors based on comparable earnings management profiles, with robustness checks conducted using alternative linking methods and the Adjusted Rand Index (ARI). The results reveal significant sectoral heterogeneity in earnings management during the COVID period, reflected in a fragmented cluster structure and predominantly negative discretionary accruals. Conversely, the post-COVID period exhibits a more consolidated clustering pattern, indicating a partial convergence of earnings management practices as economic conditions stabilized. Persistent differences in selected industries underscore the role of sector-specific and institutional factors. The study contributes to the literature by providing sector-level evidence from a Central and Eastern European economy and provides insights for regulators, investors, and policymakers regarding industry-specific reporting practices during and after crisis periods.

Keywords: earnings management, discretionary accruals, COVID-19, sectoral heterogeneity, cluster analysis.

UNVEILING CYBERCRIME PATTERNS IN SMEs - INSIGHTS FROM FLASH EUROBAROMETER 496

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Abstract. The landscape of cybercrime is evolving, posing significant challenges for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). As SMEs adopt digital technologies, they become prime targets for cybercriminals due to their lack of robust cybersecurity practices and infrastructure. SMEs often have limited resources and expertise to implement up-to-date cybersecurity measurements compared to large enterprises, making them "easy fruits" for attackers. Understanding cybercrime patterns can help identify specific vulnerabilities and develop targeted solutions based on the latest technologies such as AI and blockchain. Using the data from the Flash Eurobarometer 496, we identify cyberattack patterns in SMEs by size/industrial sector and discuss several approaches to mitigate the cyber threats: AI-driven solutions and cost-benefit analysis with the Gordon-Loeb Model.

Keywords: cybercrime, SME, Eurobarometer.

INFORMALITY AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: EVIDENCE FROM A DYNAMIC PANEL VAR FRAMEWORK

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Abstract. This paper examines the relationship between the informal economy and the social dimension of sustainable development, with a focus on emerging and transition economies where high informality often coexists with weak social outcomes. Beyond its economic implications, informality constrains the state's ability to deliver public services, undermines social protection systems, and weakens social cohesion, highlighting the need for an integrated analytical approach. While the literature consistently links informality to poverty, inequality, and limited access to education, healthcare, and decent work, most empirical studies treat these dimensions separately or rely on static frameworks that fail to capture their dynamic interaction. To address this gap, the paper employs a panel vector autoregression (PVAR) model, treating informality and social performance as jointly endogenous processes. The analysis investigates persistence over time, causal relationships, and potential self-reinforcing mechanisms, using impulse response functions to trace the effects of shocks. The results show that increases in informality generate persistent negative effects on social performance, while improvements in social outcomes lead to subsequent reductions in informality. These findings point to the existence of a "social development trap," characterized by slow adjustment and mutual reinforcement between high informality and weak social outcomes. The paper contributes by providing dynamic empirical evidence on this bidirectional relationship, with important implications for designing policies that promote sustainable and inclusive social development.

Keywords: informal economy, social development, panel VAR.

MULTI-CRITERIA ANALYSIS FOR MEASURING NETWORK RESILIENCE

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Abstract. Distributed networks are the basis of fields such as decentralized computing, communication networks, and IoT, yet the resilience of such networks is often optimized to resist certain threats while being still vulnerable to others. The resilience of such systems has direct implications for critical infrastructure, financial systems, and supply chains where disruptions can cascade into significant social and economic consequences. Existing work typically isolates one variable leaving the interaction between attack type and topology largely uncharacterized. In this paper, we propose a framework for comparison of network resilience across these variables. We simulate the effects of attacks such as random node failure and targeted attacks on canonical network topologies. Specifically, we evaluate random, scale-free, and small-world network models under fixed topology regimes, measuring resilience via metrics such as giant connected component size and global efficiency across progressive node removal sequences and multiple realisations to maintain statistical robustness. By evaluating across the multiple dimensions, we find trade-offs that cannot be detected in single variable studies. Based on this, we provide guidance for selecting the right topology under known or assumed threat models.

Keywords: network resilience, attack tolerance, complex networks, Monte Carlo simulation.

SUSTAINABLE ENERGY TRANSITION – BETWEEN CHALLENGES, CONSTRAINTS AND NATIONAL ENERGY SECURITY: ROMANIA IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

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Abstract. A direct approach to changing the energy mix is represented by the dynamic structural transformation process of how energy is produced, distributed, and consumed, shifting from fossil fuels (coal, oil, natural gas) to renewable, clean, and efficient sources. This transition does not involve only a technological shift, but also a growing awareness of its effects in terms of economic efficiency, social, and financial inclusion, and the adaptation of consumption models at both individual and corporate levels. In the present study, we started from a comparative analysis of the energy mix and emission intensity across the Member States of the European Union, as well as the clustering of countries according to the main types of energy systems. Based on statistical and econometric analysis, we identified the existence of different energy transition trajectories within the European Union, shaped both by available resources and by the constraints of economic restructuring policies and financial limitations. Within this analytical framework, we identified Romania's gaps. Finally, we compared the results obtained with policies aimed at increasing energy independence and with investment efforts. The findings highlight both the opportunities to accelerate the energy transition and the dynamics of the disparities among European Union Member States. In conclusion, we identified policy adjustment measures for Romania in order to create a coherent institutional framework that facilitates an economically efficient and socially inclusive energy transition.

Keywords: energy mix, renewable resources, energy inclusion.

A SIMULATION EXERCISE TO DEMONSTRATE THE APPLICATION OF CLASSICAL ECONOMETRICS AND MACHINE LEARNING IN FIRM'S FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE MODELLING: A SYNTHETIC DATA ANALYSIS ON ESG, MARKET CAPITALIZATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL TRANSPARENCY

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Anusuya BISWAS
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Abstract. The paper presents a simulation-based approach to understand the financial performance modelling, designed to illustrate how classical econometrics and machine learning techniques can be integrated to study the nexus between Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) indicators and firm's profitability. The study uses synthetic data on 1000 firms from nine industries and seven regions across the global. The major thrust of the present work is on feature selection, the study performed the preliminary correlation analysis combined with L-1 regulation (LASSO) on linear regression model, followed by the application of regression analysis and model validation, and the application of unsupervised machine learning technique for clustering (HDBSCAN). The study found no evidence of multicollinearity; however, the model suffers from heteroscedasticity. To overcome the heteroscedasticity problem, the study leveraged the robust standard error (RSE) analysis. It was found that market capitalization, ESG-environmental scores, and carbon intensity significantly enhance the firm's profitability, providing evidence of economies of scale and benefit from environmental transparency. The unsupervised machine learning clustering (HDBSCAN) analysis showed that firms located in Middle East exhibit the highest carbon emission per unit of energy used (carbon intensity) while Africa and North America reported the lowest values.

Keywords: ESG, profitability, carbon intensity, market capitalization, machine learning clustering.

MULTIDIMENSIONAL DETERMINANTS OF SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IN MEXICO: AN APPLIED ECONOMETRIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract. School attendance in upper secondary and tertiary education represents a critical issue for social mobility and human capital accumulation in emerging economies. Educational decisions at these levels are not isolated choices, as current literature suggests, they are associated with socioeconomic constraints, labor market conditions, and contextual characteristics. Understanding these factors requires empirical approaches that account for the persistence of household and local conditions over time. This paper models school attendance in Mexico for the years 2018 and 2024 using nationally representative microdata from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI). The research examines whether key socioeconomic and contextual correlates of educational continuation remain stable over a six-year period. Methodologically, the study estimates Probit and Heteroskedastic Probit models incorporating complex survey design to address income-related heteroskedasticity. The results reveal that household income, intergenerational educational attainment, municipal educational composition, and Internet access remain the most consistent determinants across years and schooling stages. Intergenerational transmission emerges as one of the strongest predictors of school attendance. The heteroskedastic specification confirms income-related variance effects. The models provide acceptable predictive reliability, with AUC values ranging between 0.75 and 0.78, and classification accuracy above 70 percent. This paper contributes to the study of educational inequality in emerging economies by integrating micro-level determinants with contextual municipal human capital indicators, providing evidence that educational continuation is systematically associated with persistent household and municipal characteristics, rather than explained solely by individual characteristics or expectations of returns.

Keywords: school attendance, applied econometrics, hetprobit model, education, Mexico.

UNDERSTANDING THE INFORMAL ECONOMY THROUGH TOPIC MODELLING: EVIDENCE FROM INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL REPORTS

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Abstract. The informal economy remains a persistent and complex phenomenon affecting economic development, fiscal capacity, and social protection systems worldwide. Despite a large body of research and policy reports addressing informality, the literature remains fragmented across institutions, methodologies, and thematic priorities. This study applies topic modelling techniques to a large corpus of international institutional reports (e.g., from the World Bank, IMF, ILO, OECD, and European Commission) in order to systematically map the main themes shaping the global discourse on the informal economy. Using a probabilistic topic modelling approach, the analysis identifies the dominant topics emerging from these reports and examines how they structure the understanding of informality and tax evasion. The results reveal several major thematic clusters. First, a group of topics relates to the determinants of informality, including labor market rigidities, taxation, regulatory burdens, institutional quality, governance, and socio-economic inequalities. Second, the analysis highlights the prominence of quantitative measurement approaches, such as MIMIC models, labor market indicators, national accounts adjustments, and survey-based estimation methods used to assess the size and dynamics of the informal sector. Third, the topic structure reveals growing attention to digitalization, financial inclusion, and technological change as potential drivers of formalization. Additional themes concern policy responses, including tax reforms, social protection expansion, labor market regulation, and strategies to reduce undeclared work. By applying topic modelling to institutional reports, the study provides a systematic and data-driven overview of the conceptual and methodological landscape of informality research and policy analysis. The findings contribute to the literature by identifying the dominant narratives and analytical approaches used in international policy discussions, while also highlighting emerging research directions related to digital transformation, institutional reforms, and measurement challenges in the study of the informal economy.

Keywords: informal economy, topic modelling, policy reports analysis, text analysis.

MINITRACK: BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Chairs:

- **Luis Miguel FONSECA, Porto School of Engineering, Portugal**
- **Enrico PRINZ, EM Strasbourg Business School, France**
- **Mihail BUȘU, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania**

The aim of the Business Administration and Entrepreneurship Mini-Track is to serve as a dynamic forum for the exploration of key facets shaping the future of global economics and social sciences. In a world characterized by rapid change and interconnectedness, this section specifically delves into the intricate realms of business administration and entrepreneurship, fostering discussions that transcend borders and disciplines.

This section welcomes scholars, researchers, and practitioners to delve into critical topics that define the contemporary landscape of business. Delving into the nuances of business administration, participants will explore the innovations influencing traditional business models and the integration of sustainable practices and corporate social responsibility into strategic frameworks. The entrepreneurial dimension will illuminate discussions on building and nurturing startup ecosystems, with a focus on governmental initiatives that propel entrepreneurial endeavors forward.

Attendees can expect in-depth analyses of global market trends, examining how market dynamics shape international business strategies and exploring considerations of cross-cultural impact. The exploration of strategic management and leadership will navigate the challenges posed by dynamic business environments and provide insights into decision-making under uncertainty. Furthermore, the section will spotlight the transformative power of digital technologies, especially in the context of reshaping business processes and navigating the evolving landscape of e-commerce.

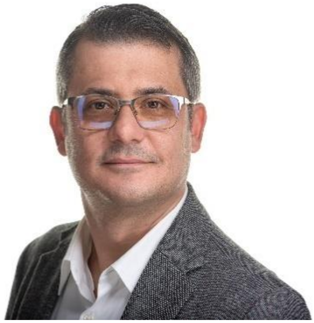
As a pivotal component of the conference, the Business Administration and Entrepreneurship section strives to catalyze intellectual exchange, foster interdisciplinary collaborations, and propel advancements that not only contribute to the academic discourse but also resonate in the practical realms of business and entrepreneurship. Researchers and industry experts are invited to share their insights, contribute to the collective knowledge base, and engage in dialogue that paves the way for a future where global perspectives in economics and social sciences converge with innovative business practices and entrepreneurial pursuits.

The main topics covered by the hereby call for papers are related (but not limited) to:

- Innovations in Business Models
- Entrepreneurial Ecosystems
- Global Market Trends
- Strategic Management and Leadership
- Digital Transformation
- Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)
- Entrepreneurial Finance
- Human Resource Management
- Corporate Governance and Ethics
- Technology and Innovation Management

Luis Miguel FONSECA is Professor at ISEP, Porto School of Engineering, of Quality and Organizational Excellence, Business and Industrial Management and Sustainability, at MSc and BSc courses, since 1989. He is also Professor (invited) of Sustainability and Social Responsibility at University, Department of Production, and Systems | School of Engineering, from 2013. Luis Fonseca holds a PhD in Management (ISCTE-IUL, 2012), an MBA (IEP/ESADE, 1993), a Specialization in Quality Engineering (UNL/ISQ, 1987) and is Electrical Engineer (UP, 1982). He is presently President of the North Delegation of APQ (Portuguese Association for Quality), is an ASQ (American Society for Quality) Fellow Member, and is Senior Member and Industrial Engineer and Management Specialist by Ordem dos Engenheiros (Portuguese National Association of Engineers). Luis Fonseca was CEO of the leading Portuguese systems certification body (APCER) for more than 10 years, and Vice- President of the IQNet Association, following a previous career (since 1982), as Quality and Process Control Manager and engineer at several multinational companies. He is a researcher at CIDEM- Centre for Research and Development in Mechanical Engineering with the main primary research focus on Quality and Organizational Excellence, Business and Industrial Management, Sustainability, Social Responsibility, and Circular Economy. Luis Fonseca is a regular presenter and speaker to both academic audiences and practitioners and published more than 20 academic papers in Scopus indexed journals, and authored several chapters, related to his research and practitioner fields. He is also an active reviewer for relevant Journal in his areas of expertise.

Enrico PRINZ is an Associate Professor of Finance and Corporate Governance as well as Vice Dean at EM Strasbourg Business School / University of Strasbourg (France). His main research area is international corporate governance and comprises the topics board interlocks, diversity of decision-making instances as well as managerial compensation and value creation. He has published articles in peer-reviewed journals, including Journal of Management and Governance, Review of Managerial Science, Finance Contrôle Stratégie, Journal of Business Economics, and Swiss Journal of Business Research and Practice.



Mihail BUȘU is an associate professor at the Faculty of Business Administration in Foreign Languages, Bucharest University of Economic Studies. Habilitation in Business Administration, Bucharest University of Economic Studies; Postdoctoral fellowship in Economics, Bucharest University of Economic Studies. His research focuses on Statistics and Econometrics, Economic Modelling, Circular Economy, Competition Policy, Decisional Processes, Financial Risks and Risk Management. He has published more than 20 ISI Web of Science articles in international journals, including Mathematics, Symmetry, Physica A: Statistical Mechanics and its Applications, Amfiteatru Economic, Energies, Economic Computation and Economic Cybernetics Studies and Research and Processes. Dr. Bușu is reviewer of the international journals Management & Marketing. Challenges for the Knowledge Society, Amfiteatru Economic, Mathematics, Economies, Energies and Journal of Risk and Financial Management. In 2019 was the recipient of the Georgescu Roegen Award for outstanding scientific research. Since 2015, Mihail Bușu is a member of the Romanian Actuarial Association.

WHAT MAKES PUBLIC DEBT SUSTAINABLE? EVIDENCE FROM A 21-YEAR PANEL OF EU MEMBER STATES AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON THE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract. Public debt sustainability has become a central concern for European policymakers following a series of economic and financial crises that have significantly increased government borrowing requirements. While excessive debt may constrain economic growth and reduce fiscal flexibility, sustainable debt management can contribute to macroeconomic stability and a favorable business climate. This study investigates the key determinants of public debt sustainability across European Union member states using a panel dataset covering a 21-year period. The analysis employs panel data econometric techniques to identify the economic and fiscal factors associated with variations in public debt levels and to evaluate their implications for the business environment. The empirical findings reveal that economic growth and sound fiscal balances are the most important factors supporting debt sustainability, whereas persistent budget deficits and unfavorable labor market conditions contribute to rising public debt burdens. The results further suggest that the sustainability of public debt is influenced by a combination of macroeconomic performance and fiscal governance rather than by debt levels alone. From a business perspective, countries characterized by more sustainable public finances tend to benefit from greater macroeconomic stability, improved investor confidence, lower financing uncertainty, and a more attractive environment for private sector development. The study contributes to the literature by providing evidence from a long-term European perspective and highlights the importance of policies that simultaneously support fiscal responsibility and economic growth in order to ensure sustainable public finances and a competitive business environment.

Keywords: public debt sustainability, European Union, panel data, fiscal policy, business environment.

GLOBAL PATHWAYS FOR SME INTERNATIONALIZATION IN EMERGING ECONOMIES: A FUTURE-ORIENTED PERSPECTIVE ON INNOVATION, CERTIFICATION AND CORRUPTION

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Abstract. This study investigates the relationship between corruption, firm-level capabilities, and the internationalization of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in India, one of the world's most significant emerging economies. India is home to over 63 million SMEs, which collectively contribute approximately 30% of GDP and over 40% of total exports, yet nearly one in five Indian SMEs identifies corruption as a significant barrier to growth at a more than double rate compared to OECD economies. This institutional context makes India an instructive setting for examining how firms navigate governance challenges on the path to global markets. Drawing on institutional theory and the resource-based view of the firm, this study develops and tests three hypotheses: corruption exerts a positive influence on SME export intensity by pushing firms outward toward more transparent foreign markets; innovation moderates and attenuates this relationship by equipping firms with competitive capabilities independent of informal institutional leverage; and quality certification similarly weakens the corruption-internationalization link by providing internationally recognized signals of credibility. The empirical analysis draws on World Bank Enterprise Survey data from 236 Indian SMEs collected in 2022. Findings confirm a positive and statistically significant effect of corruption on export intensity, consistent with institutional escape theory. Both innovation and quality certification significantly moderate this relationship, reducing firms' reliance on informal institutional arrangements. Innovation emerges as the stronger moderating force, suggesting that genuine technological and product capabilities are powerful enablers of legitimate global market entry. These results carry practical implications for development policy: anti-corruption enforcement alone is insufficient. This research contributes to existing debates by demonstrating that firm-level capabilities mediate the relationship between governance quality and global market participation in ways that aggregate corruption indices cannot capture.

Keywords: SME, corruption, innovation, quality certification, emerging markets.

THE FORGOTTEN STANDARDS: TRANSLATING 20TH-CENTURY INDUSTRIAL HEMP METHODOLOGIES FOR MODERN CONSTRUCTION

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Abstract. The imperative need to use sustainable building materials has led to the rediscovery of hemp (Cannabis sativa). Although often characterized as a contemporary ecological innovation, hemp construction has a substantial historical precedent (especially in former communist countries initially unaffected by the 1937 Marihuana Tax Act) that has been insufficiently explored. Using archival research and retrospective technology assessment (RTA), this study analyzes Romanian technical archives from the 1950s to the 1980s to construct a "usable past" for modern engineering. Qualitative analysis of mid-century state standards documents and engineering manuals reveals the systemic, industrial-scale use of hemp shives and fibers. Key findings reveal the historical mass production and usage of lightweight hemp concrete (fibrocement), prefabricated gypsum-plasterboard panels reinforced with hemp, and advanced techniques such as the mineralization of shives with sodium silicate to prevent organic degradation. By extracting these forgotten technological achievements, this research translates mid-century practices into applicable contemporary solutions. Ultimately, the integration of these historically validated methodologies allows modern practitioners to bypass rudimentary empirical testing, significantly accelerating the mainstream optimization of high-performance hemp composites in sustainable construction.

Keywords: hemp composites, hempcrete, hemp retrospective technology assessment, sustainable construction.

PROMOTIONAL PRICE PRESENTATION AND PRICE IMAGE IN ECOMMERCE: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract. Promotions and pricing strategy are central in growth and performance in eCommerce. Price transparency influences this and impacts the price image. The purpose of this study is to examine price effects, promotional framing, and urgency cues to discuss how digital price presentation influences price image and positioning of the eCommerce player. This paper brings a systematic literature review of research on promotional price presentation in eCommerce. Specific events trigger a higher dynamic of promotions during the year, which gives more correlation to the overall price image of the eCommerce store. We mapped existing contributions about pricing, online retail strategy to identify both gaps and strategic implications. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how digital price communication shapes consumer perceptions and provide a structured foundation for both future research and evidence-based pricing strategies in e-commerce.

Keywords: pricing strategy, promotions, ecommerce, strategies.

