Table of Content

Monetary Integration in The European Union:Problems and Challenges	1
Comparative Study of Apperciple Lectures of University Students in The Czech Republic and Slovakia During the First Wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic	7
Participatory Approach in The Work of a Social Worker with Homeless People	15
Non-Financial Reporting of Insurance Companies: Case of Croatia	25
Management of Change Implemented in An Airline Company	36
Analysis of a Pharmaceutical Company in The Current Economic Life	40
Quality Costs and Their Costing in Times of COVID-19 Pandemic in Independent Hospitality Services: Case Study of The Harmony Polish Hotels Group	46
Functioning And Organization of Pharmacies Activities in Poland in Accordance with The Principle of Sustainable Development – A Perspective of Fiscal Policy and Legal Regulations	56
Covid-19 And Its Impact on Strategic Management Using the Balance Score Card Method in Bus Companies in Slovakia	75
Pension Literacy and Saving for Retirement Among Generation X: Evidence from Croatia	82
The Impact of the COVID-19 Lockdown on The Revenues of Authorized Intermediaries on The Bucharest Stock Exchange	89
Regression Predictive Model to analyze IoT barriers in Supply Chain Management	99
The Role of Social Media In Shaping Hate Crime in the UK: A Brief Overview	108
Social Media Hate Crime and American Judicial Rhetoric: A Study	116
A Comparative Analysis of The Social Pension System and The Labor Market: The Case of Romania Bianca AVRAM-POP and Constantin CUCOSEL	124

The Concept of Local Economic Organization as An Instrument to Support Local Entrepreneurship Agnieszka WÓJCIK-CZERNIAWSKA and Hieronim Jedrzejewski	128
Including Occupational Risk Assessment in The Workstation Description Sheet as A Factor Contributing to Increasing the Risk Perception of Employees	132
The Level of Energy Security in The Aspect of Heat Poverty of Households on The Example of The Town Barlinek, Poland.	139
Katarzyna ŚWIERSZCZ and Bogusław JAGUSIAK	
Regulatory Challenges of Urban Development in The Russian Federation: The Case of Moscow	152
Analysis of Stakeholders' Perception on The Quality of The Financial Information Reported by Companies from Emerging Countries	157
Anatol MELEGA, Veronica GROSU, Marian SOCOLIUC and Daniel BOTEZ	
Digital Transformation and Skills Needed in The Area of Artificial Intelligence - Based Accounting	170
Employee Relations and Job Performance of Selected Deposit Money Banks in Lagos State	185
Liquidity Management and Performance of Manufacturing Firms in Nigeria	197
Liquidity Management and the Performance of the Pharmaceutical Sector in Nigeria	207
The Current State of Internet of Things (IoT) Adoption in Retail: Evidence From Romania based on The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)	218
Young People as Suppliers on The Social Media Sharing Market on the Example of Social Economy Students	225
Inclusiveness of Catering Services for The Customer with Special Requirements	236
Liquidity Management on The Performance of Listed Insurance Companies in Nigeria	247
Leadership In Managing Multicultural Teams - Analysis of the Views of Polish and Portuguese Managers Agnieszka KNAP-STEFANIUK	260
Liquidity Management and Real Estate Performance in Nigeria	271
Working Capital Management and Bank Performance in Nigeria: Comparative Study of Zenith Bank Nigeria PLC	279
Sandra Adaeze AGUZUE, Benjamin EHIKIOYA, Franklin Famous ASEMOTA, Michael Abidemi <i>ADEWOLU and Bukola Bolanle AWOGBENJA</i>	

Impact of Currency Fluctuations on Foreign Direct Investment in Nigeria. Bukola Bolanle AWOGBENJA and Isibor John AREGAN	289
Economic Analysis of Innovative Methods and Their Implementation in The Food and Pharmaceutical Industry	298
Value Creation of a Tech Startup in Modern Approaches to Strategic Management	306
Factors Affecting Job Satisfaction of Academic Staff in Higher Education Institutions	316
Theory Adoption of Integrated Cattle and Oil Palm Farming System	321
Advantages and Disadvantages of the Cashless Economy	326
Role of Nationalized Banks in Promoting Economic Growth	333
The Role of Commercial Banks in Industrial Development	343
Climate Change, Natural Disasters 2021 And the Impact on Insurance Demand! A Look at Germany from The Perspective of Behavioral Economics	354
Property Subject to Investment	359
The Influence of Negative Demographic Trends on Unemployment: A Comparative Analysis of CSEE Countries	362
The Impact of European Union Funds on The GDP Of the Republic of Croatia: An Overview by Counties Anđela PEROVIĆ, Jurica BOSNA and Dario VIŠTICA	369
Status And Perspectives of Digitalization on Public Accounting	380
The Economic Changes in The Global Economy During The Covid-19 Pandemic	393
Globalization As a Factor Influencing Threats in the 21st Century	400
Examining University Students' Motivation in A Virtual Academic Mobility Program: A Malaysian Case <i>Khairunesa ISA, Sarala Thulasi PALPANADAN and Nurliyana MD ROSNI</i>	413
The Descriptive Analysis of the New Norms of Holistic Consumer Apprentice Program Evaluation	419

