

INNOVATIONS & INTERACTIONS: A MULTIFACETED EXPLORATION OF EUROPE'S DIGITAL, CULTURAL, AND ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE. EDITORIAL*

This thematic issue of INDECS brings together articles and research on information systems and technology, circular economy, ethical and corporate social practice, technological advancements, managerial and corporate performance, and ways to sustain innovative business practices and sustainable development.

On 17-18 June 2022, the 8th Enterprise Research Innovation Conference (ENTRENOVA) was conducted virtually and in Opatija, Croatia, to present the newest trends, methodologies, and research achievements in this subject. IRENET, Society for Advancing Innovation and Research in Economy, organises ENTRENOVA, an international scientific conference, in collaboration with Međimurje University of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management, Kotor, Montenegro, and University North, Varaždin, Croatia. This multi-disciplinary conference explores innovation, knowledge management, and R&D concerns in commercial contexts specific to ICTs. More than 140 writers from 24 nations presented 68 abstracts and 43 papers at ENTRENOVA 2022.

This INDECS thematic issue was open to all interested authors, researchers, and practitioners from economics, organisation and management science, information technology, and managerial aspects of innovative business practices and sustainability, not just ENTRENOVA 2022 participants.

Eight contributions were received for the thematic issue of INDECS, including expanded journal versions of conference short pieces. After guest editing and two anonymous reviews, six articles were accepted for this issue.

The first article, **DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION AMONG EASTERN EUROPEAN COMPANIES, BASED ON THE DIGITAL ECONOMY AND SOCIETY INDEX**, by Tünde Zita Kovács, András Nábrádi and Beáta Bittner investigates the digital evolution of Europe, emphasises the European Commission's commitment since the early 2000s to the transformation of the region's socio-economic domain. The study leverages the Digital Economy and Society Index, which, by 2021, was harmonised with the objectives of the Digital Agenda 2030. Through rigorous σ - and β -convergence analyses, the authors deduced no discernible reduction in disparities or a standardised catch-up pace in digital integration across Member States. Notably, countries from the Eastern enlargements consistently fell behind the EU average. The findings resoundingly stress the need for enhanced strategies, championing a more cohesive and inclusive digital advancement within the Union, particularly for its newer members.

In their analytical study of e-learning trends within the European context, **INEQUALITY IN E-LEARNING IN EUROPEAN UNION COUNTRIES: ROLE OF GENDER, EDUCATION AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT**, the authors of the second article, Berislav Žmuk, Fayyaz Hussain Qureshi, and Sarwar Khawaja address the heightened importance of digital educational methods, further magnified by the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. The

research focuses on discerning potential disparities related to gender, education, and urban development, offering insights into the digital divides present among EU countries. By concentrating on data from the pre-pandemic years, 2017 and 2019, and comparing the e-learning uptake among distinct groups, the authors aim to provide a more controlled assessment. Their findings reveal that the EU-15 member states consistently demonstrate better e-learning adoption compared to other EU nations. This pattern suggests an enduring digital divide, highlighting the challenges in achieving technological parity among member countries, even in the context of the broader Digital Europe initiative.

The third article, *A PREFERRED REPORTING ITEMS FOR SYSTEMATIC REVIEWS AND META-ANALYSIS GUIDED SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF DATA ENVELOPMENT ANALYSIS APPLICATIONS* by authors Katerina Fotova Čiković, Mario Tomiša and Joško Lozić inquiry explores the utilisation of the non-parametric Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA) methodology, with a particular focus on its pertinence to efficiency assessments in the creative and cultural industries and sectors. This study aims to compile and analyse existing literature in this field, with the goal of summarising the present state of knowledge in the creative and cultural industries and the DEA methodology. Additionally, it aims to provide a theoretical framework for understanding these sectors and the DEA methodology. Utilising the comprehensive Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis framework, this article conducts a systematic review of relevant uses of Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA) within the industries above. Thirteen relevant publications were identified by the adopted technique, shedding light on the utilisation of the DEA (Data Envelopment Analysis) within the creative and cultural domains. Interestingly, the authors have identified a gap in the literature where no studies utilising the DEA technique in these industries were found prior to 2012. This finding raises important issues for future academic research. Moreover, the article provides a comprehensive analysis of different perspectives on efficiency evaluations within these industries. In conclusion, the authors strongly support the expanded use of the DEA approach in the creative and cultural industries. They emphasise the need to reassess research goals in these industries for the worldwide academic and analytical community.