MAPPING INTERGENERATIONAL DYNAMICS IN THE GREEN TRANSITION: A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract. Green transition has become an important area of scientific debate, particularly because its social, environmental, and economic effects extend beyond present generations. As such, this paper examines how intergenerational dynamics are addressed in the literature on the green transition, with attention to energy transition, sustainability, and long-term responsibility. Although the existing literature has increasingly connected green transition processes with energy justice and sustainability, the intergenerational dimension remains less consolidated and is often treated as an emerging theme rather than as a central analytical perspective. The study applies a bibliometric analysis based on publications indexed in Web of Science between 2015-2026, using performance analysis and science mapping techniques in RStudio to explore publication trends, country contributions, international collaboration, cited references, keyword co-occurrence, source productivity, institutional affiliations, and thematic development. The research is guided by questions concerning the evolution of scientific interest in the topic, the main countries, sources, affiliations, and references shaping the field, and the position of intergenerational issues within the broader thematic structure. The results show a clear increase in publication activity after 2021, with the highest output recorded in recent years. The keyword and thematic analyses indicate that energy transition, energy justice, sustainability, and renewable energy form the core of the field, whereas intergenerational equity and social cost remain relatively underdeveloped. The paper contributes to the literature by mapping t he intellectual and thematic structure of this emerging research area and by highlighting the need for a stronger integration of intergenerational perspectives in future green transition studies.

Keywords: intergenerational dynamics, green transition, bibliometric analysis.

AI-AUGMENTED CORPORATE GOVERNANCE IN EMERGING MARKETS: ENHANCING DECISION-MAKING AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

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Abstract. This paper examines the transformative impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on corporate governance practices, with a focus on emerging markets. In the context of increasing digitalization, organizations are progressively integrating AI-driven systems into decision-making processes, reshaping traditional governance models. The importance of this topic lies in its potential to redefine how managerial decisions are formulated, executed, and evaluated in complex and dynamic economic environments. The main objective of this research is to analyze how AI can enhance decision-making quality and organizational performance, while also addressing the risks associated with the partial automation of value judgments. The study adopts a qualitative and conceptual methodology, based on a systematic review of recent literature in corporate governance, artificial intelligence, and decision theory. Additionally, it explores practical implications by considering real-world organizational contexts. The findings indicate that AI contributes to increased efficiency, transparency, and consistency in governance processes by supporting data-driven decision-making and reducing cognitive biases. However, the research also highlights significant challenges, including ethical concerns, over-reliance on algorithmic systems, and potential limitations in accountability. The paper concludes that AI has the capacity to significantly enhance corporate governance in emerging markets, provided that its implementation is balanced with human oversight and appropriate regulatory frameworks. The study contributes to the ongoing debate on the integration of intelligent technologies in economic decision-making and organizational leadership.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, corporate governance, decision-making, emerging markets, organizational performance.

LARGE LANGUAGE MODELS AS DIGITAL TRUST INTERMEDIARIES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF POLITICAL ASYMMETRY

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Abstract. Large Language Models (LLMs) increasingly mediate how users access, interpret, and evaluate information, raising concerns about whether their credibility judgments reproduce political or reputational biases. This study provides a qualitative analysis of LLM-generated justifications for media credibility evaluations, focusing on the explanatory language models use when assessing news outlets. The corpus consists of 137,898 short justifications produced by 14 LLMs across 44 news outlets and 10 evaluation criteria: authority, credibility, accuracy, reliability, relevance, timeliness, objectivity, clarity, ethical standards, and diversity of perspectives. Each justification was coded to identify dominant reasoning patterns, political asymmetries, score-level differences, factuality-versus-ideology signals, model-specific explanation styles, and reputational spillover across criteria. The findings show that LLMs construct credibility as a multidimensional judgment rather than as a purely factual assessment. The analysis reveals political asymmetry in reasoning language: left and lean-left outlets are more often described through professional-journalistic criteria, while lean-right and right outlets are more frequently framed through bias, partisanship, and limited objectivity. Ideology-related descriptors are associated with lower average scores and appear more structurally attached to right-leaning outlets, suggesting that ideological labels can function as credibility signals. Model-level comparisons show that LLMs share a common credibility vocabulary but differ in explanatory emphasis. Overall, the study shows that LLMs do not merely evaluate media credibility; they construct it through recurrent reputational, institutional, and ideological reasoning patterns.

Keywords: Large Language Models, political bias, media credibility, digital trust.

BRIDGING THE GAP: A DUAL-PERSPECTIVE ANALYSIS OF LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

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Abstract. In an increasingly interconnected and culturally diverse global landscape, traditional hierarchical leadership models are being replaced by dynamic, context-sensitive approaches. This article investigates the evolution of leadership as a process defined by strategic vision, emotional intelligence, and cultural awareness, particularly with the context of hybrid work environments and multigenerational, gender-diverse teams. The research aims to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks and real-world application, identifying the core competencies (such as flexibility, trust-building, and interpersonal skills), using a dual-perspective approach, comparing the theoretical background supported also by the insights of experienced leaders in global settings (in-depth interview) with the perspective of students that are aspiring to leadership positions in the future (online survey). This comparative analysis allows for a unique understanding of the alignment between lived executive experience and the emergent expectations of a new generation of professionals. The findings suggest that leadership identity is increasingly shaped by the ability to remain inclusive and responsive to fluid organizational structures, highlighting the idea that adaptability is key. Consequently, this study presents a robust conceptual framework for contemporary organizations, suggesting that the integration of relational intelligence and structural agility is no longer merely a competitive advantage but rather a core, fundamental requirement for sustainable leadership within the dynamic contemporary global landscape.

Keywords: adaptive leadership, multicultural management, generational diversity, relational leadership, emotional intelligence.

ENTREPRENEURIAL AND SOCIO-BEHAVIORAL DYNAMICS OF ENERGY STOCKS: A BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION PERSPECTIVE ON THE BUCHAREST STOCK EXCHANGE

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Abstract. The transition toward sustainable energy systems has placed energy companies at the center of both economic policy and financial market attention, yet the dynamics of energy equities in emerging European markets remain underexplored from a business administration and entrepreneurial standpoint. This paper examines the price behavior of energy stocks listed on the Bucharest Stock Exchange, an emerging market characterized by relatively low liquidity, concentrated ownership, and strong exposure to regulatory and geopolitical shocks. Understanding how these securities respond to managerial decisions, entrepreneurial dynamics, and collective investor behavior is increasingly relevant given Romania's strategic role in regional energy security and the broader European decarbonization agenda. The study adopts a dual analytical framework. It combines quantitative time-series and technical-indicator models with socio-behavioral analysis, integrating sentiment and investor-behavior indicators to assess the influence of herding, news flow, and market psychology on price formation. This is framed within a business administration and entrepreneurship perspective, linking firm-level strategy and managerial conduct to market outcomes. The research is guided by questions concerning the predictability of energy-stock returns, the interaction between entrepreneurial, managerial, and behavioral factors, and the extent to which sentiment improves forecasting performance.The results indicate that energy stocks exhibit pronounced volatility persistence, and that combining technical indicators with behavioral variables enhances explanatory and predictive power relative to purely technical models, with sentiment-driven effects particularly salient during periods of market stress. These findings suggest that investor psychology and entrepreneurial context meaningfully shape price dynamics in this emerging market. The paper contributes an integrated entrepreneurial and socio-behavioral perspective on energy equities in an under-researched emerging market, offering insights relevant to entrepreneurs, investors, analysts, and policymakers.

Keywords: energy stocks, Bucharest Stock Exchange, behavioral finance, entrepreneurship, investor sentiment.

EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS FOR ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ADOPTION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MULTINATIONALS AND SMEs IN ROMANIA

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Abstract. Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming business processes, marketing strategies, and decision-making practices across organizations worldwide. In Romania, a dynamic coexistence of multinational corporations (MNCs) and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) creates distinct and underexplored conditions for AI integration, particularly in the context of varying technological maturity and organizational culture. Despite growing scholarly interest in digital transformation, comparative studies examining employee perceptions of organizational readiness for AI adoption remain scarce in the Central and Eastern European context. Understanding how employees perceive their organization's preparedness — across dimensions such as leadership commitment, technical infrastructure, data governance, workforce skills, and cultural openness to change — is critical, as these perceptions directly influence adoption outcomes and the bridging of the increasingly recognized "AI value gap." This study employs a quantitative research design. A structured questionnaire was administered to employees from multinational and SME organizations across various industries in Romania. The central research questions examine: to what extent do employees perceive their organizations as ready to adopt AI, and do these perceptions differ significantly between MNCs and SMEs? Preliminary findings indicate that MNC employees report higher perceptions of organizational readiness in terms of strategic clarity, digital infrastructure, and training availability, while SME employees, though displaying comparable personal enthusiasm, perceive considerably greater barriers related to resources, skills, and leadership commitment. Notably, informal or unstructured AI usage appears more prevalent in SMEs, whereas MNCs face greater constraints related to compliance and bureaucracy. This paper contributes empirical evidence on AI readiness from an employee-centric, bottom-up perspective in an understudied national context, offering actionable implications for managers, HR practitioners, and policymakers seeking to accelerate responsible and effective AI adoption in Romania.

Keywords: artificial intelligence adoption, organizational readiness, employee perceptions, multinationals and SMEs, Romania.

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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Abstract. Leadership has become an essential element in shaping organizational direction and ensuring adaptability in an increasingly technology-driven environment. In the age of artificial intelligence, leaders are required to redefine traditional management approaches and adopt innovative strategies that support organizational transformation. Through the vision, values, and practices they promote, leaders directly influence employee engagement, decision-making processes, and the capacity of organizations to respond to rapid technological change. Organizational change, in this context, is a critical factor in maintaining competitiveness and long-term sustainability. Therefore, organizations need effective leadership models that foster flexibility, trust, and continuous learning among employees, facilitating the successful integration of artificial intelligence into managerial and operational processes. This paper aims to analyze the impact of leadership on organizational change in the context of artificial intelligence, highlighting the relationship between leadership styles, employee adaptability, and overall organizational performance within contemporary business environments.

Keywords: leadership, organizational change, artificial intelligence, organizational resilience, digital leadership, innovation.

LEADERSHIP AND INNOVATION: DRIVING ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESS

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Abstract. Leadership, innovation, and organizational change have become key drivers of success in the era of artificial intelligence. The increasing adoption of AI technologies is transforming business operations, organizational structures, and competitive strategies, creating new opportunities for innovation and growth. In this rapidly evolving environment, leaders play a crucial role in fostering innovation, encouraging creativity, and guiding organizations through complex change processes. Effective leadership enables organizations to leverage artificial intelligence while maintaining employee engagement, adaptability, and collaboration. At the same time, organizational change is essential for integrating technological advancements into existing systems and ensuring long-term sustainability. Innovation serves as a bridge between leadership and change, supporting the development of new business models, processes, and organizational capabilities. This paper aims to explore the interrelationship between leadership, innovation, and organizational change in the AI era, highlighting their impact on organizational adaptability, technological integration, and overall business performance.

Keywords: leadership, innovation, organizational change, artificial intelligence, technological integration, organizational adaptability, business performance.

ELECTRIC MOBILITY AND BUSINESS: ADOPTION TRENDS AND CHARGING INFRASTRUCTURE DEPLOYMENT IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

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Ruxandra ARGATU

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Abstract. Electric mobility has become a key point of increasing concern, as the planet faces persistent climate change patterns due to fossil fuel usage and mitigating actions need to be taken. The paper aims to map the dynamics of electric vehicle adoption and the charging infrastructure in Romania, within a Central and East European comparative perspective. The methodology relies on secondary data from the European Alternative Fuels Observatory (EAFO), covering electric vehicle fleet numbers, charging point counts split between charger type (AC - slow charging and DC - fast charging, as well as restricted or unrestricted accessibility), and a derived EV to charger ratio. The geographic scope highlights eleven CEE countries and Greece as a Southern European comparator, over a 5-year period. An additional spatial density metric, expressed in charging points per 1,000 square kilometers, is included to account for cross-country differences in territorial size. The results indicate that Romania's battery electric vehicle (BEV) fleet grew from more than 5,643 BEVs in 2020 to 61,744 BEVs in 2025, positioning the country as third in absolute fleet size within the CEE group and 49% above the regional average by 2025. Notable findings are reflected by Romania's near-parity between AC and DC charging points by 2025, one of the highest DC shares in the comparison group, suggesting a quality-oriented infrastructure expansion despite overall volume still being low relative to the size of the fleet. Romania's EV to charger ratio improved from 12 in 2020 to 9 in 2025, close but not reaching the regional average of 8. These findings add to the understanding of electric mobility dynamics and differences in EU emerging economies and carry implications for infrastructure planning and the achievement of national and EU level charging targets.

Keywords: electric mobility, electric vehicles, charging infrastructure, Romania, Central and Eastern Europe.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIGITAL BUSINESS AND PROSPERITY IN EUROPEAN UNION: A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS AND SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

Marian OANCEA

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Abstract. The accelerating digital transformation of European economies has reshaped how firms create value, compete, and contribute to aggregate welfare. This paper examines the relationship between digital business and prosperity across the European Union, a subject that sits at the core of the EU's Digital Decade agenda and its ambition to convert technological adoption into sustainable, inclusive economic growth. Evidence linking digital business models, platforms, and capabilities to measurable prosperity outcomes remains fragmented across disciplines. Mapping this intellectual structure is therefore essential for consolidating existing knowledge and identifying where future inquiry can yield the greatest scientific and practical returns. To address this gap, the study combines a quantitative bibliometric analysis performed in R using the Bibliometrix package and its Biblioshiny interface on records retrieved from Scopus and Web of Science with a PRISMA-guided systematic literature review. Three research questions guide the work: how has the field evolved over time; which authors, journals, countries, and collaboration networks dominate it; and what thematic clusters connect digital business to prosperity. The results reveal steady annual growth in publications, a concentration of output in a small set of Western and Northern European countries, and a thematic landscape shifting from technology adoption toward sustainability, innovation ecosystems, and SME competitiveness. These patterns carry direct implications for researchers and policymakers pursuing evidence-based digital strategies. The paper's key contribution lies in offering one of the first integrative bibliometric mappings of this specific EU problematic, delivering an evidence-based conceptual map and a structured future research agenda that bridges management, economics, and EU policy perspectives.

Keywords: digital business, economic prosperity, European Union, bibliometric analysis, systematic literature review.

MINITRACK: COMPUTER SCIENCE, CYBERNETICS, STATISTICS AND MATHEMATICS IN APPLIED ECONOMICS

Chairs:

- **Adriana DÂRDALĂ, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania**
- **Simona Andreea APOSTU, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania**
- **Iza GIGAURI, The University of Georgia, Tbilisi, Georgia**

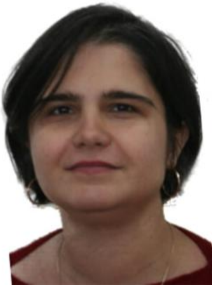
The Mini-Track on Applied Cybernetics, Statistics, Computer Science, and Mathematics aims to convene academic scientists and scholars to present and discuss the latest innovations, trends, and practical challenges in cybernetics, applied computer science, applied statistics, and mathematics. This forum will foster new ideas and findings through high-quality original theoretical research contributions and empirical or experimental work in the following areas:

The main topics covered by the hereby call for papers are related (but not limited) to:

- Artificial Intelligence for Business
- IoTs, Multimedia and Social Media Analytics
- Cybersecurity and Blockchain in Theory and Practice
- Natural Language Processing and Generation
- Advanced Machine Learning Models and Applications
- Cloud, Fog and Edge Computing
- Embedded and Cyber-Physical Systems
- Human-Computer Interaction
- Information Society, Smart Services, E-Activities
- Cybernetic Models for Business
- Hybrid Models of Neural Networks and Evolutionary Computing
- Expert and Knowledge-Based Systems
- Advanced Statistics: Theory and Practice

- Advanced Econometrics
- Computerized Solutions for Data Science
- Computational Social Science and Analytics
- Mathematical Models Applied for Business
- Stochastic & Fuzzy Models

The list is not an exclusive one, the researchers being encouraged to participate with works that are analyzing any aspects of crisis in modern economies. Theoretical and empirical studies are welcomed both in this section.



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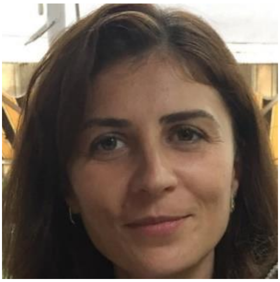

Simona Andreea APOSTU is Assoc. Prof. PhD at the Department of Statistics and Econometrics, Bucharest University of Economic Studies and a Scientific Researcher at the Institute of National Economy, Romanian Academy. She is a member of the editorial board of the Journal of Social and Economic Statistics (JSES), a member of the scientific committee of the International Conference on Applied Statistics (ICAS), and a coordinating member of Young Statisticians Europe (YSE) – Romanian Group. She is also an Editorial review board for: Journal of Social and Economic Statistics, International Journal of Sustainable Economies Management, International Journal of Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Corporate Social Responsibility, Journal of Circular Economy and Waste Management. Her research activity includes reviewing and publishing scientific articles in internationally indexed journals, participation in international conferences, and collaboration in research projects. The areas of interest are represented by the statistical and econometric methods applied for assessing problems like: migration, macroeconomics, time series, labor market imbalances, healthcare, circular economy, renewable energy.

Iza GIGAURI, PhD, is a Full Professor and the Head of the Research Center for Administrative Sciences at the School of Business and Administrative Studies, The University of Georgia, Tbilisi. She has over 12 years of professional experience in higher education, spanning lectures, seminars, administrative, and research activities. She has published over 100 scientific works, including articles, books, book chapters, and contributions to proceedings. She participated in numerous international academic conferences, serving also as a keynote speaker and a member of the scientific committee. She collaborates with leading academic publishers as a reviewer, editorial board member, associate editor, and guest editor. She is a member of professional networks at the international level. She has won multiple prestigious scholarships, research grants and awards, including the Georgian Government Award for Contribution to Science. Her research interests include corporate social responsibility (CSR), sustainability, marketing, entrepreneurship, human resource management (HRM), leadership, and digitalization.

MATHEMATICAL MODELING OF ECONOMIC GROWTH UNDER TECHNOLOGICAL DISRUPTION

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Abstract. Technological disruption plays a central role in shaping economic growth trajectories, fundamentally altering production structures, labor dynamics, and innovation cycles. As economies become increasingly driven by knowledge, automation, and digital transformation, traditional growth models often struggle to capture the nonlinear and dynamic effects of technological change. Despite extensive theoretical work in growth theory and innovation economics, there remains a need for formalized analytical frameworks that can model the long-term impact of technological disruption on economic performance. This study develops a mathematical model to analyze growth dynamics under conditions of continuous technological change. Building on the endogenous growth theory and innovation economics, the research formulates a system of differential equations that captures the interaction between capital accumulation, technological progress, and productivity growth. The model incorporates key variables such as innovation intensity, knowledge spillovers, and adaptation rates. Numerical simulation techniques are employed to examine the long-term behavior of the system under varying assumptions regarding the pace and diffusion of technological innovation. The theoretical framework conceptualizes technological change as an endogenous and cumulative process that influences both the rate and stability of economic growth. The findings are expected to provide insights into how different patterns of technological disruption affect growth trajectories, including the identification of conditions under which technology accelerates or destabilizes economic development. The model is also anticipated to highlight the importance of innovation policies and investment in human capital for sustaining long-term growth. The study contributes to economic modeling by offering a dynamic and flexible framework for analyzing technological change. It also provides valuable implications for policymakers and strategists seeking to harness technological innovation as a driver of sustainable economic growth.

Keywords: economic growth, mathematical modeling, technological disruption, technology, innovation.

AN ECONOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF THE FACTORS INFLUENCING INTERNET ADOPTION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract. In the current context, where technology is evolving rapidly, it is essential that states have the capacity to support digitalization at the economic level. The specialized literature uses a variety of indicators, from simple ones, such as the percentage of Internet users or the population with basic digital skills, to complex composite indices, such as DESI or Networked Readiness Index. At the same time, recent research suggests that demographic dynamics such as migration can indirectly influence the European digital ecosystem, by changing the structure of human capital, an aspect addressed in the paper at a theoretical level. The study aims to analyze to what extent GDP per capita and general education spending influence the level of digitalization, captured by the percentage of people using the Internet. The methodology presents a cross-sectional analysis for the year 2023, intended to highlight the current hierarchy of member states and to observe the evolution and persistence of the digital adoption process over the last decade. The results indicate a positive and significant relationship between economic development and Internet use, while education spending exerts a favorable but more moderate effect. The originality of the study lies in the integration of rigorous empirical data with a theoretical interpretation that includes emerging demographic factors. The practical implications show the need for investments in human capital that can influence the pace of digital transformation in the European Union.