The Role of Different Forms of Capital in Starting and Developing an Entrepreneurial Venture: The Case of Entrepreneurs in The Beauty Services Industry. **Tamara SMAGUC and Sara CIKAC** 420 **Tamara SMAGUC and Sara CIKAC** **Tamara SMAGUC a
Traditional Instruments for Reducing Human Risk in The Banking Sector
Professional Burnout in The Concept of Sustainable Development of The Company
Digitalization of Romanian Education: A Theoretical Approach Over the Undergraduate Education System in the Post-Communist Period
Analysis of the Significance of Economic Security and Information Management for The Functioning of An Enterprise in Today's World
Research On the Perception of Warning Signals in Conditions of Losing Sense of Security
Inter-Organizational Professional Networks as Drivers of Career Outcomes and Organizational Performance: Towards the Post-pandemic Horizon
Models of Tourism Destination Competitiveness. FAUR Monica and BAN Olimpia
Applying SOBANE Strategy for Risk Management in Museums. 49' **Izabela Luiza POP**
Blue Ocean Strategy and Competitiveness of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises in Nigeria: Can Core Competence Mediate?
Motivating Employees and The Pleasure of Working, Review
The Impact of The Level of Education and The Material Condition of The Population on The Unemployment Rate in Romania
The Correlation Between Personality and Creativity: A Study of Contestants at The National Industry-Related Skills in Taiwan
Impact of the Technological Pillars of Industry 4.0 On Steel Sector: Analysis Based on Desk and Field Research
The Technological Cluster in Business Model of Steel Production with The List of Determinants of The Development to Level 4.0 – STEEPVL Analysis
The Effectiveness of Incorporating Augmented Reality in Print Design Course

Research On the Use of Knowledge to Eliminate Waste in Enterprises in The Wielkopolskie Voivodeship Natalia PAWLAK and Dominika DŁUGOŃSKA	581
Corporate Social Responsibility Issues in Modern Banking System	592
Voluntary Disclosures Based on The Wilhelm Osbahr' Balance Sheet Theory	603
Selected Methods of Estimating Reference Values Macroeconomic Fiscal Instruments in The Context of Extraordinary Situations.	611
Agnieszka PRZYBYLSKA-MAZUR	
The Uptake of Wearable Technologies by Elderly Persons in Saudi Arabian Healthcare: An Integrative	
Review	623
SMES And Barriers to Eco-Innovations: Empirical Analysis from Slovak Firms	629
Policy Brief on Cybercrime Legal Framework in Malaysia	639
Polish Experience in Providing Financial Aid as A Special Form of Intercommunal Cooperation and Regional Growth in The Implementation of Public Tasks	644
Resilience to crisis. Determinants of Romanian Economy Resilience	654
Risk Management and Digital Transformation in Organization from Managerial Perspective: A Qualitative Approach	667
Sustainability Communications of Fashion Brands on social media: Central Themes and Consumer Responses. İrem AKSOY and Tugba TUGRUL	672
The Future of Financial Market- Is the World Without Money Possible. **Krzysztof MARECKI, Zbigniew GRZYMAŁA and Agnieszka WOJCIK-CZERNIAWSKA**	678
Influence of Institutional Factors on Student Satisfaction with Online Classes During the Covid-19 Pandemic	689
Irena TADIC, Irena PANDZA BAJS and Sinisa OPIC	
The Present and Future Design of The Modernization Fund and Its Implementation Across EU and In Romania Daniela ZĂNESCU (PANAIT)	699
Towards Digitalization: A Contrastive Culture Analysis of Digital Literacy in Europe	710
The Global Technology and Innovation Cluster `Greater Bay Area` In China	717

Disseminating Information - Influencing Decision-Making	728
Senior Entrepreneurship (SE) As a Way of Active Ageing: A Case of Poland	735
What Drives Perceived Value and Loyalty in Live Broadcasting	745
The Impact of Public Debt on Economic Growth in European Union Countries	751
Employment of Disabled Persons in Sheltered and Unsheltered Conditions During the COVID 19 Pandemic in Poland	760
The Role of Organizational Climate in Mediating the Effect of Transformational Leadership on Employee	
Performance	769
Before and During COVID-19: Far-Reaching Transformation of Virtual Reference Services in Academic	775
Library	777
Dieselgate As the Case of Greenwashing Practices. Ewa SNIEZEK and Michal WIATR	785
Embedding Sustainability and Responsibility into the Marketing Curriculum	793
An Overview about Intelligent Transport Systems and Infrastructure in Kazakhstan	795
The Correlation BetweenConsumer Behavior, Fresh Food Products, and the COVID -19 Pandemic	804
Unpacking the "Black Box" of Innovativeness and Innovation: Focus on Tourism Research	814
How Fear Can Inhibit Innovation: Bottlenecks in Change Management and Strategy Development	825
The Impact of Social Media on Facilitating Communication In The Process of Trade	831
Effectiveness of the Financial Support of the Creative Industries: Recent Evidence from Slovakia	844
Influences of EU Transport-Specific External Costs on Economic Development	851
Comprehension of Society and The Changes of Public Policies: Identifying Possible Triggers and Barriers Robert STANESCU	862

Impact of Observation Classification on The Result of ANN Analysis Based on The Example of WTI Oil Options
Radosław PUKA, Bartosz LAMASZ and Marek MICHALSKI
Communication Management in The Digital Era: Livestreaming Between Abusive Language and Black Humor
Preferences For Retail Forms of Consumer Shopping
Assessing Export Competitiveness of Malaysia's Oleochemical Products: Using Shift-Share Technique Norashida OTHMAN and Zulkornain YUSOP
Influence of the Internal Marketing Communication on The Work Performance Jakub MICHULEK and Anna KRIZANOVA
Examining The Relationships Between Negative Reviews, Information Quality, Credibility and Consumer Behavior
Time Differences in Manual Assembly Performance: An Experimental Study
Automation Costs Based on The Example of Electric Cordless Screwdriver Assembly
Assessing the Comfort of the Working Atmosphere on the Swedish Market: A Case Study
Changes In Tourism After the Covid-19 Pandemic: Results of Qualitative Research
The Issue of Overestimating the Final Price in Online Auctions in The Context of User Experience – Based on Selected EEU Markets
Bibliometric Analysis of The Altman Model
The Role of HR in the Transformation Journey from IT Shared Center to Competence Center
The Need to Implement Internal Control and The Applicability of Internal Control Standards
Sustainable Marketing Strategic Planning in Pharma and Internet of things as Part of the New Circular Economy
Raluca CONSTANTINESCU, Ada O. MIRCEA and Denisa R. MUNTEAN
Meat Market - A Regional Study of Consumer Preferences and Behaviour