In their work, *THE NINTH DIMENSION OF NATIONAL CULTURE: UNPACKING CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION STYLES* by Marjan Bojadžiev, Marjana Vaneva, Ana Tomovska Misoska, Ivona Mileva, and Marija Andonova, the authors undertake a comprehensive analysis of communication styles within various country cultures. The examination of the relationship between national culture and communication modalities is conducted by referencing the well-regarded Hofstede model. The study employs a sequential methodology, commencing with the identification and analysis of different communication styles. Subsequently, these styles are examined in connection to diverse cultural contexts. Differences and similarities in communication styles across a range of countries were revealed through the utilisation of component analysis and the analysis of variance (ANOVA) test. The study comprises samples from ten diverse civilisations, including Germany, Sweden, Japan, and the United States, among others. By employing a communication evaluation tool in conjunction with Hofstede's six-dimensional cultural framework, this study aims to explore the differences in communication practises seen among the nations included in the sample. Prominent observations arise on Germany's proclivity for formal communication and Japan's preference for informal discourse. In a comparative comparison of communication styles,

Sweden and the United States are situated at different ends of the spectrum. In addition to its empirical findings, this study possesses significant scholarly significance as it introduces a novel cultural dimension, asserting that a comprehensive comprehension of one's native culture is crucial for effectively navigating intercultural interactions. The authors argue that nations must utilise cultural self-awareness as an essential instrument for understanding and actively interacting with a wide range of cultures.

The fifth article, *INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO WINE PREFERENCES: CASE OF NORTH CROATIA*, is written by Dijana Vuković, Damira Tkalec, and Antonija Ivančić. This scholarly investigation examines the complexities of the worldwide wine market, with a particular focus on its advanced stage of development and the persistent endeavours of prominent producers to maintain their dominance. The growing field of wine tourism has been driven by a combination of respect for traditional wine cultures and local grape types, as well as the willingness of tourists to support these distinctive experiences financially. This trend has become particularly prominent in the last twenty years. The convergence of wine consumption, gastronomy, hospitality, and regional viticulture results in a cohesive amalgamation, a subject of investigation in this essay, with specific attention given to North Croatia. Acknowledging the complex and diverse characteristics of consumer behaviour, this study employs an interdisciplinary approach to analyse the preferences of wine fans in this particular geographical area. By employing chi-square tests, this study substantiates its fundamental hypotheses, providing valuable insights into the historical development of wine production, attributes of wine consumers, and intricacies of wine trade within the contexts of Croatia and the global arena. The results serve as a great resource for anyone involved in the tourism industry in North Croatia, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of the preferences and interests of wine enthusiasts in the region.

Finally, the sixth article, entitled *OPTIMISING INVESTMENT DECISIONS IN R&D INTENSIVE PRIVATE MICRO-ENTITIES USING GAME THEORY* by Andreas Georgiou, analyses optimal investment strategies for three European private micro-entities focused on R&D. This analysis uses game theory and content analysis. The research creates a game theory matrix for each organisation to improve comprehension. The assumption is that investment exposure is connected to the capitalisation of internally generated intangible assets. Intangible asset capitalisation is seen as an indicator of economic growth. Therefore, investors adjust their investment allocations. Game theory matrices, generated from publicly available empirical data from financial statements, reveal how managerial choices affect investor risk preferences. It illuminates the effects of capitalising or escaping development costs for internally generated intangible assets. Investment strategies are then categorised by risk. Equity is high-risk, long-term debt is medium-risk, and short-term debt is low-risk. The author found the current investment strategies for potential investors after analysing the matrices (2015 for one company and 2016 for the other two). One entity chose medium risk with long-term debt, while the other two preferred low risk. These strategies are then retrospectively evaluated using current financial data and accompanying documents to ensure their efficacy.

In summary, this editorial provides a thorough exploration of various urgent topics, including the advancements in digital technology and the complexities surrounding wine tastes in the northern region of Croatia. The comprehensive examinations and evaluations across several

fields, including digital technology, e-learning, cultural industries, communication paradigms, and strategic financial decision-making, demonstrate the dedication of researchers to advancing our comprehension. These books possess more than mere academic value; they offer deep insights that have the potential to influence legislation, industrial norms, and transdisciplinary methodologies in our constantly changing world. As readers and practitioners, we are presented with an opportunity to broaden our understanding and actively participate in ongoing discussions, fostering critical analysis, thoughtful reflection, and meaningful contributions to these enduring discourses.

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