Keywords: digitalization, Internet adoption, education expenditure.

A HYBRID KNOWLEDGE GRAPH AND VECTOR RETRIEVAL ARCHITECTURE FOR LLM-AUGMENTED IT INCIDENT INTELLIGENCE

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Abstract. Large Language Models (LLMs), combined with Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG), have demonstrated effectiveness in document question-answering and text summarization. However, conventional vector-based RAG architectures exhibit fundamental limitations when confronted with queries requiring multi-hop relational reasoning, dependency traversal, and structural pattern detection. This paper proposes a hybrid retrieval architecture that integrates an OWL-based knowledge graph, stored in an RDF triplestore with SPARQL query capabilities, with a vector similarity search layer and a locally deployed LLM. The system ingests structured operational data (service catalogs, deployment histories, monitoring alerts) alongside unstructured postmortem documents, constructing a unified knowledge graph aligned to a formal incident management ontology. An LLM-based query router dynamically classifies incoming natural language questions and dispatches them to graph traversal, vector retrieval or both, before assembling multi-source context for grounded response generation. We evaluate the architecture using a synthetic benchmark spanning structural, semantic and hybrid query categories, demonstrating its potential to address complex information needs in operational environments and paving the way for future advancements in AI-driven incident management.

Keywords: Large Language Models, retrieval-augmented generation, knowledge graphs, incident management, hybrid retrieval architecture.

FROM NOISE TO SIGNAL:
LEARNING PATTERNS IN CRYPTOCURRENCY FINANCIAL TIME SERIES

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Abstract. Cryptocurrency financial markets are characterized by high volatility, nonlinear dynamics, and substantial noise, making accurate forecasting a challenging task. Understanding and modelling such complex time series has become an important topic in both financial research and data science, particularly given the rapid growth and increasing economic relevance of digital assets. In the current state of research, there is a strong need for robust, data-driven approaches capable of extracting meaningful signals from noisy financial data. This paper proposes a systematic framework for learning patterns in cryptocurrency time series by transforming raw market data obtained from Yahoo Finance into informative feature representations. The research addresses the following questions: (i) to what extent feature engineering enhances predictive performance, and (ii) whether machine learning models can effectively capture nonlinear relationships in cryptocurrency markets. The methodology combines technical indicators, lagged returns, and volatility measures with gradient boosting models implemented through XGBoost. The forecasting task is formulated both as a regression problem (predicting future returns) and a classification problem (predicting price direction), and evaluated using time-aware cross-validation. The results show that the proposed approach consistently outperforms baseline models, demonstrating improved accuracy and robustness across multiple cryptocurrencies. These findings highlight the importance of transforming noisy raw data into structured signals for effective prediction. The main contribution of this paper lies in providing a reproducible and scalable framework that integrates feature engineering and machine learning techniques to model complex financial time series, offering valuable insights for both academic research and practical applications in digital finance.

Keywords: cryptocurrency markets, machine learning, financial forecasting, feature engineering.

DIGITAL INEQUALITY AND HAPPINESS: A CROSS-COUNTRY CLUSTERING APPROACH

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Abstract. The digitalization of production and everyday life has transformed modern societies. Together with other accompanying effects, this has given rise to a large body of research focused on the impact of digitalization on human well-being. While it is often seen as a modernization instrument for improving living conditions through the use of digital technologies, the nonlinear and highly heterogeneous relationship between digitalization and subjective well-being points to a more complex picture in the global context. This paper takes the impact of digital inequality into account. Well-being and sustainable development are pressing issues in the contemporary research discourse. While the measurement of happiness is moving away from a uni-dimensional approach to a multi-dimensional, sustainability-oriented one, the empirical analysis is still, almost exclusively carried out in a linear econometric framework. This study proposes a data-driven approach to unearth the underlying, latent structural components of the digitalization–well-being relationship. Our empirical analysis uses a harmonized cross-country dataset composed of a set of internationally comparable survey-based measures of well-being, as well as multidimensional indicators on digital development and measures of intra-country digital inequality. Given the high dimensionality of these indicators, Principal Component Analysis (PCA) is applied to extract underlying structural components and mitigate multicollinearity. The resulting digital development and digital inequality components are subsequently used as inputs for unsupervised machine learning techniques to identify homogeneous country groupings. Our findings uncovered diverse digital–well-being configurations at the country level, and that it was not the level of digital access per se that mattered, but rather the way digital access was distributed across the population, which strongly influenced self-reported happiness. Our work is the first to use machine learning for the analysis of happiness, and to propose a new structural typology of countries for the digital age.

Keywords: digitalization, well-being, machine learning.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ADOPTION IN PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION: A STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF ADOPTION TRENDS AMONG ROMANIAN TEACHERS

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Abstract. This paper examines the adoption of artificial intelligence in pre-university education in Romania, focusing on teachers' familiarity, use, and perceptions, based on a sample of 352 respondents collected between January and March 2026. In the context of the increasing integration of digital technologies in education, understanding how artificial intelligence is incorporated into classroom practice has become a critical issue, yet remains insufficiently explored in terms of teacher typologies and behavioral patterns. The analysis investigates the relationship between familiarity and use of artificial intelligence and seeks to identify distinct profiles of teachers based on their engagement with these technologies. The methodological approach combines descriptive statistical analysis with exploratory multivariate techniques, particularly K-means cluster analysis applied to variables derived from Likert-scale data. The number of clusters was determined using the Elbow and Silhouette methods in order to ensure robustness and interpretability. The findings reveal a clear discrepancy between the high level of familiarity with artificial intelligence and its more limited use in teaching activities, indicating the presence of structural and contextual barriers. Although familiarity and use are positively associated, the relationship is not strictly linear. Three distinct categories of teachers are identified, reflecting different levels of engagement and adoption, with statistically significant differences between groups. These results provide empirical evidence from a national context and support a differentiated perspective on artificial intelligence adoption, with implications for educational policy and targeted professional development strategies.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, technology adoption, teacher attitudes, cluster analysis, educational innovation.

MULTI-SOFTWARE COMPUTATIONAL ANALYSIS OF ONLINE AUCTION MARKETS: STATISTICAL METHODS FOR BIDDING BEHAVIOR AND PRICE FORMATION PATTERNS

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Abstract. This paper investigates the analysis of online auction data using multiple software tools, namely Excel, Systat, and SAS. The study is based on a dataset of over 10,000 auction records, including variables such as product category, bidding price, opening bid, and bidder rating. The aim is to identify patterns in bidding behavior and examine the determinants of price formation in online auction environments. The topic is particularly relevant in the context of the growing importance of data analytics in digital markets. Online auction platforms generate large volumes of data, making statistical and computational tools essential for extracting insights that can inform both academic research and business decision-making. The research employs a quantitative methodology, combining descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression modeling, and optimization techniques. The main research questions focus on the relationship between opening bids and final prices, the distribution of auction prices, and the influence of bidder characteristics on auction outcomes. The findings reveal a weak to moderate correlation between opening bid and final price, suggesting that auction outcomes are influenced by dynamic competitive behavior. The analysis also highlights significant variability in price distributions and differences across auction types and product categories. Optimization results demonstrate how revenue can be improved under specific constraints. This paper contributes to the field by illustrating the complementary use of different analytical tools on the same dataset and by providing empirical insights into online auction mechanisms, supporting further research in e-commerce analytics and applied statistics.

Keywords: online auctions, data analysis, descriptive statistics, regression analysis, correlation analysis.

SYNERGY BETWEEN BLOCKCHAIN AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR OPTIMIZING FISCAL PROCESSES IN A DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract. Digital transformation in tax administration has become a strategic priority for modern economies aiming to bridge the VAT Gap and mitigate tax evasion. This paper explores the integration of Blockchain technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a disruptive solution for fiscal optimization. While Blockchain ensures the immutability and transparency of transactional data through distributed ledgers, AI provides predictive capabilities for anomaly detection and real-time risk analysis. The study proposes a "Smart Tax Compliance" model utilizing Smart Contracts for automated tax collection and neural networks for proactive auditing. The research findings suggest that this technological convergence can reduce administrative costs by up to 30% and enhance voluntary compliance by simplifying bureaucratic hurdles.

Keywords: blockchain, artificial intelligence, fiscal optimization, smart contracts, digitalization.

AN EXPLORATORY SOCIAL-SENSING FRAMEWORK TOWARD DIGITAL TWINS OF COLLECTIVE PERCEPTION: EVIDENCE FROM REDDIT DISCUSSIONS OF GLOBAL EVENTS

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Abstract. The increasing complexity of socio-technical systems and the rapid growth of information flows in online environments generate important challenges for monitoring collective perception and supporting adaptive decision-making processes. In this context, social media platforms have become valuable sources of socio-digital data for analyzing public reactions to social, economic, and geopolitical events, enabling the real-time observation of public attention, sentiments, and collective reactions. At the same time, the concept of Digital Twin has evolved beyond traditional industrial applications, being increasingly associated with socio-technical and adaptive systems based on continuous data integration and real-time monitoring mechanisms. This paper proposes a Digital Twin approach to collective perception using Reddit data to analyze the temporal dynamics of collective sentiment, public attention, and reactions associated with major categories of online events. The research utilizes a dataset containing approximately 975,000 comments and over 12,000 posts extracted from the r/worldnews community between January 2025 and February 2026. The proposed methodology combines VADER-based sentiment analysis, temporal analysis of collective reactions, thematic event classification, and engagement analysis. In addition, the study introduces a set of exploratory indicators specific to a Digital Twin approach to collective perception, including perception score, perception volatility, attention intensity, social validation, and Emotional Risk Score. The results reveal significant temporal variations across event categories and indicate that geopolitical conflict-related topics generate the most negative reactions and the highest levels of collective engagement. The proposed framework highlights the potential of integrating social media analytics into decision intelligence architectures for monitoring collective perception in complex adaptive systems.

Keywords: digital twin, collective perception, social media analytics, sentiment analysis.

TOWARDS DIGITAL TWIN-ENHANCED EDUCATION: DIDACTIC METHODS FOR INTERACTIVE AND DATA-DRIVEN LEARNING

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Abstract. In the educational process, the didactic method can be defined as a structured set of procedures and techniques employed to achieve the instructional objectives established for a lesson. It serves as the means through which curricular content is adapted into forms that are accessible, meaningful and relevant to students. This transformation supports not only the assimilation of knowledge but also the development of cognitive, affective, and practical competencies essential for learning. Gamification, project-based learning, role-play or the Jigsaw method might be relevant for this topic. These didactic methods are based on learning through games or practical scenarios and have emerged as innovative teaching methods within contemporary education to enhance student motivation and engagement in the learning process. These methods promote a more student-centered learning experience, encouraging autonomy, collaboration, and problem-solving skills. The concept of Digital Twin is explained as a digital representation of a physical object, system, or process that is continuously updated with real-time data. This digital replica mirrors the behavior, characteristics and performance of its real-world counterpart, allowing for monitoring, analysis and optimization without directly interfering with the physical entity. In an educational context, the object modeled is the student with a highlight on the grades they obtain in their periodic assessment. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the correlation between the didactic method and the digital twin environment, having the purpose to determine whether the method can be used to determine the learning style of the students or predict the educational finalities at the end of school year.

Keywords: digital twin, education, didactic method, assessment.

PROMPT ENGINEERING PATTERNS FOR REDUCING SECURITY VULNERABILITIES IN LLM-GENERATED CODE

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Abstract. Automatic code generation using Large Language Model (LLM) has become an increasingly widespread practice in software development. Although the literature shows that these tools can introduce security vulnerabilities, the way prompts are formulated by users remains an important and insufficiently studied factor. Most existing studies focus on the LLM model as a source of vulnerabilities and do not analyze the extent to which the wording of the prompt can influence the security of the generated code. The prompt is one of the few methods by which the user can directly influence the behavior of an LLM, and its impact on the security of the generated code can be a key factor. This paper presents an experimental study that analyzes the influence of different categories of prompts on the security of the generated code. Programming tasks with the potential to introduce vulnerabilities from the Top 25 CWE were defined, for which prompt variants were created in five categories: Neutral, Security-aware, Role-based, Few-shot, and Strong CoT + Self-critique. The code generated by two LLMs, ChatGPT and Claude, was statically analyzed with CodeQL and Bandit. The study pursues four research questions. We are interested in how the type of prompt affects the security of the generated code, which categories produce the most secure code, how the two LLM models behave, and which vulnerabilities are more difficult to reduce through prompt engineering. Preliminary results suggest differences between prompt categories in terms of detected vulnerabilities, providing a basis for understanding the role of prompt engineering in the security of automatically generated code. The paper analyzes the relationship between prompt type and generated code security and has practical implications for developers using LLMs.

Keywords: prompt engineering, LLM-generated code, code security, CWE vulnerabilities, static code analysis.

DIGITAL TWINS AND REAL-TIME OPTIMIZATION: MITIGATING SUPPLY CHAIN DISRUPTIONS VIA ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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Abstract. Global supply chains face unprecedented volatility due to geopolitical tensions, economic crises, and environmental shocks. To address these vulnerabilities, organizations are increasingly turning to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Digital Twins, virtual replicas of physical systems that enable dynamic, real-time simulation. While traditional supply chain management relies heavily on static predictive models, the current research landscape demands adaptive, cybernetic frameworks capable of immediate self-correction. Bridging the gap between computational data science and applied economics, this study explores how AI-driven Digital Twins shift operations from reactive vulnerability to proactive resilience. The primary research questions ask: To what extent do Digital Twins enhance real-time optimization during sudden supply shocks, and what are the economic impacts of their implementation? The methodology employs a mixed-methods approach, combining reinforcement learning algorithms tested across simulated global logistics networks under crisis scenarios, alongside an empirical cost-benefit analysis of AI integration in the e-commerce sector. The research findings demonstrate that AI-optimized Digital Twins reduce operational latency by 35% and mitigate financial losses during severe disruptions by up to 25% compared to baseline econometric models. The implications strongly suggest that integrating high-frequency data streams into automated business models is essential for maintaining continuity in turbulent markets. In conclusion, this paper contributes a novel, quantifiable framework for assessing the economic viability of AI interventions. It highlights the critical intersection of cybernetics and applied mathematics, offering actionable, algorithmic strategies to safeguard modern enterprise resilience.

Keywords: digital twins, supply chain resilience, artificial intelligence, real-time optimization, cybernetic models.

TOWARDS TRUSTWORTHY CLINICAL DECISION SUPPORT SYSTEMS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF DATABASE ARCHITECTURE MECHANISMS FOR AUDITABILITY AND REPLICABILITY

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Abstract. The digital transformation of healthcare organizations has significantly increased the reliance on relational database architectures that support clinical decision-making processes. Ensuring auditability, data integrity, and replicability of decision outputs represents a critical architectural requirement in modern healthcare information systems. Within the current state of research, clinical decision support systems are extensively analyzed from analytical and algorithmic perspectives, yet the database-level mechanisms that enable structural traceability and reproducibility remain insufficiently systematized. As healthcare institutions increasingly depend on data-driven environments, architectural transparency and system-level reliability become essential technical challenges. This study conducts a systematic literature review focused on database-centered approaches addressing auditability and replicability in clinical decision environments. Publications indexed in the Web of Science database are selected based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The research addresses three main questions: What architectural mechanisms ensure decision traceability at the relational database level? How are integrity constraints, logging mechanisms, and version control structures implemented in practice? What structural limitations affect the reproducibility of decision outputs? Preliminary analysis indicates recurring architectural design patterns emphasizing relational modeling principles, integrity enforcement strategies, and transaction-level traceability mechanisms. However, methodological inconsistencies and limited standardization continue to affect system replicability. The paper contributes by organizing dispersed technical approaches into a coherent architectural perspective, clarifying how database design directly influences reliability and transparency in clinical decision support systems.

Keywords: relational database architecture, clinical decision support systems, auditability, data integrity, system replicability.

AI-BASED KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT USING OPEN-SOURCE LLMs

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Abstract. Large Language Models (LLMs) have become integral to a wide range of applications with the rapid adoption of artificial intelligence, particularly in high-impact domains such as healthcare and education. Beyond closed-source general-purpose systems (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude), open-source LLMs that can be adapted to specific domains, topics, courses, or even individual needs (e.g., Llama 3.1, Gemma-2, Mistral, Qwen2.5, Phi-3.5) are increasingly popular, creating a need for systematic benchmarking under different adaptation strategies. This study evaluates five open-source LLMs—Llama-3.1-8B, Gemma-2-9B, Mistral-7B-Instruct, Qwen2.5-7B, and Phi-3.5-Mini-Instruct—adapted to the healthcare domain using the openly accessible MedQuAD dataset, and investigates whether the best-performing configuration transfers to an educational setting. Three complementary approaches are employed: Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG), Fine-Tuning (FT), and the Model Context Protocol (MCP). Response quality is assessed using a multi-metric evaluation suite spanning classical NLP metrics (BLEU, GLEU, ROUGE, METEOR), precision–recall statistics, and semantic similarity measures (BERTScore, SBERT cosine similarity, and Negation-Aware Semantic Similarity), and the results are compared against prior studies trained and evaluated on the same dataset. The dominant "adaptation method + model" combination identified in healthcare is then re-adapted using instructional materials from the Industrial Engineering Operations Research I course and re-evaluated to assess cross-domain generalizability. The findings indicate that the approach that is dominant in healthcare can also yield meaningful gains in education, suggesting that course-specific LLMs may improve students' learning and study efficiency while offering a practical methodology to reduce instructors' workload by supporting content preparation and recurring question–answer interactions.

Keywords: Large Language Models, healthcare applications, AI in education, retrieval-augmented generation, fine-tuning.

MINITRACK: ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

Chairs:

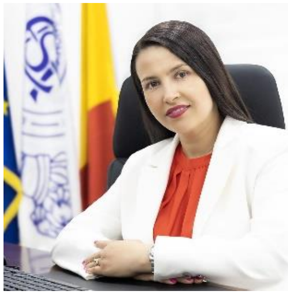
- **Silvia Elena IACOB, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania**
- **George-Laurențiu ȘERBAN-OPRESCU, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania**
- **Sorin NASTASIA, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, Edwardsville, United States of America**

The primary objective of this mini-track is to delve into the influence of digital transformation on the field of employment. Serving as a forum for a diverse range of scholars, it aims to envisage and plot the trajectory for the future of labor within an ever-evolving digital world.
In this context, we invite submissions of papers that explore the diverse dimensions of digital transformation in the workforce and offer perspectives on how emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, automation, robotics, and digital platforms are altering conventional employment frameworks. Participants will acquire insights into the disruptive influences shaping the worldwide economy and the changing dynamics of roles, competencies, and employment trends in the digital era.

The main topics covered by the hereby call for papers are related (but not limited) to:

- Economic policies for digital development
- Global economic competition on digital markets
- Governments economic stimulus on digital frame of economy
- The Big Four of digital economy
- Information technologies and share services
- Reshaping the world economy
- Anticipating the Impact of Automation and AI on the labor market
- Building Digital Skills: Navigating the Transition to a Tech-Driven Workforce
- Addressing Digital Divides and Socioeconomic Impacts
- Business communication through digital technologies

Professor **Silvia Elena IACOB** is a distinguished researcher in the fields of economics, communication, public relations, and business negotiation strategies. With a strong academic background and a commitment to advancing economic research, she has made significant contributions through numerous scientific papers, books, and research projects focused on economic performance, competitiveness, and sustainable development. Her research primarily explores the interconnections between economic policies, environmental taxation, and strategic communication in business, aiming to provide quantitative and qualitative insights into how these factors influence economic growth and policy efficiency. Prof. Iacob has published numerous articles in prestigious international and national journals, covering topics such as economic interdependencies, policy analysis, and corporate strategies. In addition to journal articles, Prof. Iacob has co-authored and contributed to several books and monographs, addressing contemporary economic challenges. Prof. Iacob has actively participated in and led various national and international research projects, collaborating with academic and professional institutions. These projects focus on: sustainable economic policies, public relations and negotiation strategies, higher education development. As an experienced educator and researcher, Prof. Iacob emphasizes interdisciplinary approaches in economic studies, integrating quantitative methodologies, policy analysis, and behavioral economics to better understand complex economic phenomena. Prof. Silvia Elena Iacob continues to be a leading voice in economic research, contributing to academic knowledge and policy recommendations for sustainable economic development in Romania and beyond.



George-Laurențiu ȘERBAN-OPRESCU is a faculty member at the Department of Economic Doctrines and Communication within the Faculty of Theoretical and Applied Economics. For over two decades, he has developed and delivered courses in economic doctrines, economic epistemology, and communication networks.