The Marketing Mix for A Series of Wine Products Produced by S.C. Agroindustriala Bucium S.A. Iași Cristian DELIBAS, Mioara MIHAILA, Andy-Felix JITAREANU, Maria BOGUS (ROBU), George UNGUREANU, Elena LEONTE and Mioara MIHAILA	1004
Representative Economic Activity Index in Case of Selected Central and Eastern European Countries: Evidence During the Pandemic Crisis	1015
Indicators of Circular Economy: A Premise Towards a Green Economy. Luiza-Florentina ZAPUCIOIU and Maria Cristina STERIE	1025
Eco-Friendly Packaging and Its Influence on Purchasing Decision Process	1033
Using The FMEA Method to Streamline Assembly of The Gearmotor	1043
The Impact of Lean Management Concept on The Development and Financial Security of Polish Enterprises	1050
360 Degree Learning Agility: A Novelty Concept to Increase Knowledge Creation Based on Islamic Values & Followership in Learning Organization	1057
The Future of Public Policy Post COVID-19	1063
Environmentally Friendly Public Transport	1080
Key Factors Stimulating Health Intrapreneurship in Saudi Public Hospitals	1087
The Role of External Stakeholders in the Development of Innovations by IT Companies in Lubuskie Voivodeship	1098
Comparative Research of Managerial Communication in Profit and Non-Profit Romanian Organizations During Covid-19 Times	1105
The Sustainable Rural Development Strategies of The North-East Region of Romania	1110
Selected Problems of Disaster Theory	1119
A Coordinated Research Project Focused on Self-Assessment of Security Culture in A Polish Private Health Facility	1127
Exploring The Link Between the Entrepreneur, The Start-Up, And the Perceived Success in The Covid-19 Pandemic Era: Is There a Clear Connection?	1138

Human Resources Management Systems and Employees Reaction: A Case Study from Sweden	1145
Offshore Wind Energy as A Pivotal Factor in Recovery, Resilience and Sustainability – Status Quo And Lessons Learned from Selected Countries in Europe	1158
Synchronization of Financial Cycles in selected Central and Eastern European Countries	1169
Perspectives of Employees' Home Office in the Slovak Republic in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic	1178
Analysis of the Migration Phenomenon of Physicians from Romania	1183
Labour Resources in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan: A Comparative Study	1196
Macroeconomic Changes and Financing of Public Investment Projects	1208
Influence of Communication on Consumer Purchasing Decision: A Study of Competing Sugar Brands Omotola NEJO, Lanre AMODU and Oscar ODIBOH	1216
Influence of the Economy Structure on Wages and Salaries in The EU Countries	1229
Wine Tourism - Premises of Development in The Republic of Moldova	1238
Financial Literacy and Financial Capability - What Is What?	1244
Supply Chain Challenges in the COVID-19 Pandemic World	1254
Monastery Memorable Tourism Experiences in Greece: An Empirical Study on Gender Differences Irene (Eirini) KAMENIDOU, Aikaterini STAVRIANEA, Aikaterini VASSILIKOPOULOU and Spyridon MAMALIS	1260
Changes In Asset Turnover Ratio During the Pandemic for The Visegrad Four Companies	1266
Ethical Aspect of a Contemporary Enterprise: Empirical Evidence from Poland	1273
Is The Wheat Futures Market Discovering Cash Prices?	1282
Economic and Social Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Small Business from the Republic of Moldova Lica FRHAN Ludmila COBZARI and Liliana STAVER	1290

Social Influence and Elderly Smartwatch Adoption: A Case Study	1297
Structural And Geographical Analyses of Polish Labour Market in The Perspective of Professional Activity Magdalena BRUDZ and Maciej JEWCZAK	1303
Impact of the Subprime Crisis in Southern European Countries	1314
Precious And Industrial Metals as A Hedge Against Inflation	1325
The "Loser-Winner" Effect on Commodity Futures Markets	1334
Mobile Modular Center for Crisis Management of International Migration	1341
The Influence of National Culture on Person-Organization Values Fit as a Predictor of Employee Retention in Eastern European Corporations	1350
Possibilities of Builiding the Social Security of Precariat: Polish Experinces and Challenges	1362
Social Responsibility Reporting on Forest Enterprises in Europe: A Comparative Analysis	1370
Financial Management in the Slovak Health Insurance Sector during the COVID-19 Pandemic	1378
Infrastructure of Secondary Schools in The Context of Using New Technologies in Education	1386
Financing of Dividend Payouts on The Example of Commodity Companies in Poland	1391
Global Strategic Maritime Infrastructure and its Impact on Shipping Industry and Supply Chains Management	1399
A Critical Review of Circular Economy Developments in European Union: Realities, Trends and Expectations	1410
Iuliana NICOLAE, Jean Vasile ANDREI, Vasilii EROKHIN, Tianming GAO and Mehmet Emin KALGI	
An Analysis of European Natural Gas Market Using a Cournot Game Theory Model	1419
Public Consumer Protection in The Polish Insurance Market: Scope and Effects	1430
Development of Innovations in Retail Trade as A Response to Latest Trends in Consumption – Polish Perspective	1437