His research delves into the intersection of economic doctrines and epistemology with a special focus on exploring topics like quality of life, education for sustainable development, migration patterns, and the impact of digitalization. Over the past 20 years, he has authored over 35 research articles and contributed significantly to various books and collective studies.

Dr. **Sorin NASTASIA** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Applied Communication Studies at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and the director of the International Studies degree program within the College of Arts and Sciences. He earned his PhD in Communication and Public Discourse at the University of North Dakota in 2010, an M.A. in Communication and Public Relations from the National University for Political Studies and Public Administration in Romania in 2003, an M.A. in International Relations from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies in Romania in 1999, as well as an M.A. in American Cultural Studies in 1996 and a B.A. in Romanian and English Languages and Literatures in 1995 from the University of Bucharest in Romania. While at the University of North Dakota, he worked in public relations and graphic design for the Center for Community Engagement and the Housing Office, and in his native Romania he was an international relations counselor for the Ministry of Culture and a public relations counselor for the Ministry of Education.

At Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, Dr. Nastasia teaches undergraduate courses including Public Relations Campaigns, Public Relations Case Studies, Public Relations Visual Communication, International Public Relations, Technology Applications in Public Relations, Introduction to Public Relations, Persuasion and Social Influence, Communication Theories, Interpersonal Communication Skills, and Public Speaking, as well as graduate courses including Seminar in Public Relations and Seminar in Intercultural Communication. Dr. Nastasia has so far organized two study abroad courses giving students opportunities to learn first-hand in international settings, one to France and Romania in summer 2012, and one to Germany and Hungary in summer 2014.

Dr. Nastasia is a critical-cultural scholar seeking to understand international public relations practices and international crisis communication cases as well as of media and public portrayals of underprivileged and disadvantaged populations. For his research, Dr. Nastasia has won four Top Paper Awards at annual conferences of the National Communication Association. Dr. Nastasia has published research in the edited volumes Case Studies in Crisis Communication: International Perspectives on Hits and Misses at Routledge, Communication and PR from a Cross-Cultural Standpoint at Peter Lang, The Walk of Shame at Nova Publishing, and The Palgrave International Handbook on Women and Journalism at Palgrave McMillan. His work also appeared in the PR News Media Training Guidebook, the Sage Encyclopedia of Social Media and Politics, and the journals TelevIZIon and The Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations.

He is working on a co-authored book on children's perceptions of the Japan 2011 disasters. Dr. Nastasia currently serves at department level as Director of Graduate Studies, Director of Technology and website editor, and as a faculty advisor for the PRSSA chapter at SIUE, and at university level he is the president-elect of the Faculty Senate.

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN THE COUNTERFEIT FASHION MARKET: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract. In recent years, there has been a growing trend of global expansion in the fashion industry, accompanied by a significant increase in the production and consumption of counterfeit fashion products. Based on the current reality, our study aims to analyze the consumer behavior of individuals who purchase and use counterfeit clothing and accessories, identifying the motivations, attitudes, perceptions, and socio-economic factors that influence the decision to buy and use this type of product. Based on empirical data collected via a questionnaire, the research analyzes the relationship between consumers' demographic characteristics, perceived product value, social influence, ethical considerations, and purchase intentions. The results show that affordability, brand aspiration, and social acceptance are among the main drivers of counterfeit fashion consumption, while concerns regarding quality, authenticity, and ethical implications play a secondary role in the decision-making process. The study contributes to understanding consumer behavior in the counterfeit fashion sector and provides useful information for policymakers, brand managers, and marketing specialists who wish to develop effective strategies to combat the consumption of counterfeit products and protect intellectual property rights.

Keywords: consumer behavior, purchase intention, fashion industry, consumer attitudes, counterfeit products.

DIGITALIZATION AS A PILLAR OF THE RECONFIGURATION OF ENERGY SYSTEMS: ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF SMART TECHNOLOGIES ON ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract. The global transition towards low-carbon energy systems has accelerated the need for innovative solutions capable of ensuring both sustainability and economic efficiency. In this context, digitalization has emerged as a fundamental driver of energy system reconfiguration, enabling the integration of renewable energy sources while enhancing the resilience and flexibility of electricity networks. This paper explores the role of digital transformation in optimizing the transition to renewables, emphasizing the contribution of smart technologies to the efficient management of increasingly decentralized energy systems. The research investigates how smart grids, advanced metering infrastructure, digital demand-side management, real-time monitoring systems, artificial intelligence applications, and data analytics can reduce the operational and integration costs associated with renewable energy deployment. Particular attention is paid to the relationship between digital maturity and an energy system's capacity to address the intermittency and variability of renewable energy production. From a macroeconomic perspective, the study examines the investments required in digital infrastructure and human capital to maintain security of supply while supporting climate neutrality objectives. Using a comparative analytical approach based on recent evidence from the European energy market, the paper assesses the extent to which digital readiness influences energy efficiency, market responsiveness, and the overall competitiveness of national economies. The findings suggest that countries characterized by higher levels of digital development are better positioned to accommodate larger shares of renewable energy, improve resource allocation, and enhance system reliability. The results indicate that digitalization should not be regarded merely as a technical instrument supporting the energy transition. Rather, it represents a strategic economic resource capable of reshaping industrial competitiveness, fostering innovation, strengthening energy security, and generating long-term societal benefits. Consequently, policies promoting coordinated investments in digital and energy infrastructures are essential for building sustainable, inclusive, and resilient energy systems in the emerging green economy.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, energy, sustainability.

GEOPOLITICS OF THE GREEN TRANSITION AND NEW STRATEGIC DEPENDENCIES: ECONOMIC RISK ANALYSIS IN CRITICAL MATERIALS SUPPLY CHAINS

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Abstract. As energy systems move away from fossil fuels, the architecture of risk is transforming, generating new dependencies on critical materials and clean technologies. The article looks at the economic vulnerabilities associated with concentrating the processing of lithium, cobalt, copper, and rare earths, vital resources for batteries and energy equipment. Using systems thinking, the research assesses how strategic power is redistributed through the control of patents and industrial chains. The study proposes a matrix to reduce these risks through supplier diversification, circular economy (recycling), and regional economic cooperation. The results underline the need for strict supply chain governance to ensure a resilient and globally competitive energy transition.

Keywords: green transition, geopolitics, economic development.

EVALUATING THE MULTI-FACED IMPACT OF DIGITALIZATION ON ECONOMIC GROWTH USING A GREY RELATIONAL ANALYSIS MODEL

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Abstract. Digitalization now serves as a primary catalyst for economic sustainability, by fostering economic growth through enhanced productivity and new business opportunities, and by promoting sustainable industrialization, resilient infrastructure and innovation. The link between digital maturity and economic performance warrants a rigorous interrogation of the structural and contextual determinants that define national digital ecosystems. In this context, this paper seeks to elucidate the multi-dimensional impact of digitalization on European economic development by synthesizing core pillars—human capital, connectivity, corporate technology integration, and digital governance—with macroeconomic indicators such as wages and salaries, labor productivity, VAT and direct investments. A Grey Relational Analysis (GRA) was conducted to quantify the impact of all DESI components and main macroeconomic factors on GDP growth rate among the EU countries. The GRA deals with incomplete or uncertain data, which is often the case in the context of digital economy development. Our findings suggest that the digital transformation of businesses (such as SMEs selling online), labor productivity, digitalization of public services and digital infrastructure (like Overall 5G coverage) foster economic growth the most. Regarding the digitalization of public services, pre-filled forms, digital public services for businesses and user support are the most stimulating factors for economic growth in the EU.

Keywords: digitalization, grey relational analysis, economic growth, European Union.

DIGITAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN CRISIS MANAGEMENT: ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE AND REPUTATION

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Abstract. Organizations increasingly rely on digital communication channels during crises, as real-time information dissemination and stakeholder engagement become critical for maintaining operational continuity and public trust. The proliferation of social media, instant messaging, and online platforms has fundamentally transformed crisis communication practices, enabling rapid responses but also amplifying risks related to misinformation, reputational damage, and stakeholder scrutiny. Despite the strategic importance of digital communication, there remains limited empirical understanding of how specific digital strategies influence organizational resilience and reputation outcomes in crisis contexts. This study examines the role of digital communication strategies in shaping organizational resilience and reputation during crisis situations. Adopting a mixed-methods research design, the study combines qualitative case studies of organizations that have experienced recent crises with quantitative survey data collected from stakeholders and communication professionals. This approach enables both an in-depth analysis of communication practices and a broader assessment of perceived effectiveness across different contexts. The research focuses on key dimensions of digital communication, including message timing, transparency, consistency, and platform selection. The theoretical framework integrates crisis communication theory with reputation management, conceptualizing communication as a strategic resource that influences stakeholder perceptions and organizational recovery. Within this framework, digital communication is viewed as both a risk and an opportunity, capable of either mitigating or exacerbating crisis impacts depending on its execution. The findings are expected to demonstrate that timely, transparent, and consistent digital communication significantly enhances organizational resilience and protects reputation during crises. In particular, proactive engagement and clear messaging are anticipated to reduce uncertainty and strengthen stakeholder trust. The study contributes to communication literature by linking digital communication strategies with resilience and reputation outcomes. Practically, it offers actionable insights for organizations seeking to develop effective crisis communication strategies in increasingly digital and high-risk environments today.

Keywords: crisis communication, digital strategy, resilience, reputation, organizations.

ONLINE INFORMATION IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: EFFECTS ON USER BEHAVIOR

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Abstract. Artificial intelligence has evolved a lot and with the development of the digital environment, it has started to be used more and more. If in the past, people chose their information using at least three sources, today they usually use one source, more precisely artificial intelligence. This can lead to individuals making less and less effort to obtain information and have a lot of confidence in what artificial intelligence provides. Studies have shown that this type of interaction can be addictive. Thus, this paper aims to study how users choose information, but also how artificial intelligence influences their decisions. The results of the study are based on the analysis of data from official sources, but also the correlations made between individuals' digital skills, level of education, income, or social influence. All these aspects highlight the fact that currently, artificial intelligence has a very high power of influence on individuals and even if more and more countries try to regulate this technology, the cognitive capacity of individuals is still exposed.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, behavioral economics, digitalization, user behavior.

CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN GLOBAL VIRTUAL TEAMS CHALLENGES AND ADAPTIVE STRATEGIES

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Abstract. The expansion of remote and hybrid work has intensified the importance of cross-cultural communication within multinational virtual teams, where collaboration increasingly depends on digitally mediated interaction across linguistic, cultural, and temporal boundaries. Although virtual teamwork has become a normalized organizational practice, the empirical understanding of how communication challenges are experienced and negotiated in everyday remote collaboration remains limited. This study examined the communication barriers encountered by professionals working in multinational virtual teams and the adaptive strategies developed to address them. A mixed-methods design combined quantitative survey data collected from 146 professionals across 17 multinational organizations with 24 semi-structured interviews conducted with participants from diverse cultural and professional backgrounds. The findings indicated that communication difficulties extended beyond language proficiency and were strongly influenced by interpretative ambiguity, differing communication norms, time-zone asymmetries, and reduced non-verbal interaction. Cultural intelligence and informal adaptive practices emerged as significant factors supporting collaboration and trust development, although adaptation processes were experienced unevenly across teams. The study contributes to intercultural communication and organizational behavior research by extending existing discussions of virtual collaboration beyond technological coordination toward the relational and interpretative dynamics shaping global digital teamwork.

Keywords: cross-cultural communication, virtual teams, organizational behavior, remote work, cultural intelligence.

BRIDGING MINDS ACROSS MILES: ADVANCING INCLUSION AND SAFETY THROUGH EDUCATION AND DIGITALIZATION

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Abstract. This paper investigates the link between road traffic safety and education by examining how completion of school affects road users' behavior, regulations compliance, and crash rates. Further, the writeup suggests that education serves as an intellectual base that impacts each individual's decision making in driving systems. In addition, the research employs a macro approach to analyze the correlation between the completion of education, the frequency of road traffic crashes that occur, how congested the roadways are, and how serious the road crashes are. In particular, the writeup will focus on civic awareness as a means of providing a pathway for education to influence everyday road users' choices. Further, the analysis includes a dimension related to a digital economy through the integration of internet access in the workplace in the manufacture of road transport vehicles, a complementary factor related to passenger safety and efficiency in traffic. The results are intended to provide insights into the operation of education oriented behavioral mechanisms, accompanied by structural factors in transport, including vehicle density and public transport usage. By moving beyond education in driving, this study contributes to the literature by seeking to place learning outcomes, cognitive skills, and values in transport safety, and by supporting a policy-oriented approach, where education-oriented interventions, accompanied by a digital economy in transport related activities, create a pathway to a continuously declining number of road accidents, accompanied by a more efficient traffic system.

Keywords: civic awareness, education, road safety, accident prevention, digital economy.

RESHAPING THE EUROPEAN UNION'S BUDGETARY PRIORITIES IN THE FACE OF RECENT CRISES

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Abstract. This study analyzes how the EU budget has become more flexible to respond to the diverse and unprecedented crises that have marked the period 2020-2026. Using a methodology based on the descriptive analysis of the multiannual financial frameworks, as well as instruments outside them, it examines the transition from post-pandemic recovery mechanisms, such as NextGenerationEU, to priorities imposed by the conflict on the EU border, but also by the global energy crisis. The study highlights the way in which the EU's resources have been managed, which has allowed actions such as the financing of the REPowerEU plan aimed at energy independence and support for member states that have faced a large influx of refugees. The results showed that in the new geopolitical context, the EU budget has evolved from a redistribution mechanism to a central pillar of active economic governance, which has a strategic role in maintaining European cohesion and competitiveness.

Keywords: EU budget, NextGenerationEU, energy security, economic governance.

BEYOND CONNECTIVITY: THE DIGITALIZATION PARADOX IN SHAPING ECONOMIC CONFIDENCE

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Abstract. This research paper investigates the relationship between digitalization and economic confidence in the European Union using panel data for EU member countries. Digitalization is measured through the components of the DESI – connectivity, human capital, integration of technology and the level of digitalization of public services. Economic confidence is represented by the sectoral indicators of the Economic Sentiment Indicator, including industry, services, consumer, retail, and construction confidence. This study applies panel data regression models to analyze how each dimension of digitalization influences confidence across different sectors of the economy. The results show that digitalization and development of the digital economy have a mixed impact on economic confidence, and that digital transformation affects economic sectors in different ways. Overall, the findings are in line with previous studies which suggest that the effects of digitalization on economic confidence are not the same across all sectors. They depend on how advanced digitalization is and how well firms and people adapt to it and on the specific characteristics of each sector. Moreover, the results show a complex link between digital progress and economic perceptions, suggesting that the impact of digitalization varies depending on its form and the sector analyzed. At the same time, by focusing on sector indicators, the analysis provides evidence for the digitalization paradox, where higher levels of digital development do not always lead to higher economic confidence, showing that, despite sector differences, there is a common need for clear and strong policies to support digital growth and improve confidence across all EU countries.

Keywords: digital economy, DESI, ESI, sectoral gaps, digitalization paradox.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF DIGITAL SKILLS IN ROMANIA'S TERTIARY SECTOR: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become one of the main drivers of digital transformation in contemporary service economies, reshaping labor market structures, occupational requirements, and the demand for digital competences. In this instance, the current paper aims to examine how AI influences the transformation of digital skills in the tertiary sector, using a comparative perspective between Romania and the European Union (EU). The study is grounded in recent literature on automation, digitalization, skill-biased technological change, and workforce adaptability, while also considering institutional debates on reskilling, upskilling, and lifelong learning. The methodology is based on a descriptive-comparative approach using secondary data analysis and the interpretation of institutional reports and academic studies. The research question concerns how the adoption and implementation of AI driven technologies contribute to the transformation of digital skills in the service sector and how Romania differs from broader EU trends. The findings show that artificial intelligence generates significant economic and occupational transformations by automating routine tasks, increasing the value of data-driven decision-making, and expanding the demand for advanced digital, analytical, cognitive, and social competences. The comparative analysis indicates that Romania remains below the EU average in AI adoption by enterprises and in basic digital skills, which might limit the capacity of the workforce to benefit from technological changes. At the same time, the development of digital services creates opportunities for modernization, productivity growth, and new professional roles. The present research paper contributes to the field by linking AI adoption, digital skill transformation, and tertiary-sector competitiveness in a comparative Romania–European Union framework, emphasizing the importance of education, continuous training, and coherent public policies for an inclusive digital transition.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, digital skills, tertiary sector, Romania, European Union.

BRIDGING GROWTH AND INCLUSION: THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF EUROPEAN FUNDS AND ECONOMIC CORRIDORS IN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract. Regional development and social inclusion represent key priorities for the European Union's long-term growth strategy. This paper examines the role of two complementary development instruments—European funds and economic corridors—in fostering economic growth, reducing regional disparities, and promoting inclusive development. The study combines perspectives on the impact of European funds on poverty reduction in Romania during the 2014–2020 programming period with the growing importance of economic corridors as drivers of connectivity, investment, and regional competitiveness. The research is based on a qualitative analysis of academic literature, European policy documents, and regional development strategies. Particular attention is given to the contribution of European funding programs to employment, infrastructure, and social cohesion, as well as to the capacity of economic corridors to facilitate trade, improve accessibility, and stimulate economic activity across regions. The findings indicate that both instruments play a significant role in supporting sustainable socio-economic development and strengthening territorial cohesion. The paper argues that integrating cohesion policy instruments with corridor-based development approaches can generate important synergies for achieving balanced regional development and poverty reduction. By highlighting the relationship between economic growth and social inclusion, the study contributes to current debates on the future of economic and social development and provides relevant insights for policymakers and researchers concerned with sustainable development within the European Union.

Keywords: European funds, economic corridors, regional development, poverty reduction, inclusive growth.

CONTINUOUS EDUCATION AS A DETERMINANT OF ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS: AN ECONOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF UPSKILLING ON HUMAN CAPITAL

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Abstract. In the context of rapid digital transformation and structural changes in labor markets, continuous education and workforce upskilling have become essential drivers of economic competitiveness and sustainable development. This paper investigates the impact of upskilling processes on human capital formation and labor productivity through an econometric analysis based on panel data from European Union member states over the period 2010–2025. The study examines the relationship between participation in lifelong learning programs, investments in vocational training, and key macroeconomic indicators related to productivity, employment, and economic performance. Using panel regression models, the research highlights a positive and statistically significant relationship between continuous education and the enhancement of human capital efficiency, particularly in economies characterized by higher levels of digitalization and innovation capacity. The findings also suggest that upskilling initiatives contribute to labor market resilience by reducing skill mismatches and improving workforce adaptability to technological change. The paper contributes to the existing literature by integrating human capital theory with contemporary labor market dynamics and provides empirical evidence supporting the strategic role of education and professional training in fostering long-term economic competitiveness. The results offer relevant implications for policymakers designing education, employment, and digital transition strategies within knowledge-based economies.

Keywords: human capital development, workforce upskilling, labor productivity, data econometrics.

HUMAN CAPITAL IN THE EUROPEAN DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM: INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATION, CYBERSECURITY, CAPITAL MARKETS AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

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Abstract. This paper presents an integrated analysis of the European Union's digital ecosystem, positioning human capital at the core of current technological and economic transformations. The research first evaluates how human resources catalyze digitalization within European institutions, driving administrative innovation. Recognizing that digital literacy and skills are critical for risk management, the study then investigates the impact of cyberattacks on capital markets and outlines strategic preventive measures. To demonstrate the long-term value of these dynamics, the article analyzes the direct correlation between human capital investments and overall economic development. Finally, the research explores the behavioral dimension of this capital by examining online consumer dynamics across social networks and search engines. Through this multidisciplinary approach, the study provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how the human factor and technological advancement interact to shape the future of the European economy.

Keywords: human capital, digital economy, cyber risk, capital markets, consumer dynamics.

AI-DRIVEN CAMPUS-TO-CAREER PATHWAYS: THE EVOLVING ROLE OF UNIVERSITY-INDUSTRY COLLABORATION

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Abstract. University-industry collaboration refers to the cooperative agreements and partnerships between businesses and academic institutions that are meant to foster innovation, research, and development. Scholarly research, students' careers, and company operations all benefit from these connections, which facilitate the sharing of resources, technology, and experience. The purpose of this study is to investigate how university-industry collaboration shapes students' future in terms of future employment opportunities specifically in Lithuania using AI-driven pathways. The quantitative research methodology employed in this study, and the data was collected from Lithuanian students, particularly those in the business and engineering departments of several universities, using a survey questionnaire. The study's conclusions demonstrate how the close relationships between academic institutions and business sectors have a significant influence on students' careers and enable them to use AI-driven career pathways. To sum up, in order to successfully close the gap between education and employment, universities and business must establish closer, more structured ties. In order to improve students' employability and career preparedness in terms of AI-driven pathways, university-industry partnership is crucial.

Keywords: AI-driven, campus, career pathways, university-industry collaboration.

BRIDGING THE TRANSPARENCY DEFICIT: HOW DANISH COMPANIES COMMUNICATE ALGORITHMIC INTEGRATION TO PRESERVE MARKET TRUST

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Abstract. This paper examines how the corporate values of Nordic companies, traditionally rooted in human-centricity and egalitarianism, are being recalibrated in response to the shift toward algorithmic management, automated recruitment, and performance evaluation, and how they reflect the EU AI Act. Current research often focuses on the technical or legal compliance aspects of the EU AI Act, yet there is a significant gap regarding the sociological fit of these regulations within specific cultural models. In the Nordic context, where social trust is the primary economic asset, the introduction of algorithms can be a competitive advantage, or it can undermine competitiveness. The EU AI act is positioned as a tool to ensure trustworthy AI in European markets, and trust is a value deeply rooted in Scandinavian culture. The research is guided by two central questions: (1) How do foundational Nordic corporate values align with the transparency and accountability requirements of the EU AI Act? (2) Does the implementation of automated management create a transparency deficit that legal regulation alone cannot rectify? Drawing on the theoretical framework of sociotechnical imaginaries, this paper utilizes qualitative document analysis to analyze the public-facing policies and annual reports of eight Danish companies, focusing specifically on their approach to data ethics and AI governance. The findings propose a value-based AI framework for corporate governance, grounded in sociotechnical imaginaries, and show that a one-size-fits-all regulation is interpreted differently by each company, depending on their humanistic or pragmatic approach.

Keywords: Nordic competitiveness, algorithmic trust, trustworthy AI.

MEASURING THE ECONOMIC AND OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS OF AN R&D LABORATORY FOR ADDITIVE MANUFACTURING: AN ENGINEERING ECONOMICS AND DATA-DRIVEN DECISION SUPPORT APPROACH

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Abstract. Quantifying the economic value created by in-house additive manufacturing capabilities has become increasingly important for industrial firms aiming to reduce procurement lead times and dependency on imported spare parts. This study proposes a systematic, data-driven framework to measure the economic and operational effectiveness of the R&D Laboratory within SASA Polyester A.Ş., which supports group companies by producing spare parts locally—primarily via 3D printing—thereby generating potential cost and time advantages. However, the laboratory's contribution has not yet been validated through a structured, quantitative analysis. The study is designed in three consecutive stages. First, all production processes are observed and mapped to identify and detail investment, fixed, and variable cost components. The laboratory's effectiveness is evaluated using engineering economics indicators, including Net Present Value (NPV), Benefit–Cost Ratio (BCR), Internal Rate of Return (IRR), and Cost-Effectiveness Ratio (CER), to quantify its overall economic performance. Second, production outputs are classified through ABC (Pareto) analysis to determine the most critical (A-class) parts and materials that drive the majority of operational impact. Third, for these critical items, production time and quantities are forecast using the Random Forest algorithm, enabling forward-looking production planning, scheduling strategies, and improved utilization of 3D printing capacity. The proposed framework is to support evidence-based investment and operational decisions for SASA Polyester and affiliated companies, while also providing a transferable engineering economics-based model for similar industrial organizations.

Keywords: engineering economics, additive manufacturing, 3D printing, Pareto analysis, decision support.

DIGITAL ECONOMY TRANSFORMATION IN AZERBAIJAN: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract. This paper explores the digital economy transformation in Azerbaijan, positioning it within broader global trends of digitalization and socio-economic change. As digital technologies increasingly reshape production systems, public governance, and social interactions worldwide, Azerbaijan has identified the digital economy as a strategic driver for sustainable growth, economic diversification, and improved public service delivery. The study introduces the national context of Azerbaijan's digital transition while linking it to global debates on the future of economics and social sciences. The importance of this topic lies in the growing scholarly focus on how emerging and transition economies adopt digital technologies to enhance competitiveness, institutional efficiency, and social inclusion. While extensive research exists on digital economy models in advanced economies, there is comparatively limited academic analysis of post-Soviet and resource-dependent countries such as Azerbaijan, making this study a timely contribution to the literature. The paper addresses three main research questions: (i) How does Azerbaijan's digital economy transformation align with global digital development paradigms? (ii) What policy instruments and institutional frameworks support this transformation? (iii) What future economic and social implications emerge from Azerbaijan's digitalization agenda? Methodologically, the study employs qualitative policy analysis, supported by a review of national strategic documents, official statistics, and secondary data from international organizations, complemented by comparative insights from selected global practices. The findings indicate that Azerbaijan has made significant progress in digital government, data-driven public services, and digital labor relations, strengthening transparency, efficiency, and citizen engagement. However, challenges related to digital skills, private sector adoption, and regulatory adaptation remain. The paper contributes to the field by offering a structured, globally contextualized case study that enriches comparative digital economy research and provides policy-relevant insights into the future trajectory of digital transformation in emerging economies.

Keywords: digital economy transformation, digital governance, socio-economic development, emerging economies, Azerbaijan.

MINITRACK: LABOR AND SOCIAL WELFARE

Chairs:

- **Eva MILITARU, National Research Institute for Labor and Social Protection, Bucharest, Romania**
- **Denisa M. SOLOGON, Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research, Luxembourg**

The mini-track on Labor and Social Welfare aims to provide an open platform for researchers, academics, and scholars to discuss and share insights on key issues related to labor market and social welfare. It intends to inspire positive change and contribute to the development of sustainable, equitable, and inclusive labor and welfare systems. The section will delve into a range of topics, from the challenges faced by the labor force, labor market trends and critical aspects of ensuring the well-being of workers and citizens, to innovative solutions in employment, welfare strategies and social protection measures.

The main topics covered by the hereby call for papers are related (but not limited) to:

- Trends in the Future of Work
- Education and Lifelong Learning
- Emerging Skills Needs
- Digital Literacy and Technology Skills
- Social Welfare Innovations
- Inclusive Policies and Services for Vulnerable Groups
- Innovation in Long-Term Care
- Social Protection and Welfare Systems
- Income, Poverty and Inequality
- Health and Well-being at Work
- Work-Life Balance and Family Well-Being
- Workplace Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
- Global Perspectives on Labor and Welfare

Eva MILITARU is senior researcher and scientific director at the National Research Institute for Labor and Social Protection Bucharest, having more than 20 years of experience in socio-economic research. She holds a PhD in Economics from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies and completed a postdoctoral research program at the same university. Her research activity is focused on the following themes: income and inequalities, poverty, social policy analysis, distributional impact of taxes and social transfers, labor market developments, earnings, wage gaps, minimum wages. She has extensive experience in policies and programs evaluation in the fields of employment, social protection, competitiveness and research, development, and innovation. She has solid skills in quantitative analysis, econometric modelling, macro and microeconomic simulations and general equilibrium modelling. She participated in more than 40 research projects, financed under national, European and international programs, of which she coordinated 14 projects, and published more than 30 papers. She is a member of the Scientific Council of the National Research Institute for Labor and Social Protection Bucharest since 2015 and coordinates the Romanian national team in the EUROMOD – Tax-benefit microsimulation model for the European Union since 2011.

Denisa M. SOLOGON is a Senior Research Scientist at the Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research. Her research programme involves quantitative approaches to welfare economics, in particular income inequality, income distribution dynamics, taxation, social policy and social protection, social mobility, environmental policy and health, with a special focus on the role of social, economic and policy drivers of inequality. Her main interests are in the development and application of policy microsimulation models and the quantitative analysis of large data sources (administrative, survey) to aid the design, evaluation and improvement of public policy. She has been leading several projects focused on developing a cutting-edge modelling capacity to understand the drivers of distributional outcomes such as inequality, conducted in international partnership and funded by various sources, ranging from the European Commission to National Funding Agencies. The focus of this developmental research has been building a scalable modelling infrastructure for social, economic, and environmental policy, with a particular focus on assessing the impact of crises such as the Financial, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Cost of Living and the Climate Crisis on wellbeing. Over time, this modelling framework has generated a rich stream of research with applications across countries, time and policy areas (health, environment, inflation, COVID-19, spatial inequality), published in over 29 academic articles, book chapters and policy briefs. This work has been awarded the 2020 Miriam Herderman O'Brien Prize awarded by the Foundation for Fiscal Studies (Ireland) for the contribution made to understand the distributional implications of the COVID-19 crisis and its policy responses.

THE QUALITY OF STRUCTURAL LABOR REALLOCATION IN ROMANIA: DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, SKILLS AND SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTIVITY

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Abstract. This paper examines the quality of structural labor reallocation in Romania over the period 1995–2023, moving beyond the magnitude of labor mobility to assess whether reallocation supports productivity-enhancing structural adjustment. Using harmonized Eurostat national accounts data on employment and gross value added by sector, the study applies a Learning-by-Shifting (LBS) framework based on diagnostic structural indicators to capture the direction of labor reallocation across sectors with different productivity levels. The analysis is further contextualized by integrating sectoral skills and digital capabilities—proxied by Human Resources in Science and Technology, adult learning participation, and digital intensity indicators—to assess the capacity of destination sectors to transform labor mobility into productivity gains. The results show that labor reallocation alone does not explain short-run productivity dynamics. Productivity-enhancing structural adjustment emerges only when labor mobility is aligned with sectors characterized by strong skills and digital capabilities, notably information and communication, financial services, and professional activities. By contrast, reallocations towards low-capability services generate structural volatility without sustained productivity growth. The findings highlight that the quality of structural labor reallocation depends critically on sectoral capabilities, underscoring the role of skills development and digital transformation in supporting long-term productivity growth in emerging economies.

Keywords: structural labor reallocation, productivity, skills, digital capabilities, learning-by-shifting, Romania.

DELAYED LABOR ADJUSTMENT TO STRUCTURAL CHANGE: EVIDENCE FROM SECTORAL AND EMPLOYMENT REALLOCATION DYNAMICS

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Abstract. Structural change is a defining feature of contemporary economic transformation, driven by technological progress, globalization, and sustainability transitions. While shifts in value added reflect changes in production structures, employment reallocation often follows with a temporal delay. This paper examines the timing gap between sectoral structural change and labor market adjustment in Romania over the period 1995–2023. Using harmonized national accounts data on sectoral employment and value added, the analysis applies diagnostic structural indicators to identify adjustment delays and asymmetric reallocation dynamics across sectors. The results indicate that employment adjustment systematically lags behind changes in production structures, generating transitional mismatches and short-term adjustment costs. These delays are particularly pronounced during periods of accelerated structural transformation. The findings highlight the importance of anticipating labor market adjustment frictions when designing skills policies and structural transformation strategies, and contribute to the literature by explicitly addressing the temporal dimension of labor reallocation dynamics.

Keywords: structural change, labor reallocation, employment dynamics, adjustment delay, productivity.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE EDUCATION OF ROMA WOMEN IN ROMANIA: A CENSUS-BASED ANALYSIS

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Abstract. This paper examines the educational status of Roma women in Romania using data from the 2021 Population and Housing Census provided by the National Institute of Statistics. The analysis is conducted in the broader context of social inclusion policies and the strategic framework adopted by the Romanian Government for the integration of Roma citizens. The study highlights major disparities between the Roma minority and the main ethnic groups in Romania with respect to educational attainment, age structure, and labor market participation. Particular attention is given to gender differences within the Roma population, emphasizing the educational position of women and its potential implications for social mobility and community development. The results show that although the overall level of education among Roma remains significantly lower than that of the general population, Roma women demonstrate slightly higher educational attainment compared to Roma men. The findings underline the importance of investing in education for Roma women as a mechanism capable of generating intergenerational benefits, improving health outcomes, increasing labor market participation and supporting the socio-economic integration of Roma communities.

Keywords: Roma minority, education, social inclusion.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, SKILLS AND INFORMAL EMPLOYMENT: EVIDENCE FROM REGIONAL DATA IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

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Abstract. The rapid expansion of digital technologies is reshaping labor markets across Europe, yet its implications for labor informality remain insufficiently understood, particularly at the regional level. This study explores how differences in regional digital capabilities relate to the prevalence of undeclared work across Central and Eastern European (CEE) regions. Special attention is given to the interaction between digital development, human capital formation, and labor market frictions. To capture regional disparities in digital readiness, the research develops a multidimensional dataset combining indicators on digital skills, educational attainment, and access to digital infrastructure derived from several European statistical sources. These macro-level indicators are complemented with micro-evidence from Eurobarometer surveys, allowing a broader perspective on the behavioral and institutional aspects associated with informal labor practices. The empirical analysis relies on regularization-based econometric techniques designed for high-dimensional datasets, enabling the identification of the most influential drivers of regional informality while mitigating multicollinearity issues. By integrating multiple dimensions of digitalization and education into the modelling framework, the study provides new evidence on how digital ecosystems shape labor market outcomes. The results indicate that regions characterized by stronger digital capabilities and more developed skill ecosystems tend to exhibit lower exposure to undeclared work. However, digital connectivity alone does not guarantee labor market formalization, suggesting that the effectiveness of digitalization depends on complementary factors such as education quality and labor market matching mechanisms. These findings highlight the importance of integrated policies that simultaneously promote digital skills, human capital development, and institutional capacity to support the transition toward more formal labor markets.

Keywords: labor informality, digitalization, skills, Central and Eastern European (CEE) regions.

ROMANIAN MARITIME WORKFORCE ABROAD: A STRATEGIC ASSET FOR THE NATIONAL ECONOMY

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Abstract. This study examines the role of Romanian engineers and technicians working on international maritime projects in supporting the development of Romania's naval industry through reverse knowledge transfer. In the context of increasing labor mobility and persistent skill shortages in the European maritime sector, the research explores whether the outward migration of skilled personnel can generate strategic benefits for future domestic shipbuilding initiatives and the broader Romanian economy. A quantitative approach was employed using an online questionnaire disseminated via the maritime platform www.romcrew.com and administered to 2,341 Romanian maritime professionals with international experience. Beyond descriptive statistics, the study incorporates composite index construction and exploratory correlation analysis to assess the relationship between the international experience, the knowledge transfer potential, and the willingness to contribute to national projects. The results reveal a strong consensus, with approximately 87% of respondents acknowledging that the expertise acquired abroad can significantly enhance the technological capabilities and competitiveness of the Romanian naval sector. Additionally, a majority expressed readiness to apply their competencies in Romania under favorable conditions. The findings highlight the existence of a highly skilled and mobile workforce that represents a strategic resource for both the national shipbuilding industry and the Romanian economy, through increased productivity, innovation potential, and reduced reliance on external expertise. The study contributes to the literature on labor mobility and knowledge transfer by providing empirical evidence from the maritime sector and supports the need for targeted policies to facilitate effective knowledge reintegration.

Keywords: knowledge transfer, labor mobility, maritime workforce, composite index.

DIGITAL RECRUITMENT PLATFORMS AND WORKFORCE ALLOCATION: EVIDENCE FROM A CROSS-BORDER REDEPLOYMENT CASE IN INDUSTRIAL AND MARITIME SECTORS

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Abstract. This paper examines how a digital recruitment platform can support more efficient labor allocation in project-based recruitment environments. The analysis focuses on a cross-border redeployment case involving Romanian workers transferred from a completed project in Spain to a new project in Denmark. The study addresses the problem of project-start deployment under conditions of limited time, international mobility, and incomplete operational information. A case-based analytical model is developed to compare a standard closure-and-remobilization route with a direct redeployment route supported by updated worker availability and deployment information embedded in the platform. The model is complemented by a Monte Carlo simulation in IBM SPSS Statistics in order to test the stability of the redeployment value under varying operational conditions. The findings show that the platform-enabled redeployment creates measurable project-start advantages through avoided repatriation cost, lower delay exposure, and improved workforce readiness at the receiving project. The simulation results indicate that these gains remain positive across the parameter ranges used in the analysis. The paper argues that digital recruitment platforms can generate value not only by increasing worker visibility, but also by improving the coordination of labor transitions between successive projects.

Keywords: digital recruitment platforms, labor allocation, project-based recruitment.

ECONOMIC SHOCKS, THE MOTHERHOOD PENALTY, AND THE RISE OF FEMALE PRECARITY IN EUROPE

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Abstract. This article investigates how recent economic instability and rising inflation have affected women's participation in the labor market, with a particular focus on the so-called "motherhood penalty". Although progress in workforce inclusion was visible during periods of macroeconomic stability, the recent cost-of-living crisis has intensified pressures on women, especially those with caregiving responsibilities. The central aim of the study is to measure the employment gap between women with and without children across the EU-27 and to examine how this gap relates to recent inflationary shocks. The analysis relies on a quantitative research design using cross-sectional data from the Eurostat Labor Force Survey (LFS) and the Harmonized Index of Consumer Prices (HICP). The HICP was selected as the key macroeconomic indicator to ensure the comparability of inflation trends across all member states. To explore cross-country patterns, a K-Means cluster analysis is employed to group European countries according to both their inflation levels and the magnitude of their motherhood penalty. The preliminary findings identify three distinct clusters of countries: a vulnerable group (high inflation and a pronounced motherhood penalty), a resilient group (relatively high levels of maternal employment despite economic turbulence), and a transitional cluster (with moderate outcomes on both dimensions). Overall, the paper contributes empirical evidence on crisis-driven gender disparities by applying machine learning clustering techniques to comparative European data. From a policy perspective, it underscores the structural vulnerabilities of existing social protection systems and offers recommendations for strengthening inclusive welfare arrangements capable of shielding mothers and other at-risk groups from future economic shocks.

Keywords: motherhood penalty, k-means clustering, economic instability, gender inequality.

INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF (DIS)ADVANTAGES ON LABOR MARKET AMONG GEN Z VS. MILLENNIALS IN EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES: A TWO-STAGE INSTRUMENTAL VARIABLE PROBIT APPROACH

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Abstract. Social mobility has declined in Europe in the last 20 years, parental socio-economic status being of increasing importance for offspring's professional outcomes. At the same time, the labor market has shrunk, with entry-level jobs severely declining in the last years. Gen Z is at the intersection between the two phenomena, facing challenges on work integration. The present paper studies the implications of multi-level variables for labor market participation among Gen Z comparative to Millennials in Eastern Europe countries (EEC). We use data from EU-SILC 2023 module on intergenerational transmission of (dis)advantages. By employing a two-stage structural framework estimated via an Instrumental Variable Probit (IV Probit) model that includes familial background, individual characteristic, and national context variables, we answer several research questions: (1) What are the factors for labor market integration among Gen Z in EEC? (2) Are these factors different for Millennials? (3) How does familial background impact labor market attachment for Gen Z comparative to Millennials? The results confirm the relevance of parents' education and socio-economic status, along with public investments in education for the participation in education and school interruption, which further predicts labor market attachment of Gen Z. While the results are similar for Millennials, differences emerge based on gender and familial background. As novelty, we have as focal point Gen Z in Eastern European countries, and we make comparisons between them and Millennials. Furthermore, we focus on less studied variables, such as labor market attachment and national expenses with education and APLMs. Based on the results, policy recommendations on education and labor market integration are made.

Keywords: intergenerational transmission of (dis)advantages, intergenerational social mobility, labor market, Gen Z, Eastern European countries (EEC).

DIGITAL SKILLS FOR THE AI AGE: UNDERSTANDING DEMAND AND EMERGING TRENDS

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Abstract. This study analyzes the relationship between digital skills and employability in the context of rapid digital transformation, with particular attention to the role of artificial intelligence in shaping labor market opportunities. Three complementary types of findings support our research: recent academic literature, Eurobarometer 101.4 data collected in 2024, and an analysis of AI-related online courses. The literature revealed that Artificial Intelligence and automation are transforming work rather than simply replacing workers, increasing the need for adaptable, applied, and multidimensional skill sets. Empirical analysis further indicates that confidence in one's digital abilities is shaped by individual characteristics, prior exposure to technology, access to training, and positive perceptions of AI in the workplace. The analysis of online AI courses highlights strong interest in both technical competencies and the practical use of AI in business and management contexts. It suggests that digital upskilling is relevant across a wide range of occupations. Overall, the study underlines the growing importance of digital competences for employability and emphasizes the need for closer links between education, workplace training, and public policy in order to support adaptation to a changing labor market.