The Influence of Natural and Anthropic Resources in Tourism Activities	1445
The Impact of Corporate Governance on The Performance of Companies Listed on The Bucharest Stock Exchange During the Pandemic Period	1452
Empirical Study Regarding the Impact of Foreign Direct Investments on Economic Growth in Emerging European Countries	1460
Upskilling B40 Food Microentrepreneurs through Digital Non-Formal Lifelong Learning (E-NLL): A Preliminary Study	1469
Models of Planning and Optimization Cropping Plan of The Agricultural Exploitation of Farms in Romania George UNGUREANU, Manuela Carmen PANAITESCU, Elena LEONTE, Dan DONOSA, Eduard BOGHITA and Cătălin Răzvan VÎNTU	1485
Remote Work Preferences and Experiences with Distance Learning - Empirical Research	1494
A Qualitative Study of Export Performance: Case of Small and Medium-Sized Moroccan Enterprises Elmehdi ESSBAA, Salma ALAOUI and Lhacen BELHCEN	1499
Intervention Instruments in the Implementation of Public Policies	1507
Issues of Gender Inequality Depending on The Level of Education in The Czech Republic	1517
Farm2Fork Strategy: An Econometric Analysis of The Gini Index in Relation with The Vulnerable Workforce and Workforce Involved in Agricultural Activities	1532
Analysis on the Usage of Social Media platforms in Nigeria Aviation Industry	1539
The Influence of The Natural Gas Consumption, Occupational Level and Water Consumption on The Rural Households Wellbeing Status: A Synoptically Approach	1547
Flexible Business Models A Concept for Furniture Production Systems	1552
Blockchain-Based Software Solution in Business Environment: Application In Product Recall	1558
A Holistic Approach to Working Conditions Quality Management Model	1559
A New Approach to Comparison and Sorting of Grey Numbers	1566

Students' performance at the Baccalaureate Exam during the COVID-19 pandemic – Evidence from	1.570
Romania	1578
Environmental Strategies in Enterprises of The Energy Sector and the Role of The Ecological Audit in Them	1585
Agnieszka MAZUREK-CZARNECKA, Piotr Paweł MAŁECKI and Renata ŻABA-NIERODA	
Shop Floor Management in the Era of Digitalization: Systematic Literature Review	1596
New Roman Participation, Acceptance, And Motivation of Students to In-Class Game-Based Learning (GBL)	1607
Elisabete S. VIEIRA, Mara MADALENO and Daniel MAGUETA	
Assessing Romanian Students' Digital Skills Based on The Scores at The Baccalaureate Exam	1612
Types, Legal Aspects and Irregularities of Product Claims on Natural Cosmetics Packages: An Empirical Study	1615
Why Studying the Internationalization of Central and Eastern European (CEE) Organizations? A Theoretical Synopsis	1624
The Circular Economy Phenomenon Impact on Multinationals Business Model: A Marketing Analysis in the Fashion Industry	1631
The Role of Accountants in Encountering Climate Change and Its Impact on the Industrial Sector Companies Sustainability: A Conceptual Model	1639
The Effect of E-Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction, E-Trust, E-Wom and Repurchase Intention: A Study of Medium-Sized Women Clothing Brands in The Retail Sector	1644
The Influence of Managers' Temporal Orientation on Employee Autonomy and Burnout	1660
The Threat of The Covid-19 Pandemic and Military Aggression as Factors of Youth Migration	1664
Exploring Opportunities and Risks of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Research for Islamic Ethical Guidelines Aliff NAWI, Wan Hilmi WAN ABDULLAH, CHUA Chy Ren, Nor Yazi KHAMIS, Mohd Faiz MOHD YAAKOB, Ab Halim TAMURI and Al-Adib SAMURI	1671
EU Countries Electromobility Ranking Based on Linear Ordering Methods from Economics Perspective Monika HAMERSKA, Monika ZIOLKO and Patryk STAWIARSKI	1683
Internationalization of Polish IT Small and Medium Enterprises	1693
Employee Recruitment Process During the Covid-19 Pandemic in The IT Sector	1702

Exports to Brazil by Land	1711
When The Jobs of The Future Meet Their Key Competencies: An Exploratory Study to Align the Perspective of World Economic Forum and the Occupations in ESCO Database	1717
Virtual Monitoring as a Digital Delivery and Assessment Impact on Students' Learning Pascal MUAM MAH, Iwona SKALNA and Uwakmfon Promise OFFIONG	1727
Global Economic Competition in The Fields of Information and Telecommunication Technologies and Artificial Intelligence: The Case of Russia	1738
Cybersecurity Issues Affecting Online Banking and Online Transactions	1745
Assessing Creative and Cottage Industry towards Strengthen Local Knowledge of Local Craft Community in Malaysia	1756
Smart Society in Practice - Case Studies: Austria and Poland	1764
Model Design for The Implementation of Innovative Methods in Companies in The Food Industry According to Size Category	1770
Internal Control in the Information Systems of SMEs: A Peruvian Reality	1781
Challenges Faced by Enterprises in Implementing a Robotic Process Automation (RPA) Solution	1788
Identification of Technical Measures That Will Simulate and Stimulate Smart Growth in A Smart Sustainable and Inclusive Digitalization	1793
The Importance of Corporate Culture in Passenger Transport Companies in Slovakia in The Post-Covid Period	1805
The Diversification Processes in Ensuring Sustainable Development of the Agrarian Sector of the Agro-Industrial Complex (AIC): Problems and Prospects of Transformation under the Current Conditions	1812
Photovoltaic Micro Installations - The Most Popular and Promising Way to Use Solar Energy in Poland Renata CABAN	1820