Keywords: digital skills, artificial intelligence, labor market, network analysis, Eurobarometer.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF LABOR MARKETS IN THE AGE OF AUTOMATION: A SKILL POLARIZATION ANALYSIS

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Abstract. Automation technologies are fundamentally reshaping labor markets, driving structural transformations in employment patterns, skill demand, and wage distribution across sectors. While a substantial body of literature has documented the displacement effects of automation, particularly in routine-intensive occupations, comparatively less attention has been devoted to the nuanced dynamics of skill polarization that emerge as labor markets adjust to technological change. In particular, there remains an insufficiently developed empirical understanding of how automation reconfigures the distribution of skills and wages over time, and how these shifts vary across industries and institutional contexts. This research addresses this gap by investigating the impact of automation on skill distribution and wage structures within European labor markets. Drawing on an extensive panel dataset covering multiple countries and sectors, the study employs advanced econometric modeling techniques to analyze longitudinal trends. The analytical framework integrates human capital theory with models of skill-biased and routine-biased technological change, assessing how technological advancements interact with workforce characteristics and institutional factors. The expected findings reveal a pronounced polarization of labor markets, characterized by increasing demand for both high-skill, cognitively intensive roles and low-skill, service-oriented occupations, alongside a marked decline in middle-skill jobs traditionally associated with routine tasks. Furthermore, the study is likely to highlight sector-specific variations, indicating that the pace and nature of polarization are contingent upon industry structure, technological adoption rates, and regulatory environments. From a theoretical perspective, the research contributes to labor economics by providing updated empirical evidence on the evolving relationship between automation and skill formation in contemporary economies. Practically, it offers valuable insights for policymakers and educational institutions, emphasizing the need for adaptive workforce development strategies, reskilling initiatives, and education systems aligned with the demands of an increasingly automated and knowledge-intensive economic landscape.

Keywords: automation, labor market, skill polarization, econometrics, employment, technological change.

LEADERSHIP, ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE, AND ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE: A MULTI-LEVEL ANALYSIS ACROSS CORPORATE AND HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXTS

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Abstract. Faced with accelerating transformations of business and economics through further digitalization, artificial intelligence integration in organizations and global knowledge-based ecosystem expansion, the search for robust principles determining organizational performance across heterogeneous institutional environments has become a most salient research theme. While leadership and organizational climate have been frequently studied, most existing research focuses on single-sector analyses, with limited attention to cross-level dynamics and the role of digital transformation in shaping performance outcomes, particularly across corporate and higher education environments. This study develops and empirically evaluates a multi-level integrative framework that connects leadership configurations (transformational, distributed, and AI-enabled leadership), organizational climate dimensions (innovation climate, psychological safety, and digital resilience) to economic performance indicators (productivity, knowledge output efficiency, and financial sustainability). The analysis is based on a multi-source dataset of combining perceptual data and objective indicators obtained from organizations that are engaged in digital and structural transformation. Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) is utilized to consider the nature of nested data structures and examine the impact of cross-level interactions. The study contributes to the business and economics literature on transformative changes by proposing a cross-sectoral, multi-level perspective of performance in digitally mediated and knowledge-intensive systems. It also spotlights the mediating role that organizational climate, in particular, plays as an enabling construct when it comes to shaping digital resilience and adaptive capacity. The findings offer practical guidance to leaders and policy-makers seeking to link leadership practices, transformational processes and sustainable performance goals in dynamic economic environments.

Keywords: AI-enabled leadership, organizational climate, digital resilience, multi-level modeling, economic transformation.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION OR INTEGRATION?
LIMITED PROGRESS IN DISABILITY SERVICES IN ROMANIA

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Abstract. From the perspective of social inclusion, one of the main challenges is the integration of people with disabilities into the labor market, which is directly influenced by the way social assistance services are organized. This study analyzes how the system of services for people with disabilities in Romania evolved between 2015 and 2025, focusing on the relationship between community-based and residential services as indicators of the level of integration and institutionalization. According to the literature, community-based services are considered essential tools that support independent living and active participation in society, including access to employment. In contrast, residential services are more often associated with dependence on the system and institutionalization. The research uses a quantitative approach, based on annual data collected from the websites of official institutions, and applies simple linear regression to examine changes over time in the share of community-based and residential services. The results show changes in the proportion of residential services compared to community-based services, offering insights into whether there is a trend toward deinstitutionalization or a continuation of an institutional model. These changes also indirectly reflect the level of social integration and access to alternative forms of support for people with disabilities. The conclusions highlight the importance of developing community-based services in order to reduce the dependence on institutional care and to support the social and professional integration of people with disabilities. At the same time, they point to the need for public policies that are more clearly oriented toward inclusion.

Keywords: disability, institutionalization, community-based services, social integration, linear regression.

INDIVIDUAL AND CONTEXTUAL PATTERNS SHAPING PERCEIVED DIGITALIZATION

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Abstract. Although digital transformation is a key policy objective in the European Union, its advantages are still not evenly dispersed among people and nations. Digital disparities are multifaceted, involving subjective elements like motivation, behaviors, and perceptions as well as objective elements like access, use, and results. This article investigates the factors associated with individuals' perceptions of the importance of digitalization, focusing on national background, internet use, sociodemographic traits, and attitudes toward digital policies. Both country-level and individual-level factors are taken into consideration using binary and multilevel logistic regression models. The results indicate that the perceptions of digitalization are driven more by individual-level factors than by cross-country variation. Higher education and income are positively linked to perceived importance, while age is negatively associated. Attitudes toward digital education, access, and infrastructure show strong relationships as well. At the country level, a higher share of basic digital skills is positively associated with perceived importance and helps explain between-country differences. By emphasizing attitudes about digitalization and the interaction between contextual and individual factors, this study adds to the body of knowledge on digital inequality.

Keywords: digital divide, digitalization, multilevel logistic regression.

BUDGETARY EFFICIENCY AND LABOR COST OPTIMIZATION IN PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS: FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

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Abstract. This paper analyzes labor cost efficiency in public organizations, starting from the point that it cannot be assessed only through the value of personnel expenditure. In practice, salaries, allowances and social contributions are mainly monitored as budgetary items, while less attention is given to the way paid work is organized and used in daily activity. To address this limitation, the paper develops a conceptual analysis oriented towards public policy and organizational management. Labor cost is treated as a financed resource, internal processes include activities such as timekeeping, data verification, reporting and interdepartmental coordination, while outputs are discussed through service continuity, administrative accuracy, and the better use of existing competences. It distinguishes between labor cost, personnel expenditure, and human resource efficiency, and examines their relationship through an input-process-output logic. The analysis draws on institutional literature from the OECD, Eurostat, and the World Bank and uses Metrorex as an illustrative example of a public infrastructure organization. The analysis shows that budgetary strategies may support labor cost efficiency through medium-term planning, human resource data, clearer internal processes and the prevention of hidden organizational costs. The paper concludes that efficiency should not be reduced to the decrease of personnel expenditure and should be analyzed through the way already financed work is organized and transformed into organizational results. Metrorex is not treated as a full empirical case study, but as an applied reference for understanding the relationship between budgeting, shift work, administrative processes, and continuous public service delivery.

Keywords: labor cost, personnel expenditure, public organizations, budgetary strategies, human resource efficiency.

THE ROLE OF LIFELONG LEARNING IN ADAPTING TO A RAPIDLY CHANGING LABOR MARKET

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Abstract. The rapid transformation of labor markets in recent decades, driven by technological advancement, digitalization, globalization, and automation, has significantly altered the nature of work and the skills required from the workforce. In this context, lifelong learning has emerged as a crucial strategy for individuals and institutions seeking to remain competitive and adaptable in an increasingly dynamic economic environment. Continuous education and skill development are no longer optional but essential for maintaining employability and supporting sustainable labor market participation. The importance of this topic has grown within contemporary economic and educational research, as scholars and policymakers increasingly focus on how workforce skills can keep pace with technological change and evolving job requirements. Lifelong learning is widely recognized as a key mechanism for reducing skill mismatches, enhancing labor productivity, and facilitating smoother transitions between occupations in rapidly changing economies. This paper investigates the role of lifelong learning in helping individuals adapt to the evolving demands of the labor market. The study is based on a qualitative and conceptual analysis of existing academic literature, policy reports, and statistical data related to education, training, and labor market dynamics. The research addresses questions regarding how lifelong learning contributes to workforce adaptability and which institutional mechanisms support effective implementation. The results highlight that continuous learning opportunities, supported by appropriate public policies and educational systems, significantly improve workers' capacity to adapt to technological and structural changes. The paper contributes to the literature by emphasizing the strategic importance of lifelong learning for strengthening human capital, improving labor market resilience, and supporting long-term economic development.

Keywords: lifelong learning, labor market adaptation, skills development, employability, technological change, workforce resilience.

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HOW INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY SHAPES SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN EUROPE

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Abstract. This paper examines how the quality of public institutions is closely linked to social and economic conditions in various European countries. The paper includes indicators related to education, digital access, and labor market conditions. The analysis uses a panel data set that includes several countries in Europe for the period 2010-2024. The research begins with a brief descriptive analysis and then continues with the application of various quantitative methods. The methods used help to explain how institutional quality is linked to socio-economic indicators. The research begins with a descriptive analysis of governance models across countries. This stage helps to highlight clear differences in institutional performance across Europe. The study then applies quantitative methods based on panel data. These methods help to understand how institutional quality is linked to key socio-economic indicators over time. The results show that government effectiveness changes very slowly over time, being strongly influenced by structural factors.

Keywords: institutional quality, socio-economic indicators, panel data analysis.

TIMING AND CONCENTRATION OF STRUCTURAL FLEXIBILITY IN THE GREEN–DIGITAL TRANSITION: EVIDENCE FROM ROMANIA AND THE EU-27

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Abstract. This paper develops and applies a Growth Flexibility Index (GFI) to measure the intensity and distribution of structural labor-market adjustment in the context of the green–digital transition. Using Cedefop Skills Forecast 2025 microdata, we combine sector–occupation employment projections at the intersection of NACE 1-digit sectors and ISCO 2-digit occupations with occupation-level qualification structures (ISCED aggregated into low, medium, and high) to capture two concurrent dimensions of change: within-sector occupational restructuring and skill reconfiguration within occupations. The index is designed to move beyond net employment growth rates by quantifying the internal compositional turbulence that may occur even when aggregate sectoral employment appears stable. We compute GFI for Romania and the EU-27 aggregate for two forecast horizons (2025–2030 and 2025–2035) and compare distributions using mean, median, and upper percentiles (e.g., P90/P95). The results indicate that the EU-27 exhibits higher average structural flexibility in the medium term (2025–2030), consistent with earlier and more broadly distributed adjustment dynamics across sector–occupation nodes. By 2035, however, Romania overtakes the EU-27 in upper-tail flexibility, displaying a stronger concentration of high-turbulence sector–occupation combinations. While median flexibility remains lower in Romania, the distribution becomes increasingly polarized, suggesting delayed but intensified restructuring within a subset of nodes. These findings highlight that structural flexibility under the green–digital transition differs not only in magnitude, but also in timing and distributional concentration. The paper discusses implications for anticipatory reskilling, VET modernization, and targeted labor-market interventions, emphasizing the value of distribution-sensitive monitoring tools for transition governance.

Keywords: Cedefop Skills Forecast, NACE-ISCO, occupational restructuring, skill reconfiguration, Romania and EU-27.

MEASURING LABOR MARKET RESILIENCE IN THE EU-27: A COMPOSITE INDEX APPROACH (2005-2022)

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Abstract. The succession of crises that have hit European labor markets since 2008, from the global financial crisis and sovereign debt crisis to the global COVID-19 pandemic, has exposed significant disparities in the ability of EU-27 member states to absorb shocks and maintain employment outcomes. In this study, we develop a composite index of labor market resilience for the period 2005-2022 by applying principal component analysis to four variables: employment rate, long-term unemployment, NEET rate, and GINI index. Following the application of PCA, we have obtained a singular principal component that explains 65.7% of the total variation (KMO = 0.744*, Cronbach's Alpha = 0.821), with very high stability of ranks under alternative methods of equal weighting across the four variables (ρ = 0.998). The results highlight persistent disparities between countries, with Nordic and continental economies systematically recording higher levels of resilience. Sigma convergence reversed sharply in 2008-2013 before resuming after 2014, and beta convergence is strongly confirmed (β = -1.620, $p < 0.001$), driven by the recovery of Central and Eastern European countries. Crisis resilience ranged from −51.72% to −7.45% (Spain) during the Global Financial Crisis. On the other hand, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were more moderate, suggesting an improved collective resilience capacity through institutional learning and policy interventions at the European level.

Keywords: economic resilience, composite index, labor market, EU-27, PCA.

FROM SCHOOL TO WORK: SKILL UTILIZATION AND MISMATCH IN COMPETITIVE SECTORS

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Abstract. The paper aims to analyze the factors shaping the alignment of skills supply and job requirements among youth engaged in the school-to-work transition, with a focus on competitive sectors of the Romanian economy. Labor market entry is usually considered an indicator of a successful transition. As a plus, this study examines the quality of this entry by measures of educational (mis)match and skill utilization. The empirical analysis uses data from a 2019 national survey of 1130 Romanian youth aged 15–34 years who completed their initial education. The exploratory methodological approach consists of applying correspondence analysis to explore relations among variables such as the educational profile, the entry in economic sectors with competitive potential, and different measures of skills mismatch. The findings evidence patterns of alignment between skills supply and demand, as well as identify areas where institutional interventions are needed to improve human resource allocation and increase the relevance of training for competitive sectors. The bioeconomy and (eco)tourism sectors are associated with a higher probability of skills matching, while the ICT, energy & environment sectors, as well as the automotive industry, display increased risks of skills mismatches.
Acknowledgement: This research was funded by Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, NUCLEU program, grant number 22010102.

Keywords: skill mismatch, skills utilization, labor market entry, correspondence analysis.

BEYOND GENDER STEREOTYPES: HOW GENDER SHAPES THE RISK FACTORS FOR EXPERIENCING HARASSMENT AND MOBBING AT THE WORKPLACE

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Abstract. Abusive behaviors in organizations negatively impact organizational climate, productivity, absenteeism, staff turnover, and employee well-being, affecting both male and female employees. Understanding the gender differences influencing the risks of experiencing harassment and mobbing at the workplace is an essential part of psychosocial research. Women usually report a higher incidence of harassment and mobbing, their discrimination being explained by the traditional gender roles expected of them. But in competitive settings, men become targets for harassment and mobbing if they are perceived as weak, inefficient, or do not conform to dominant masculine norms. Using the 2022 OSH Pulse Eurobarometer dataset, we aim to examine gender differences in experiences of harassment and mobbing. We employ classification techniques to understand how individual (health status, migration status, age, level of education, type of contract, etc.) and organizational variables (employer size, economic activity, job location, etc.) influence the risk of experiencing workplace harassment and mobbing. Understanding the different patterns and risk factors for men and women allows us to identify the structural and cultural roots of abusive behaviors in organizations and to develop gender sensitive interventions leading to safe workspaces for all.

Keywords: gender and power relations, psychosocial risk factors, workplace harassment, workplace mobbing.

FROM RECOVERY TO MATURITY: MAPPING THE DIGITAL LABOR MARKET IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract. Digitalization has recently reshaped the labor market landscape worldwide, by enhancing the need for digitally skilled workers, by increasing productivity, and by creating new opportunities. In the Digital Agenda context, this paper examines the evolving relationship between digitalization and labor market performance across the European Union, contrasting the pre-pandemic recovery period of 2019 with the more mature period of 2024. Based on a cluster analysis on Eurostat data, we investigate patterns and map the EU countries from a labor market and digitalization perspective, using the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), NEET rates, and ICT employment among other factors. The paper reveals the fact that the COVID-19 pandemics led to a rapid growth and the immediate necessity to implement new digital strategies and work environments, having to rapidly and successfully adjust to the newly-created conditions. Preliminary findings reveal a stark negative correlation between digital maturity and youth disengagement (NEET), alongside a significant positive association with GDP per capita. The cluster analysis identifies a tripartite hierarchy: (1) Laggard Economies struggling with low digital adoption and high social exclusion; (2) Transitioning Adopters showing moderate technological integration; and (3) Digital Sovereigns characterized by high-maturity digital skills and robust labor market outcomes. The comparison highlights that while the pandemic accelerated the digital uptake, it also intensified the "digital divide" between these clusters. As main contribution in the field, the results suggest that EU policy must shift from general digital investment to cluster-specific interventions to ensure social convergence by 2030.

Keywords: digitalization, labor market, European Union, cluster analysis, mapping.

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THE ALGORITHMIC SOCIAL CONTRACT: DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND THE RE-BRANDING OF THE NORDIC WELFARE IDENTITY IN FINLAND AND DENMARK

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Abstract. Following the 2008 financial crisis, the Nordic region underwent a significant structural pivot, utilizing digital transformation as a primary tool for economic stabilization and state modernization. This paper examines the transition from traditional universal welfare to a data-driven workfare logic in Finland and Denmark. As the global economy faces increasing pressure to automate public sectors, the Nordic countries, long considered the gold standard of social trust, serve as a critical laboratory. Within current research, there is a gap regarding how digitalization specifically affects social citizenship and national identity. As we approach 2026, understanding whether the Nordic Model can survive the removal of human discretion in favor of algorithmic logic is essential for both social scientists and policymakers globally. To compare Finland's experimental technocracy with Denmark's mandatory digitalization, the research is guided by two primary questions: (1) How has the post-2008 push for digital governance shaped a new "technocratic" Nordic identity? (2) Does the shift toward algorithmic bureaucracy undermine traditional levels of social trust? Methodologically, the paper combines a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of national digital strategies (2008–2026) with a secondary quantitative analysis of longitudinal trust data from the European Social Survey (ESS). Preliminary findings indicate that while digitalization has secured fiscal sustainability, it has introduced a digital conditionality, where welfare rights are increasingly tethered to technical compliance. In Denmark, this has led to a digital identity characterized by increased surveillance, while Finland's model shows a shift toward technocratic universalism.

Keywords: digital welfare state, Nordic model, algorithmic bureaucracy, social trust.

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EXPANSION OF EDUCATION AND SKILL MISMATCH IN THE LABOR MARKET

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Abstract. The mismatch between workers' skills and job requirements has significant economic and social impacts. At the macro level, it reduces productivity and slows economic growth, as organizations are unable to fully utilize human capital. Employers may face higher recruitment and training costs, while employees experience lower job satisfaction, reduced wages, and limited career progression. Over time, persistent mismatch can contribute to structural unemployment and labor market imbalances, particularly in rapidly changing sectors driven by technological advancement. At the societal level, it can deepen inequalities, as certain groups struggle to access relevant education or skilling opportunities. This paper analysis data from European skills and jobs survey second wave (ESJS2) that has been carried out in 2021, aiming to identify patterns and links between skill supply and skill mismatch. Special attention has been given to the influence of educational expansion on the manifestation of skill mismatch in the labor market. Our results are informative for policies targeting human capital development. Addressing skill mismatch through relevant education and vocational training is essential for improving workforce adaptability and economic growth prospects.

Keywords: expansion of education, skill mismatch, human capital.

MINITRACK: SUSTAINABILITY, STRATEGY AND ENGAGEMENT

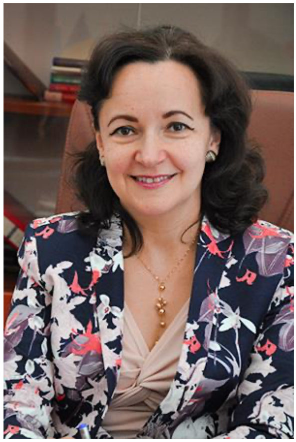
Chairs:

- **Magdalena IORDACHE-PLATIS, University of Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania**
- **Dumitru MIRON, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania**
- **Mike IVANOF, University of the Fraser Valley, Abbotsford, Canada**

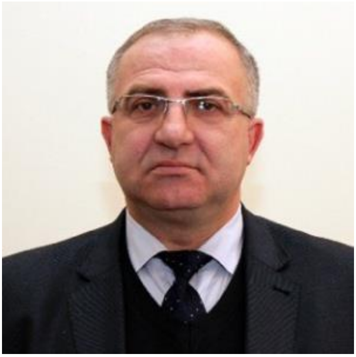
Higher education institutions have the capacity to meet global challenges in the current global context. Areas such as health, climate, environment, energy, digitalization, society, crisis have been considered priorities for education, research, and social responsibility actions of educational leaders. Societal challenges made all institutions work together to raise awareness and act in joint approaches. In this context, higher education institutions, alliances of universities and networks of different stakeholders promoted knowledge, skills, and competences together with civic engagement of staff and students towards responsible citizenship and community development. Therefore, sustainability has become a priority for academic leadership and higher education institutions have increased their role in coping with societal challenges, concrete actions being identified at individual, institutional, and social level. The orientation towards sustainability is observed in universities from workshops and events dedicated to raise awareness on specific topics to sustainability strategies, from dedicated actions to transversal embedding of sustainability into teaching, research, contribution to society, as well as into management and administration changes. New innovative pedagogies, such as service learning prove the tremendous higher education capacity of response not only to the global challenges, but also to the stakeholders needs. In other words, addressing the current complexity and dynamism of initiatives based on innovation, entrepreneurial and civic approach transforms higher education institutions into effective contributors to the achievement of the SDGs.

The main topics covered by the hereby call for papers are related (but not limited) to:

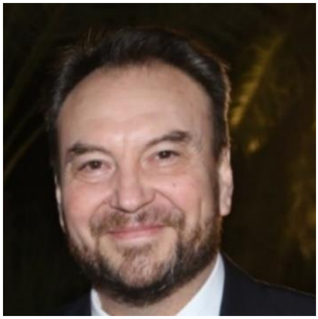
- Service learning and challenges for universities
- SDGs challenges and university practices
- Civic engagement and community impact
- Sustainable university initiatives
- Strategic partnerships for civic universities
- Innovative pedagogies for sustainable education
- Social entrepreneurship and students' initiatives
- Sustainable entrepreneurship and university support
- Strategies for sustainability and educational leaders' efforts
- Transnational interaction and cooperation with stakeholders
- Inclusiveness, innovativeness and interconnection in academic environment



Magdalena IORDACHE-PLATIS is full professor at the University of Bucharest with over 30 years of experience, teaching Marketing, Micro and Macroeconomics, vice-rector for Quality Management, Social Responsibility and Relationship with Social Partners. She is an external reviewer on quality assurance for higher education at foreign quality assurance agencies and reviewer at different international journals. She was a member of the Thematic Peer Group of EUA Teaching & Learning Initiative (2017): Empowering students for their future professional life and civic engagement and mini-track chair at several editions of the European Conference on Management, Leadership and Governance – ACPI (2016, 2017, 2019, 2021). She was the country manager in the Horizon 2020 project called Students Achieving Valuable Energy Savings (SAVES 2) during 2018-2021. Under the CIVIS project (ERASMUS+) she is the institutional coordinator of the Open Lab group aiming to cooperate with different stakeholders in the process of identifying and addressing to local challenges. She is also the institutional representative in the University Industry Innovation Network (UIIN) and the institutional manager of the KA2 project: "Service-Learning: Intersectoral Collaboration Practices for the development of students´ soft skills and socially engaged universities". Main areas of interest include: academic leadership and university rankings, civic engagement of academic community, university-industry cooperation, stakeholder commitment and student participation.



Dumitru MIRON is a Full Professor at the Department of International Business and Economics. Having a university career of more than 40 years, he has as areas of professional and scientific concern: The Economics of European Union; European Business Environment (holds a Jean Monet course); International Trade and Trade Policies; Entrepreneurship and Business Development; Global Economic Governance. He has published 26 books as the sole author, coordinator or co-author, is author of over 55 scientific papers published in specialized journals in the country and abroad where the main challenges faced by the institutional environment business in Romania, Europe and other regions of the planet. He was project manager for 3 projects, member of implementation teams or expert in 12 other projects funded by the Structural and Cohesion Funds of the European Union. He is one of the members of „Team Europe" Romania, in which he contributes to the promotion of the contingent problems with the European affairs in the Romanian society. Between 2005 and 2008, he served as Secretary of State for Higher Education and European Integration at the Ministry of National Education, where he represented Romania at the Bologna Follow-Up Group. He was vice-Dean of the Faculty of International Business and Economics during the period 1991-2000; vice-rector of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies during the period 2000-2012; Dean of the Faculty of International Business and Economics in 2012-2016 and between 2020 and 2024 was President of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies Senate.



Dr. Mike (Mihai) IVANOF, CGA, BSc. Eng, MBA, DBA/PhD, is a distinguished Associate Professor at the University of the Fraser Valley's School of Business, where he leverages his extensive academic and professional background to shape the next generation of business leaders. With a strategic mindset that transcends national boundaries, Dr. Ivanof excels in teaching critical subjects such as Strategy and Strategic Management, Innovation Management, International Business, International Marketing, and Entrepreneurship. His global perspective is not only a hallmark of his teaching but also informs his research and program development initiatives. In his previous role as Director of the School of Business, Dr. Ivanof demonstrated a remarkable ability to conceptualize, design, and implement advanced academic programs, including Master's degrees, MBAs, Executive MBAs, and Global MBAs. His expertise in program management is complemented by a strong foundation in finance, budgeting, and performance management, enabling him to align educational offerings with current global market demands. Dr. Ivanof's commitment to fostering innovation and entrepreneurship is evident in his active involvement in curriculum development and his dedication to enhancing student learning experiences through practical applications of theory. Dr. Ivanof's research interests and projects often focus on pressing global issues, positioning him as a thought leader in the fields of international business and strategic management. His proficiency in data analysis and portfolio management further enhances his ability to guide students and professionals alike in navigating the complexities of today's business landscape. Through his multifaceted role at the University of the Fraser Valley, Dr. Ivanof continues to inspire and equip future business leaders with the skills necessary to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world. Dr. Mike Ivanof is a Global citizen with a career that spans more than a dozen countries on four continents. His career combines substantive industry experience in finance and business development, and over a decade in academia. His academic research interests revolve mainly around Corporate Governance and Corporate Social Responsibility.

INTERSECTIONAL PEDAGOGY: REDEFINING SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION THROUGH THE PRISM OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Tabita Nicoleta ALEXANDRU
Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

Abstract. This paper explores the need for a paradigm shift in education for sustainable development, proposing a shift from a purely ecocentric to an intersectional model. While traditional environmental pedagogies have historically focused on individual behavioral changes (recycling, resource conservation), they have often overlooked the systemic structures that generate inequality. The article examines the concept of climate justice as an essential pedagogical tool in shaping the global citizen of the 21st century. Authentic sustainable education must address the interconnection between environmental degradation and social marginalization, exploring how the climate crisis disproportionately affects vulnerable communities. By introducing concepts such as “ecological apartheid” and “systemic consumer ethics,” intersectional pedagogy provides students with a critical framework for understanding that protecting biodiversity is inseparable from protecting human rights. The paper proposes innovative teaching strategies, such as the participatory mapping of environmental risks in local communities and the analysis of global supply chains, transforming the classroom into a space for ethical debate and civic activism. The conclusions emphasize that innovation in sustainable education does not lie only in digitalization or green technologies, but in the ability to cultivate radical empathy and critical thinking. The ultimate goal is the transition from a passive “eco-illiteracy” to an active participation, capable of addressing the political and economic roots of the current ecological crisis.

Keywords: intersectionality, climate justice, critical pedagogy.

INSTITUTIONAL ACTORS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

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Andra-Nicoleta MECU

Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

Abstract. The digital transformation of higher education has conclusively transitioned from a peripheral modernization agenda to a core public policy imperative, fundamentally driven by systemic disruptions and the strategic repositioning of digital skills for socioeconomic resilience. Current scientific literature highlights a conceptual shift from rudimentary digitization to complex digital transformation, emphasizing the persistent tension between coercive external mandates and internal institutional capacities, yet often overlooking the organizational nuances of symbolic implementation. To address this research gap, this study investigates how key multi-level institutional actors perceive, regulate, and operate digital transformation policies in higher education, utilizing sociological institutionalism as a theoretical framework. Employing a qualitative, actor-centered documentary analysis of strategic policies, funding frameworks, and legislative acts issued between 2020 and 2026, the research evaluates the policy framing, instruments, and governance logics of supranational entities, the national government, quality assurance agencies, and universities. The findings reveal a profound implementation asymmetry: while supranational and national actors exert intense coercive and normative pressures through massive funding programs and stringent accreditation standards, universities frequently respond with pragmatic, compliance-driven adaptation. This dynamic fosters structural means-ends decoupling, where institutions successfully procure digital infrastructure to satisfy external requirements without necessarily achieving the intended pedagogical innovations or equitable outcomes. The paper contributes a critical governance perspective to the field, highlighting that sustained educational digitalization requires shifting from symbolic, consistency-oriented compliance toward reflexive, context-specific pedagogical integration.

Keywords: digital transformation, higher education policy, educational policies.

URBAN SUSTAINABILITY AND SMART CITIES: INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Monica-Ioana VULPE
Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

Abstract. Smart city initiatives increasingly aim to enhance urban sustainability by leveraging technological innovation alongside active citizen engagement, thereby transforming how cities are planned, governed, and experienced. While substantial investments have been made in digital infrastructure and data-driven urban management, the role of participatory approaches in shaping sustainability outcomes remains insufficiently understood. Limited empirical attention has been given to how citizen involvement influences the effectiveness, legitimacy, and long-term impact of smart city projects. This study investigates the relationship between participatory governance and sustainability outcomes within smart city initiatives. Adopting a mixed-methods research design, the study combines in-depth case studies of selected smart cities with survey data collected from citizens involved in or affected by these projects. The analysis focuses on forms of citizen involvement such as co-design, digital participation platforms, and community-driven initiatives, as well as their influence on project implementation and outcomes. The theoretical framework integrates perspectives from urban studies and sustainability theory, conceptualizing smart cities as socio-technical systems in which technological innovation and social participation are mutually reinforcing. Participatory governance is viewed as a critical mechanism for aligning technological solutions with local needs, enhancing transparency, and fostering the collective ownership of sustainability goals. The findings are expected to demonstrate that participatory approaches significantly enhance the effectiveness and resilience of smart city projects by improving decision quality, increasing public trust, and facilitating adaptive implementation. Moreover, higher levels of citizen engagement are anticipated to correlate with stronger sustainability outcomes across environmental, social, and economic dimensions. The study contributes to sustainability and urban governance literature by empirically linking participatory mechanisms with performance outcomes in smart city contexts. Practically, it offers policy-relevant insights for urban planners and decision-makers seeking to design inclusive, responsive, and sustainable urban development strategies.

Keywords: smart cities, urban sustainability, citizen participation, governance, innovation.

CLUSTERING UNIVERSITIES BASED ON SUSTAINABILITY PERFORMANCE: A DATA-DRIVEN ANALYSIS OF UI GREEN METRICS RANKINGS

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Tarsus University, Mersin, Türkiye

Hilal KARAMANCIOGLU
Tarsus University, Mersin, Türkiye

Zeliha SEZER ERGİN
Tarsus University, Mersin, Türkiye

Abstract. Assessing and comparing universities' sustainability performance has become a critical component of institutional competitiveness and long-term strategic planning in higher education. This study aims to systematically identify development areas by clustering higher education institutions included in the UI Green Metrics ranking according to similar sustainability performance profiles. An unsupervised learning approach is adopted, employing the K-means clustering algorithm, with the optimal number of clusters determined using the Elbow method. Based on UI Green Metrics indicators, the resulting clusters reveal universities' relative sustainability positions and their primary competitors in terms of sustainability performance. Through inter-cluster comparisons, the study identifies the specific sustainability dimensions in which lower-ranked universities need to improve in order to transition to higher-performing clusters. In addition, the clustering results at the university level are compared with country-level sustainability performance indices, such as GRI and similar international metrics, to examine the relationship between institutional and national sustainability performance. Furthermore, universities positioned in the upper clusters of the UI Green Metrics ranking are analyzed in terms of their placements in global academic rankings, including QS and THE, in order to highlight similarities and differences between sustainability-oriented rankings and general academic performance rankings. The findings are discussed in comparison with existing literature, providing empirical evidence on the alignment and divergence between sustainability-based and academically oriented ranking systems. Overall, this study contributes a data-driven decision-support framework that enables universities to identify strategic sustainability priorities and benchmark their performance against comparable institutions.

Keywords: university sustainability rankings, UI Green Metrics, k-means clustering, strategic benchmarking.

FROM RESILIENCE TO ANTIFRAGILITY: RETHINKING THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Ioana TĂTĂRCIUC
Ștefan cel Mare University of Suceava, Suceava, Romania

Abstract. Higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly expected to play a strategic role in tackling difficult environmental and societal issues, such as social fragmentation, rural vulnerability, and climate change. Institutional resilience has emerged as a prominent framework in contemporary research for comprehending how universities deal with uncertainty; however, resilience-based approaches frequently place a higher priority on stability and recovery than on long-term transformation. This paper addresses this gap by exploring how the concept of antifragility can offer a more dynamic perspective on the role of HEIs in sustainable community development. Using interdisciplinary literature from sustainability transitions, organizational studies, and civic university approaches, the study employs a conceptual and theory-building methodology. How can higher education institutions transition from resilience-oriented responses to antifragile strategies? is the main research question that guides the analysis. According to the paper's analysis, HEIs can use strategies like service learning, community-based research, youth civic engagement, and strategic partnerships with local and rural stakeholders to leverage uncertainty and become antifragile actors. These practices allow universities to learn, innovate, and co-evolve with their local communities instead of just responding to external shocks. The results emphasise decentralized decision-making, experimentation, and long-term community capacity building, all of which have significant implications for sustainability strategies and academic leadership. This paper contributes a fresh conceptual perspective to discussions about sustainability, strategy, and engagement in higher education by redefining universities as possible antifragile actors. For educational leaders looking to reinforce universities' transformative role in attaining sustainable and inclusive development, it provides practical insights.

Keywords: higher education institutions, sustainability strategy, institutional economics, antifragility, local development.

SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY, STAKEHOLDER AND PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT: DRIVERS OF LONG-TERM VALUE CREATION

Maria-Cristina EREMIA
Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

Abstract. Sustainability has become a strategic imperative for organizations seeking to balance economic success with environmental protection and social responsibility. This paper explores how sustainability strategy, stakeholder engagement, and personal engagement collectively influence organizational performance and long-term value creation. As global challenges such as climate change, resource depletion, and social inequality intensify, organizations are increasingly expected not only to implement sustainable practices but also to foster active participation among stakeholders and employees. Current research has extensively examined corporate sustainability and stakeholder engagement; however, limited attention has been given to the role of personal engagement — the commitment, values, and daily behaviors of individuals within organizations — in the successful implementation of sustainability initiatives. Addressing this gap, this study investigates how integrating sustainability into core business strategy, encouraging stakeholder collaboration, and promoting personal responsibility contribute to organizational resilience and competitive advantage. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining the analysis of sustainability performance indicators with qualitative case studies and employee surveys. It explores three key questions: how sustainability strategies affect performance, how stakeholder engagement supports implementation, and how personal engagement influences the effectiveness and durability of sustainability initiatives. The findings indicate that organizations aligning strategic sustainability goals with stakeholder involvement and strong personal commitment achieve improved risk management, enhanced reputation, and more sustainable performance outcomes. This paper proposes an integrative framework linking strategy, collaboration, and individual action, contributing to more holistic and participatory approaches to sustainable development.

Keywords: sustainable development, stakeholder engagement, value creation.

THE GREEN CHEMISTRY OASIS: A STRATEGIC MODEL FOR SOVEREIGN INDUSTRIAL INTEGRATION AND SUSTAINABLE ADVANCED MATERIALS IN THE ALGERIAN SAHARA

Ayat Arrahman Khadija LABIDI
The School of Higher Commercial Studies, Tipaza, Algeria

Abstract. This study explores the feasibility of establishing a carbon fiber industry in Algeria through an integrated sustainable model. Despite the country's natural and energy resources, its economy remains dependent on raw material exports, limiting high-value industrial opportunities. This research proposes the "Green Chemistry Oasis" model, combining localized PAN precursor production, carbon fiber manufacturing, and renewable energy in a unified system. The analysis focuses on energy and economic dimensions. From an energy perspective, the study evaluates Concentrated Solar Power (CSP) with thermal storage as an alternative to fossil fuel-based systems, ensuring continuous high-temperature processes while reducing costs and environmental impact. From an economic standpoint, the research assesses production costs, capital investment, and market dynamics, showing that localizing key inputs enhances profitability. The findings indicate that despite substantial initial investment and technological requirements, a phased implementation strategy reduces entry barriers and improves feasibility. The growing global demand for lightweight, high-performance materials creates market opportunities for cost-efficient sustainable solutions. This study concludes that developing a carbon fiber industry in Algeria is feasible and strategically advantageous through an integrated framework. The proposed model improves economic resilience, industrial competitiveness, and provides a scalable pathway toward sustainable transformation.

Keywords: carbon fiber, concentrated solar power (CSP), green manufacturing, techno-economic analysis, sustainable industry.

WORKSHOP FOR YOUNG RESEARCHERS

Chairs:

- **Marius CONSTANTIN, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania**
- **Donatella PRIVITERA, University of Catania, Catania, Italy**
- **Elena-Mădălina DEACONU, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania**

This workshop is dedicated to young researchers who are at the beginning of their scientific research career. The workshop welcomes papers from PhD candidates and young researchers with an interest in business administration or in economics, hence providing a unique platform to present innovative ideas, share insights, and engage in thought-provoking discussions. In addition, this workshop is not just a forum for presenting papers; it is an incubator for ideas that challenge conventional wisdom, propose novel frameworks, and contribute to the theoretical and practical advancement of business administration and economics. All the papers presented at the workshop will undergo initial screening by the chairs who will provide feedback to all submitting authors. Later, the best papers will be considered for the peer review process and publication in a dedicated ICESS volume, in case of paper acceptance.

Marius CONSTANTIN is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Agrifood and Environmental Economics at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. His research primarily focuses on agricultural economics, with a particular emphasis on competitiveness. He has participated in a best-practice sharing program at the University of Georgia, USA, focusing on the synergy among agri-environmental research, education, and extension—an initiative housed within the College of Agricultural & Environmental Sciences. Moreover, Marius Constantin has also been involved in various teaching and research missions at the Catholic University of Valencia "San Vicente Mártir" and the Institute of Agricultural Economics in Belgrade. In recognition of his outstanding research activity, Marius Constantin has been honored with two awards at the Excellence Gala, an event organized by the Bucharest University of Economic Studies.

Donatella PRIVITERA graduated with honors in Economics and Commerce, with an MSc in Agrifood Economics, is a full professor of Geography. She teaches economic geography with implications for tourism, environmental changes, and urbanization processes at the University of Catania (Department of Educational Sciences). Currently, she is the coordinator of the Tourism Sciences degree course; a member of the university research center "Geographical Design and Research Center – Progeo" and of Cutgana "University Center for the Protection and Management of Natural Environments and Agro-ecosystems". Her research focuses primarily on topics in economic geography, food and tourism. In particular, she deals with: territorial valorization for tourism purposes with a focus on gastronomic tourism; sustainability and sustainable urban mobility; technological innovation in tourism. Currently, she is the head of the local unit in Catania for the "Emplacing Food. Narratives, policies and spaces in Italy" research project supported by the Italian National Research Programme 2020.

PhD student and research assistant at the Faculty of Agrifood and Environmental Economics within the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, **Elena-Mădălina DEACONU** explores the complexities of agrifood and environmental economics through data-driven research, policy analysis, and interdisciplinary methodologies. Her work focuses on advancing sustainable agricultural practices, trade balance dynamics, and economic decarbonization models, contributing to a deeper understanding of the sector's evolving challenges. With a strong foundation in both theory and applied research, she integrates academic insights with practical expertise in policy evaluation, project management, and quantitative analysis. Her main research interests include agricultural and environmental policies, economic decarbonization strategies, and social entrepreneurship, aiming to drive sustainable and resilient economic transformations.

WHEN ALGORITHMS TRAVEL: A LITERATURE REVIEW ON ALGORITHMIC BIAS, CULTURAL ENACTMENT AND FAIRNESS-BY DESIGN IN AI-ENABLED ERP/CRM SYSTEMS OF MULTINATIONAL ENTERPRISES

Carolin ROETHEMEIER
Technical University of Munich, Munich, Germany

Holger WITTGES
Technical University of Munich, Munich, Germany

Abstract. Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platforms transform multinational enterprises (MNEs) from transactional processors into embedded decision infrastructures, introducing algorithmic bias as a structural organizational risk. Standardized AI modules deployed via globally uniform enterprise templates propagate biases across culturally diverse subsidiaries at scale. Despite advances across algorithmic fairness, human AI-collaboration and AI governance, their theoretical intersection in the specific organizational context of MNEs remains critically unexplored. This paper, therefore, asks: How do culturally mediated human–AI interaction patterns shape algorithmic fairness outcomes in AI-enabled ERP/CRM systems across multinational enterprise subsidiaries? Drawing on a structured integrative literature review, this paper makes two original theoretical contributions. First, it introduces enactment bias, as a systematic distortion of realized AI outcomes arising from algorithmic outputs that are culturally mediated and enacted by human actors across subsidiary contexts. This construct extends existing bias typologies beyond the model level and connects human-AI interaction dynamics explicitly to fairness outcomes in culturally heterogeneous organizational settings. Second, it identifies the absence of an operationalized fairness-by-design framework for AI-enabled ERP/CRM governance across culturally heterogeneous MNEs as a critical research gap. Further, it outlines the design requirements for a Multilevel Fairness by-Design Framework. These contributions advance responsible AI governance theory and offer actionable implications for practitioners navigating increasing regulatory pressure, most urgently the compliance obligations introduced by the EU AI Act and the efficiency of work for MNEs.