Barriers To the Development of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) In Poland: A Survey Analysis	1834
Feast of Corpus Christi Celebration in Spycimierz (Poland) as an Example of a Cultural Tourism Event Bogdan WŁODARCZYK, Ewa SZAFRAŃSKA and Marzena MAKOWSKA-ISKIERKA	1842
A Special Form of Brain-Drain Along the Hungarian Romanian Border: The Cross-Border Commuter Students` Motivations	1855
Internal Marketing in Car Transport Companies: An Empirical Study	1864
Development of A University Innovation Ecosystem: An Analysis of International Practices, Interaction of Universities, Research Institutions, Industry, Development Institutions and Government Entities	1873
The Balanced Scorecard Factors of a Training Company: Selection and Linkages	1878
Attitudes of Young Adult Consumers Regarding Food Safety During Meals Preparation Eugenia CZERNYSZEWICZ And Magdalena NIEWCZAS-DOBROWOLSKA	1889
Study On Romania's Potential in Achieving Agricultural Mountain Products	1901
The Influence of Social Networks and The Internet in The Choice of Tourist Destination: The Case of Serra A Estrela	1908
Interaction of Macroeconomic Models of Mundell and Fleming: Historical Aspect	1920
Research on Barley Behavior in The System of Sustainable Agriculture	1926
The Economy of the Organizations in the founding competence of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic in 2021: are the public finances managed efficiently?	1933
Private Healthcare Economy: Impact of COVID-19 Restrictions on Elective Healthcare	1940
The Indebtedness of the Population in Slovak Republic: An Economic Perspective	1944
A Comparative Sentiment Analysis Towards Cryptocurrency Market and Blockchain Technology Using Twitter Data and Supervised Learning	1948
Towards A More Gender Balanced Job World: Exploring the Perspectives of Recruiters and Job Applicants About the Attractiveness of Occupations for Male and Female Professionals	1957

Using The Fama-French Model for Estimating the Cost of Capital of Selected Stock Indexes	1965
Effect of the Perceived Value of Social Media Brand Content on Customer Satisfaction, E-Wom, Brand Loyalty and Repurchase Intention: A Study of The Energy Drink Sector	1976
A Solution to Increase Work Efficiency and Quality, By Using a Modular Sound Diffuser, That Determines the Acoustical Climate Conditions at The Workstation	1989
Local Business Organization as Institutional Support for Local Entrepreneurship (Case Study)	1995
The School Choosing Methods and The Relevance of The Cross-Border-Student Mobility Along the Hungarian-Romanian Border Stage	2003
The Role of SMES In the Economy: The Case of The Mazowieckie Region at The Background of Regions in Poland	2012
The Role of Digital Contact Tracing Tools in Fostering Resilience in Smart Cities: Challenges and Opportunities	2023
Information System, Factors of Success and Impact on Performance Case of The Moroccan Public University	2033
Employee Engagement in The Conditions of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Analysis of a Budimex Compaign Beata TARCZYDŁO	2041
Most Popular Recent Topics and Theories in Organizational Behavior Based upon Citation Score	2052
Are Emerging Markets Efficient? The Impact of Dividend Payment on The Company Financial Performance: Evidence from The Polish Stock Market	2063
A Short Analyses of Romanian Consumers Expenditure Behaviour During The COVID-19 Period	2074
Impact of Covid-19 on The Poultry Sector in Morocco: An Empirical Analysis	2080
Assessment of the Legal Instruments Used to Support the Tourism Sector in Poland During the Covid19 Pandemic	2087
Socioeconomic Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Employment	2094
Elements of Management in the Face of Conflicts, Crises, Pandemics and Human Migration	2102

Aspects Regarding the Status of Main Natural Factors and Sustainable Development in Romania	2111
Levels of Pollution Control	2120
The Role of Intellectual Capital in Shaping Innovation in Organizations	2133
The Concept of Talent Identification in Human Resource Management in Organizations	2137
An Analysis of the Social Network Users Posting Frequency in the Context of Online Brand-related Activities and their Motives: An Empirical Study	2141
Business Models and Flexibility Service on The Electricity Market	2147
Selected Instruments of Migration Policy in The Field of Professional Integration of Displaced Persons During the Crisis Caused by The War in Ukraine	2159
Measuring Employees Turnover Intention: A Case Study Analysis in Private Universities in Egypt	2166
Supply-Side Competitiveness on The Polish Apple Market Against Other V4 Countries	2178
Expenditure on Fixed Assets for Environmental Protection in Poland After Accession to The European Union	2186
Joanna SZYMAŃSKA, Anna S. KOWALSKA, Anna OLSZAŃSKA and Klaudia GURKOWA	
Organizational Commitment by The Type of Employment Contract: A Case Study of a Higher Education Institution Located in The Northeast Portugal	2198
Exploratory Studies on Strategy and Accountability in Segamat School Co-Operatives Region	2208
Managing Stress During the Coronavirus Among Students from Technical Specialization: A Case Study of Several Universities in Romania	2221
An Empirical Study on Awareness and Factors Influencing Consumer Purchase Behaviour Towards Non-Prescription Drugs with Reference to Visakhapatnam District, Andhra Pradesh State, India	2229
Perception Of Ethical Phenomena in Marketing Communication in The Digital Space Within the Slovak Republic: A Qualitative Research	2240