Keywords: AI-enabled ERP/CRM, human-AI collaboration, algorithmic bias.

THE INTELLECTUAL EVOLUTION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND TEAM PERFORMANCE: A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

Florina-Raluca VOITEANU
Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

Abstract. This research examines the intellectual trajectory and structural configuration of the academic literature dedicated to emotional intelligence (EI) and team performance, covering the 2015–2025 decade. Within an organizational landscape shaped by digitalization and complexity, understanding how collective emotional dynamics catalyze group outcomes has become imperative for strategic management. The primary objective of this study is to identify key research trends, emerging authors, and the thematic clusters that define this field. The adopted methodology is quantitative in nature, employing bibliometric analysis techniques applied to a dataset extracted from Web of Science and Scopus. Data processing was conducted using Bibliometrix (R-package) software, facilitating the mapping of co-citation networks and keyword co-occurrence. The results reveal a transition from individual-centered EI models toward collective emotional intelligence constructs, while also highlighting an emerging intersection with themes such as adaptive leadership and organizational agility. The analysis identifies three major thematic clusters: (1) psychological mechanisms of cohesion, (2) the impact of EI on innovation, and (3) the moderating role of organizational culture. The study contributes to the literature by providing a systematic synthesis of the "knowledge frontier," signaling research gaps regarding hybrid human–AI teams. This analysis serves as a theoretical foundation for developing strategic frameworks aimed at optimizing collective performance through the cultivation of emotional competencies.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, team performance, bibliometric analysis, strategic management, Biblioshiny.

SHOULD I HELP OR SHOULD I GO? IS VOLUNTEERING LINKED WITH THE MIGRATION INTENTION OF SOUTH-EAST EUROPEAN YOUTH?

Sergiu URSA
Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Abstract. Young people in South-Eastern Europe have a lot of particularities, two of them being that they volunteer less and migrate a lot. While volunteering increases civic participation, leading to a person's increased will to change and be mobile; it also creates a sense of belonging, which then diminishes the desire to leave the community. Yet, no research has addressed the relationship between volunteering and migration intention, despite the fact that, recently, there has been an increase of interest in research addressing the question of migrants doing volunteering. Using a 2018 youth database collected by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in ten countries from South-Eastern Europe, we address this lack of research between individual volunteering rates and the migration intention of young people in the region. Individual volunteering does seem to have an effect on migration intention, but that effect becomes non-significant when other metrics are taken into account. When checking for different volunteering rates, there are significant differences between youth who volunteer sporadically and those who do so periodically. As such, my research suggests that there exists a moderator effect of volunteering on migration intentions, affecting a young person's view of their country's democratic identity and their own wellbeing within it.

Keywords: youth, volunteering, migration, South-Eastern Europe, democracy.

TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION IN STRENGTH TRAINING: EVALUATING THE ROLE OF DIGITAL VARIABLE RESISTANCE IN HYPERTROPHY OUTCOMES

Cristian BĂLTĂREȚU
National University of Physical Education and Sport, Bucharest, Romania
Virgil TUDOR
National University of Physical Education and Sport, Bucharest, Romania
Adrian IACOBINI
Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

Abstract. The integration of digital technologies into resistance training has generated significant changes in the way strength development and muscular adaptation are approached in contemporary fitness and sports science. Among recent innovations, Digital Variable Resistance (DVR) systems represent an emerging method that enables real-time adaptation of resistance according to movement velocity, force production, and biomechanical characteristics during exercise execution. Unlike traditional resistance training, which relies on constant external loads, DVR systems create an adaptive environment capable of maintaining more consistent mechanical tension throughout the range of motion. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of Digital Variable Resistance systems in optimizing hypertrophy-oriented training and improving training efficiency in resistance-trained individuals.

Keywords: Digital Variable Resistance, hypertrophy, resistance training, sports technology, muscle adaptation.

WORKSHOP: INTEGRATING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS INTO REAL WORLD: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Chairs:

- **Atanas DIMITROV, University of National and World Economy, Sofia, Bulgaria**
- **Carmen Lenuța TRICĂ, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania**
- **Elena PREDA, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania**

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is one of the most ambitious plans established globally, representing the moment that marked the entire human society by developing objectives and targets for all nations and peoples, for all sectors and fields of interest. The complexity of the approach, the highest ambition and the transformative long-term vision represent a unique approach, aiming to redesign the existence and development of human society in harmony with the natural environment, to ensure continuity, responsibility and long-term socio-economic development. The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represented the recognition that action is needed at the level of all components of society if we want to change the development model.

The main aim of the workshop is to identify, discuss and share experiences, ideas and opinions about SDGs implementation challenges and opportunities, also.

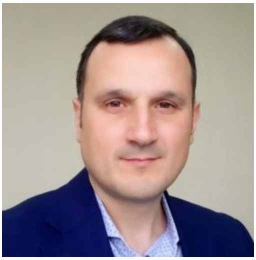
The main topics covered by the hereby call for papers are related (but not limited) to:

- Circular economy – a model for future generations
- The impact of climate change on economy and society
- Good practices for the implementation of the SDGs in the context of global risks Inclusive and fair education for all
- The green and digital transition

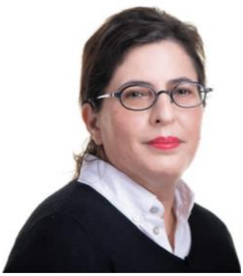
Abstracts should be no more than 300 words, clearly stating the research question, methodology, results, and implications for sustainable education. Full papers should be between 5,000 and 7,000 words, including references, tables, and figures. Submissions must be original and not previously published or under consideration for publication elsewhere. All submissions will be peer-reviewed for relevance, originality, and contribution to the field.

This workshop is open to educators, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners interested and involved in sustainability and SDGs implementation.

Join us at "Integrating Sustainable Development Goals into Real World: Challenges and Opportunities" to contribute to the dialogue on challenges, dificulties and opportunities for a sustainable future. We look forward to your insightful contributions and to fostering collaborations that drive forward the Agenda 2030 for all.



Atanas DIMITROV has been teaching since 2015 at the University of National and World Economy (UNWE), Bulgaria, where he currently holds the position of Senior Assistant Professor. He is a former EVS volunteer, consultant to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (E4J Integrity & Ethics Champions Programme) and Transparency International School on Integrity Fellow. He is a Doctor of Economics and Management (Economics of Defense and Security) from UNWE. His research interests and publications focus on peace and conflict studies, migration and refugee studies, higher education, ethics and integrity.



Carmen Lenuța TRICĂ, Professor, PhD, is a graduate of the Faculty of Agrifood and Environmental Economics from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania. She teaches the courses: Sustainable Development, Circular Management of Resources, Environmental Governance, Environmental Economics, Ecological Impact Assessment. The topic of the doctoral thesis was "Economic tools in the sustainable management of water resources" and, in 2023, she defended the habilitation thesis with the theme "Contributions regarding the evaluation of the impact of the circular economy on sustainable development in the context of global risks". In the 25 years of research activity, she was involved, as a team member or director, in 32 research projects related to the circular economy, waste management, sustainable development.

Elena PREDA, PhD, Senior Lecturer, is the Head of the Research Center for Sustainable Development from Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania. She holds a PhD in Ecology and has scientific expertise in the field of environmental assessment and indicators, ecological processes, evaluation of ecosystem services in connection with socio-economic system. Her research activities concern: contributions to knowledge development and technical basis for assessment of climatic changes impacts on ecosystems; understanding the impact of different drivers on ecosystem functioning and development of innovative nature-based solutions and sustainable business models; involvement in environmental policy elaboration and implementation, thus supporting the decision-making process.

STAKEHOLDER MAPPING TO PROMOTE ENGAGEMENT AND COOPERATION FOR SUSTAINABLE TRANSFORMATION IN THE DANUBE REGION

Elena PREDA
Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

Nicolae ISTUDOR
Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

Monika MANOLOVA
Bulgarian-Romanian Chamber of Commerce, Ruse, Bulgaria

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Abstract. The Danube River Basin represents a highly intricate socio-ecological system currently facing significant ecological pressures, biodiversity risks, and climate vulnerabilities. Achieving sustainable transformation and climate resilience across this vast catchment needs robust transdisciplinary cooperation and the proactive engagement of a diverse multi-actor network. This paper examines the critical role of stakeholder mapping as an important background tool to foster regional engagement and collaboration, especially for managing complex ecological restoration projects or initiatives. Within Danube Region Water Lighthouse Innovation Action (DALIA) project, a comprehensive multi-actor approach has been proposed to bridge the gap between scientific water innovation and practical local applications. By detailing the systematic processes of identifying, analyzing, and organizing stakeholder groups based on their specific information demands, this study demonstrates how mapping underpins the baseline requirements for the project's nine Demonstrator Pilot Sites (DPS). A structured participatory process facilitates a creative co-creation ecosystem, feeding directly into the iterative refinement of local action and validation plans. Furthermore, the paper highlights how establishing a balanced multi-actor community directory promotes a deep sense of co-ownership and shared responsibility among local communities, policymakers, academia, and industry partners. By aligning individual expectations and fostering the cross-fertilization of knowledge, this stakeholder mapping methodology builds an enabling environment for sustainable financing, socio-economic impact assessments, and optimized water governance. Ultimately, the insights gathered from local DPSs offer a scalable blueprint for effectively mobilizing stakeholder interests across complex river basin catchments.

Keywords: Danube Region, EU Water Mission, Stakeholder mapping, water governance.

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY BETWEEN PEDAGOGY AND LAW: EDUCATIONAL MODELS, EFFECTIVE PRACTICES AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract. The paper analyzes the pedagogical and legal-normative perspectives that guide education for sustainability and the environment in the education systems of a selected group of European and African countries (Italy, Spain, Malta, Greece, Portugal, Finland, Germany, Turkey, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom, France, Switzerland, Denmark, Tanzania, and Tunisia), with particular attention to national specificities. Education for sustainability today represents a strategic dimension of global education policies, in line with the 2030 Agenda, Goal 4.7 and the UNESCO frameworks on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), assuming a key role in the formation of aware, responsible, and participatory citizens. In the context of the current state of research, the work is located at the intersection of pedagogy, law, and public policy, responding to the need for comparative analyses capable of capturing convergences, divergences, and emerging models between European and African contexts. The methodology adopted is qualitative-comparative and is based on the documentary analysis of national curricula, laws, ministerial guidelines, and international policies, integrated with case studies and literature review. Research questions explore prevailing pedagogical patterns, experiential educational practices, teacher training, student and community perception, as well as regulatory frameworks and governance and participation mechanisms. The results highlight a greater curricular and regulatory structuring in European countries, with transformative, participatory and service-learning approaches, compared to African contexts characterized by greater flexibility and centrality of the community. From a legal point of view, significant differences emerge in the recognition of the right to the environment and in state obligations in the field of education. The contribution offers integrated pedagogical and legal perspectives, indicating lines of development for educational policies oriented towards sustainability, environmental justice and global citizenship.

Keywords: education for sustainability, transformative pedagogy, legal and regulatory framework, comparative analysis of education systems, environmental citizenship.

ACHIEVING FOOD SECURITY AMID RISING ARMED CONFLICTS: A CHALLENGE EXTENDING BEYOND 2030

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Abstract. This paper examines the escalating challenge of achieving global food security amid rising armed conflicts, with implications that extend beyond the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals horizon. Drawing on recent data from conflict-affected countries and regions, the paper analyzes how armed violence and protracted instability disrupt agricultural production, lead to forced migration, and hamper good governance, exacerbating hunger and malnutrition. The study further explores the limitations of current international frameworks and humanitarian responses, highlighting gaps in coordination, funding, and long-term planning. The paper highlights the relationship between armed conflict, political leadership, economic fragility, and food security, suggesting that the latter must be a priority for the international community. The paper argues that without addressing the root causes of armed conflict and investing in resilient food systems based on strong international cooperation, the SDG2 will unlikely be achieved even beyond 2030. Thus, it calls for proactive crisis management to ensure the achievement of food security in the current fragile security environment.

Keywords: food security, armed conflicts, sustainable development, SDG2.

UNIVERSITY COOPERATION FOR NET ZERO ON CAMPUS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract. Accelerating the transition toward net-zero carbon emissions is a critical mandate for higher education institutions globally. This paper examines the challenges and opportunities inherent in the first phases of university implementation, the role of inter-university collaboration, focusing on Bucharest University of Economic Studies potential to manage net-zero on campus using an integrated whole university approach. Through a systematic stakeholder mapping and joint needs assessment, this study investigates how institutional profiles influence the implementation of campus decarbonization strategies. The research identifies critical structural challenges, including institutional silos, data availability or fragmented data tracking, budgetary constraints, and behavioral inertia among campus users. At the same time, it highlights significant opportunities for cross-institutional synergy, such as the co-creation of open-source energy management tools, shared curriculum frameworks, and joint student-led engagement campaigns. The findings reveal that while individual universities face localized socio-economic and infrastructural barriers, structured cooperation enables resource optimization and scales best practices more rapidly than isolated efforts. Ultimately, this paper proposes a transferable framework for multi-university alliances, demonstrating that strategic cooperation not only mitigates operational decarbonization hurdles but also positions universities as regional catalysts for broader societal net-zero transitions.

Keywords: net-zero on campus, decarbonization, SDG13, SDSN.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT FOR NET ZERO APPROACH IN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract. Achieving a net-zero campus requires a systemic whole institution approach that bridges structural operations with active stakeholder engagement. This paper analyzes the operational realities, infrastructure gaps, and stakeholder perceptions at Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania's leading economic university. As a dense urban institution with many different buildings, including older, historically significant assets, the university faces distinct decarbonization hurdles. A preliminary survey was applied within UNICO project to check students' opinion about the existing sustainability initiatives and to identify their expectations and needs related to sustainability learning and teaching environment as well as the physical infrastructure and operational activities in campus. The paper concludes that while cultural alignment is exceptionally high, bridging the gap to a 2040 net-zero state requires targeted behavioral and technical interventions in student dormitories, education infrastructure, and sustainability integration into general curricula alongside the immediate integration of National Green Procurement Program as mandatory rule.

Keywords: stakeholder, net-zero on campus, SDG13, decarbonization, SDSN.

HYBRID WIND-PHOTOVOLTAIC SYSTEM WITH ENERGY STORAGE FOR DECARBONIZING HEATING IN UNIVERSITY BUILDINGS

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Abstract. The primary aim of this project is to decarbonize the heating infrastructure of university buildings by implementing an integrated hybrid renewable energy system (HRES). This system will leverage complementary wind and solar resources, coupled with advanced energy storage, to power high-efficiency electric heat pumps, thereby replacing or significantly reducing reliance on fossil-fuel-based heating. The secondary aim is to develop and promote the education for sustainable development, universities acting as sustainability labs where the new ideas are tested and implemented.

Keywords: decarbonization, net-zero on campus, green transition, SDG13.

PLATFORM FOR MONITORING CO2 EMISSIONS IN UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES - GREEN TOKEN TRADING SYSTEM

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Abstract. The project aims to integrate different green transition actions like recycling technologies, replacing modes of heating, powering upand transportation with eco friendly ones, turning organic waste into biogas or bio-compost to boost the CO2 emissions reduction in university campuses. These technologies already exist and are proven to be efficient. Our innovative idea is to implement all of them under a single umbrella, to be able to get a much better picture of how much we can reduce CO2 emissions and better reward those who distinguish themselves in this endeavor. To this end we have decided to create a software, that has a threefoldgoal: 1. Establish the paramaters a uni campus needs to function, and create green targets that should be achieved 2. Create a leadeboard system like in a competitive videogame for the number of goals achieved 3. Create a green token system that rewards the individuals and the institution for working towards achieving green goals.

Keywords: net-zero on campus, decarbonization, green transition, SDG13, SDSN.

BIOGAS: AN ELEMENT OF ACCELERATED DECARBONIZATION AND THE POPULATION'S PERCEPTION OF IT AS A TRANSITIONAL ELEMENT

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Abstract. The global energy transition requires the identification and adoption of sustainable solutions, capable of reducing the dependence on fossil fuels and the negative impact on the environment. In this context, biogas is emerging as a viable alternative, both in the residential sector and in transport or decentralized energy production. This paper analyzes the general perception of the population regarding the implementation of the use of biogas as an alternative fuel, highlighting the level of information, the degree of social acceptance, and the main factors influencing public attitudes. From a theoretical perspective, the research is based on the theory of socio-technical transition (Transition Theory), which explains the processes of systemic change through the interaction between the niche level (emerging innovations), the dominant regime level (institutional structures, infrastructure, social norms) and the macro level (economic, political and cultural context). The research methodology includes the development and application of a questionnaire designed to assess the public perception of the use of biogas in everyday life. The analysis of the data collected is conducted through a qualitative interpretation of the responses to identify trends, barriers, and determinants of acceptance or reluctance towards this alternative energy source. Aspects such as the level of information, readiness for adoption, perception of costs, infrastructure and safety, as well as the associated benefits – reducing greenhouse gas emissions, valorizing organic waste and increasing energy independence – are investigated. The expected results highlight the role of the social dimension in the energy transition process, demonstrating that the success of biogas implementation depends not only on technological feasibility, but also on the alignment between innovation, public policies and collective perception. The paper provides recommendations for decision-makers and for the development of effective strategies to promote sustainable alternative fuels.

Keywords: biogas, fossil fuel, decarbonization, transition.

CLIMATE CHANGE RESEARCH DYNAMICS AND EMERGING TRENDS. A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract. This study provides a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of the scientific literature on the term "climate change" indexed in the Web of Science database over the period 2015-2025. The main objective is to identify the evolution of research trends, thematic structures, and intellectual dynamics associated with climate change studies during the last decade. Using VOSviewer as a visualization and mapping tool, we conduct co-occurrence, co-authorship, co-citation, and keyword clustering analyses to uncover the main research streams, influential contributors, and emerging thematic patterns. The results reveal a significant expansion of interdisciplinary approaches, with growing connections between environmental science, economics, public policy, sustainability, and corporate governance. Emerging themes include climate risk, adaptation strategies, renewable energy transition, ESG reporting, and climate-related financial disclosure. The network visualization highlights the increasing integration of climate change research with sustainable development goals and policy-driven frameworks, reflecting a transition from predominantly environmental perspectives to broader socio-economic and governance-oriented paradigms. Furthermore, temporal overlay analysis indicates a shift toward applied research addressing resilience, decarbonization strategies, and regulatory mechanisms in recent years. This study contributes to the literature by offering a structured overview of the intellectual landscape of climate change research and by identifying key trends and future research directions. The findings provide valuable insights for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners interested in understanding the evolving scientific discourse surrounding climate change and its multidimensional implications.

Keywords: climate change, sustainable development, ESG, decarbonization, climate risk.

ANALYSIS OF THE ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION POTENTIAL IN THE BUCHAREST METROPOLITAN AREA

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Abstract. This study analyzes the critical need and framework for ecological restoration within the rapidly expanding Bucharest-Ilfov metropolitan area. The region faces severe anthropogenic pressures, characterized by an increase of population density in Bucharest, habitat fragmentation, and heavy pollution. Urbanization has left 80% of the capital covered in impermeable concrete, disrupting natural abiotic factors and leaving rivers like Dâmbovița and Colentina heavily modified and channelized. Furthermore, a deficit in wastewater treatment infrastructure in the surrounding Ilfov county exacerbates water eutrophication, threatening local aquatic food webs. To counteract this environmental degradation, this study proposes a comprehensive transformation of the metropolitan landscape into a resilient blue-green infrastructure network. The proposed model is built around biodiversity nodes, such as the Snagov and Cernica forests, connected by ecological corridors represented by Dâmbovița and Colentina rivers, and supported by other urban green areas like parks and trees alignments. Additionally, the initiative highlights the "Green Belt" project, aimed to act as a bioclimatic barrier against the urban heat island effect. Divided into four structured implementation phases, the ecological restoration plan ranges from preliminary risk assessment to direct interventions, such as substituting concrete banks with native riparian vegetation and bioengineering solutions. Ultimately, the study concludes that multi-year systematic monitoring is vital until the metropolitan ecosystem achieves autonomy and climate resilience.

Keywords: ecological restoration, green transition, SDG11, urbanization.