The Green Deal Role for EU Energy Security amid Shifting Geopolitics with Russian Federation	2247
The European Central Bank Quantitative Easing Policies in Economic Growth – A causal relationship? Miguel Dias FILIPE, José Alberto FUINHAS and Ernesto Raúl FERREIRA	2258
Readiness of the SME Sector for Market Changes Arising from The Fourth Industrial Revolution	2264
Evolution of The Omnichannel Concept in DIY Retail Chains	2274
The Main Indicators of Rural Development in The South-East Region	2282
Gauging Digital Natives Behavioural Intentions in Information Sharing on social media: A Quantitative Study	2290
Study of Individual Differences in Teaching at Pedagogical University Students Using Neuroscience Methods	2299
Information Technology Social Impact: The Role of Medical and Biological Texts Content in The Formation of The Students' Literacy	2306
Landscape Park, Poland	2311
Daniel CHIS and Mihai CARAMIHAI Framework for Raising Cyber-Awareness to Prevent Cybercrimes Among Generation Z Shereen KHAN, Nasreen KHAN, Swee Leng TAN, Anusuyah SUBBARAO and Booi Chen TAN	2317
Sources and Threats of Bitcoin's Recent Crisis	2335
Evaluation of the Competitive Performance of the Largest Exporters in the Furniture Industry in the World Katarzyna ŁUKIEWSKA	2347
A Religious Approach to Modern Management	2357
Understanding The Benefits and Uses of Project Management Software: Insights for Strategic Marketing Campaigns	2363
Drop-Shipping – A Business Model Without Holding Inventory: A Case Study of Online Store	2369

Food Supplements in Romania. Market, Controls, Compliance and Non-Compliance	238
Organisational Behaviour Model Based on Principal Component Analysis Assessment	238
Financial Well-Being of Mature and Elderly People In The Visegrad Group Countries Ewa SOBOLEWSKA-PONIEDZIAŁEK	239
Covid-19 and Communication Barriers: Assessing the Internal Communication in The Field of Health and Safety in The Time of Pandemic	240
How Green Are the Competency Requirements for Project Managers? An Exploratory Analysis of Online Job Adds for The Region of Aveiro	240
An Investigation of Density of Skills' Demands at Regional Level in Portugal: A Quantitative Analysis of Online Job Advertisements	242
Perceptions of Home Office Studying and Tele-Education During COVID-19 Era in The Czech Republic with Mental Health Context	243
Strategies For Strengthening the Economic Security of Business Entities in The Context of Global Financial and Economic Challenges	244
The Interaction of Digital Transformation, Innovation and Environmental Uncertainty on Organizational Resilience	245
Anna KWIOTKOWSKA	
IT And Mathematical Mapping: Estimating Temperature Measurement Uncertainty During Environmental Tests	246
Green HRM Innovation in Indonesia: Where Should We Go from Here?	246
Safety Management Issues in Maritime Transport Organizations in The Context of Ethical Environmental Protection	247
Do Managerial Resources for Procurement 4.0 Influence the Circular Economy Openness of Managers? Ovidiu-Iulian BUNEA and Razvan-Andrei CORBOS	248
Attracting And Maintaining Valuable Employees in Modern Organizations: An Analysis of Selected Methods	248
Anna KOCHMAŃSKA	
Industry 4.0 and Circular Economy in Chemical Industry of the Czech Republic – First Mapping	249

National Fisheries Sector of The Republic of Moldova: An Economic Overview	2502
Cluster Development in Romania in a European Context	2509
Fuzzy Time Series Model for Predicting University Performance Indicators	2528
Economic Influence of Training in Brazilian Culture on Agricultural Exports from The Southern Macro-Region of Peru to Brazil by Land	2534
Economic Influence of Cooperatives of Small Farmers from The Southern Macro-Region of Peru with Distributors and Exporters on Agricultural Exports to Brazil by Land	2539
Economic Influence of Cooperatives Among Small Farmers: A Study of The Southern Macro-Region of Peru on Agricultural Exports to Brazil by Land	2544
The Environmental Impacts of Municipal Waste Incineration Plants in Poland Comparison as a Part of Circular Economy System	2549
Efficiency of Mining Investments. Models To Determine the Optimal Production Capacity by Dividing the Total Costs	2563
Relevant Aspects Concerning Some Covid-19 Crisis Effects in Romania	2576
Waste Management in a Circular Economy: The Role of Compostable Plastic Food Packaging and Foodservice Ware Businesses	2589
Emotional Control in Mothers of Autistic Children Experiencing Their Husband's Migration	2598
Innovation Management in Organizations and Their Industrial Classifications: An Approach to Building a New Typology	2604
Project Planning with Limited Resources and as Part of a Project Portfolio	2614
Artificial Intelligence from Economic Perspective: From Mystery to Mastery in Combating The COVID-19 Pandemic	2621
"Distance Human Resource Management under Uncertainty of Pandemic Era"	2626
The Use of ICT Tools in the Creative Industries Sector in Poland: Selected Industry Profiles	2633

Tax Regulation Tools of Tourism Business in order to Localize the Effects of COVID-19	2642
Strategic Management in SMEs: Innovation and Sustainability	2650
Ensuring The Economic Security of The Industrial Complex	2657
Aspects of Personal Security of Polish and Austrian Employees Through Lens of Crisis Management Ewa MATUSKA and Joanna GRUBICKA	2662
Digital competences in Poland in light of European Union "DESI" Reports	2670
Green Supply Chain Management Drivers and Barriers: A Comparison of a Global and African View Ethel Tembo MWANAUMO, Bupe Getrude MWANZA and Levy SIAMINWE	2678
Evidence of the Long-Term Influence of Local Regulations as A Challenge to The International Harmonization of Financial Reporting	2689
Economic Perspective of Transport accessibility: A Qualitative Analysis of Koszalin, Poland	2697
Persuasive Effect of Type and Credibility of Endorser on The Formation of Consumer Attitudes and Purchasing Intention	2707
Does Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Interact with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)? A Literature Review of The Contribution and Implications of CSR To The SDGS	2718
" The Mediating Effect of The Audit Expectation Gap on The Relationship Between Loan Decisions Performance and Individual Factors: Experimental Evidence in Saudi Banks "	2729
Motivation and Knowledge Transfer in Social Enterprises Management	2739
Influence of Organizational Culture on Enterprise Development: Selected Theoretical Aspects	2747
GAFA in the Time of Pandemic: A Performance Analysis	2755
The Development of Online Shopping in Europe from 2017-2021: A Quantitative Analysis	2767
Service Distribution Channel in The Automotive Industry: The Case of Selective Distribution of a Given Car Brand in Poland	2777
The Applicability of Artificial Intelligence Marketing for Creating Data-driven Marketing Strategies <i>Ioseb GABELAIA</i>	2787

Measuring The Performance of Humanitarian Supply Chains and Problems of Their Application in Practice Dusan REPIK and Pavel FOLTIN	2795
"Collaborative Farming Business Model as Innovative Sustainable Model for Indigenous Chicken Microfarming: An Economic Perspective"	2805
The Green Deal and The Common Agricultural Policy in The Context of Post-Pandemic and Current Geopolitical Challenges	2816
Identifying the Factors of Sustainable Competitive Advantage to Maintain the Continuity and Performance of MSMEs In the Pandemic Era.	2824
Wawan DHEWANTO, Anindia P. PUTRI and Gita HINDRAWATI	
Maritime Container Shipping Companies Consolidation and Market Integration and their Impact on Global Supply Chains: An Analytical Approach	2825
Tourists' Perceptions of Peneda-Gerês National Park, Portugal: An Analytical Study	2834
Analysis of Differences in the Assessment of Selected Dimensions of Social Well-being in Terms of Different Levels of Management	2842
The Impact of Aligning Learning Processes with Technological Developments - The Emergence of The Concept of Education 4.0	2851
The Connection Between the Activity Within the Social Networks and The Consumer Behaviour - New Techniques for Knowing the Consumer Behaviour	2861
The Impact of The Brand on The Decision of The Romanian Consumer to Buy Pharmaceutical Products Bianca-Cristiana VOICU, Raluca-Giorgiana (POPA) CHIVU, Ionuţ-Claudiu POPA, Ionuţ TĂNASE and Elena-Florentina GREJDAN	2868
Analysis of Employee Life Satisfaction in Terms of Socio-Demographic Factors	2876
Analysis of Mutual Differences of Attributes of Communication Skills and Attributes of Machiavellian Manifestations in Employees	2882
COVID-19 Perceived as A Driver for Home Care Based on Digital Solutions with A Senior-Centered Approach	2892
A Review of The Main Global Developments Addressing Green Investments Among Central Banks Andreea OPREA	2902

Personalized Solutions using Assistive Technologies for Elderly Eugenia TIRZIU, Eleonora TUDORA, Maria GHEORGHE-MOISII, Irina CRISTESCU and Dragos-Daniel IORDACHE	2908
Decision-Making Uncertainty under the Reflection of Globalization Using Artificial Intelligence in Companies' Business Planning	2917
Centers and Peripheries in Motion – Spatial Structure Changes in the Partium (Crișana) Region (Romania) Ferenc SZILÁGYI and Tibor ELEKES	2929
Logistic Determinants of Financial Losses During Poultry Transport	2941
COVID-17 1 and chine	2947
Hasna ELKHANNOUBI, Daniel TOMIUK and Mukesh SRIVASTAVA	
nom i olana	2954
Aldona PIOTROWSKA	
Analysis of Social Intelligence of Sellers by MESI Methodology	2961
The Effects on The Economy and Environment Caused by Electric Cars Compared to The Conventional Ones	2967
Cosmin Codruț BLEDEA, Izabela Luiza POP and Rita Monica TOADER	
Planning of International Transport in The Context of The Condition of Transport Infrastructure in Selected EU Countries	2973
Landscape of Innovation and Data Analytics in Sports Management: A Qualitative Study of The National Basketball Association (NBA)	2983
How Do Organizational Culture and Innovation Trigger Successful Management of Public Institutions? Irina TARABAN, Maria Andreea TILIBASA, Alina Nicoleta DOBRE, Dorin Felician MARCHIS and Lucica TUDORAN	2992
Development of Project Management Competencies among Members of the Roma Community	3000
The Risks of Technology Adoption for Packaging Circularity and Consumer Involvement: A Qualitative Approach	3007
Systemic Analysis of The Convergence of The Agricultural Economy in Relation to The Change of Vectors for Achieving Environmental Conditions	3021
The Use of the OpenAI GPT-3 AI technology for Marketing Content Purposes	3024

A Traditional Literature Review on Physicians' Dual Practice: Literature Review	3031
Health Care Practitioners' Perception of Dual Practice in Kenya	3043
Faces of Corporate Social Responsibility - Coercion Vs Morality	3056
Empowering Women through Social Entrepreneurship: A Literature Review	3065
The Evaluation of The Professional Training Programs In Romanian Local Public Administration: A Quantitative Research	3073
The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Global Yields: A Short Review of the 2020-2021 Period Monetary and Fiscal Policies'	3086
Factors Influencing Organizational Culture to Facilitate Radical Innovation in Mature Manufacturing Organizations	3094
Towards Smart and Sustainable Shopping Centres - A Response to The Challenges of Modern Supply Chains	3109
Image of Douro Wine Region Through Social Networks: Visitor Perception	3117
Support For Sustainable Strategic Management Using SMART Technology: A Managerial Perspective Gabriel KOMAN, Martin HOLUBČÍK and Jakub SOVIAR	3131
International Legal Aspects of Maritime Security in the South China Sea: A Literature Analysis	3138
The Role of Brand Trust and Perceived Risk in Shaping Brand Experience: The Case of a Second-Hand Online Marketplace	3153
The Impact of Sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility in Current and Future Literature. Two Responses to Bring Innovation and Competitive Advantages to Companies	3165
The Effect of Credit Portfolio Concentration on the Risk and Profitability During the Covid-19 Pandemic Evidence From Commercial Banks in Indonesia	3174
The Surface Division Method as A Complementary Measure of Estimating Variability of The Financial Time Series	3183
Delays In the Processes of Economic Evolution. Piotr WALAG and Kamil BOJDO	3193

Digital Transformation in Public Administration: A Bibliometric Analysis	3201
Maritime Security in International Law: A Conceptualization	3208
Study on The Consumption of Milk and Dairy Products in Romania	3221
On Project Financing of International Business in Developed and Developing Countries	3225
Organizational Resilience as An Antecedent of Efficient COVID 19 Induced Public Grant Distribution in the EU	3232
Teams In VUCA - Ways of Dealing with Uncertainty	3237
Research on the Degree of Concern of Romanian Entrepreneurs in the Field of Cyber Security Petronela Cristina SIMION, Mirona Ana Maria POPESCU, Andrei MITROFAN and Iustina Cristina COSTEA-MARCU	3246
What Might Be the Value of The Company That Changed the Course of the COVID-19 Pandemic Crisis Two Years After Pandemic? The Case of PFIZER	3253
Application of Analytic Network Process (ANP) Methodology for Public Funding Decisions: Case Study of Latvia Education Sector	3299
Digitalization: A Step Closer to Sustainability. The Case of Romania and Neighbor Countries from The Perspective of Desi Components	3306
Disruptive Innovation and the "Penguin Effect" – The Review of Theory	3313
Effectiveness Measures According to Lean Management: Empirical Verification of The Concept in The Area of Physical Flows of Production Logistics	3318
Influence of the Development of Energy Infrastructure from The Southern Macro-Region of Peru on Agricultural Exports to Brazil by Land	3328
Circular Economy and Rebound Effects: Exploring the Gaps Between Principles and Practice	3334
Macroeconomic Stability of The Romanian Industry Indicators	3341

Sibiu Tourist Destination Sustainability Analysis Based on Visitors' Perception Using the European Tourism Indicators System.	3349
Elena Manuela ISTOC, Mihaela Adina MATEESCU, Mihai Sabin MUSCALU and Daniela Nicoleta BALEANU	00.17
Managing The Efficiency of Public Transport in The Silesian Voivodeship	3355
Impact of Tax of Certain Banks Institutions on Financial Banks Results in Poland	3365
Multidimensional Project Portfolio Management in The Context of The Current Covid-19 Situation in The Automotive Industry: A Case Study	3375
The Possibility of Using the Social Network Tiktok for E-Commerce in Terms of Consumer Behaviour <i>Jakub HORVÁTH</i>	3383
Research on Consumer Behaviour - Significant Relationships Between the Importance and Frequency of Online Shopping	3388
Spatial Differentiation of Social Capital and Non-Governmental Organizations in Poland	3396
Costs and Benefits of Joining the Euro Area: The Case of Croatia	3407
Influence of Training and Technical Assistance of Small Farmers from The Southern Macro-Region of Peru on Agricultural Exports to Brazil by Land	3413
Functions of Agriculture and Rural Areas in View of Energy Management and Ecoservices Development in Poland	3419
The Influence of Organizational Culture on Employees' Commitment: An Empirical Study In 22 Joint-Stock Commercial Banks in Viet Nam	3425
Industry 4.0 as a Tool in Crisis Recovery: The Case of the Tourism Sector	3435
Trust In Electronic Word-Of-Mouth (eWOM): The Concept and The Most Important Determinants	3440
Drinking Water Quality Management in Cracow, Poland: A Case Study	3447
Study of the Impact of Sustainability Trends in Business After Pandemic	3459

Perceived Security by Various Generations in Using NFC Payment Technology: An Empirical Study in	34
Poland	<i>J</i> -
The Impact of The Covid-19 Pandemic on Local Development Management in Poland in The Aspect of Using Participatory Budgeting	34
Arkadiusz GRYKO and Michał OLEJNICZAK	
Future Trends on E-grocery Market in Poland	34
The Decline of Rural Area in Romania - Economic Implications	34
Investigating Cash Replacement as A Means of Fighting Money Laundering: The Case of Digital Currency and Its Economic Impact	34
Exploring Motivators for Students in the Pursuit of Further Studies and Career Development	3:
Conceptual Approaches to Modeling the Study of the Impact of Digital Employment on Parental Wellbeing Natalia TONKIKH, Tatiana MARKOVA and Tatiana KAMAROVA	3.
Supply Chain Resilience in Era of combined effects of COVID-19, Brexit, and Russia-Ukraine war: Global Trends and Developments	3
Studying Competitiveness of Rural Territories in The Conditions of Decentralization: An Economic Analysis and Comparison	3
Managing Lebanese SMEs During the Pandemic and The Financial Crisis: "A Quantitative Research" Maria FRANGIEH	3
Jurisdiction Issues in Cyberspace: An Overview in Respect of Brunei and Malaysia Comparing with United States' System	3
Nehaluddin AHMAD and Norulaziemah binti HAJI ZULKIFFLE	
Financial Performance in Portuguese Outdoor Tourism Industry: A Quantitative Research	3
Research Methodology in the Management Sciences	3
Digital Open Government and Transparency in Nigeria: The Constraints and Prospects	3
Relationship of Hedonic and Utilitarian Values and Their Influence on Consumer Satisfaction and Loyalty Adriana CUADROS, Daniela RODRÍGUEZ and Martin A. MAURICIO	3
Social Commerce: The Impact of Satisfaction on Purchase Intention in Local Business	3:

Determinants of the Intention to Use Mobile Banking Applications	3594
E-commerce in BRICS Countries	3603
Development of Tourism in the Light of Contemporary Economic Concepts	3609
Advertisements and Their Effectiveness Among Young People: An Example of a Message About Aid Activities Related to The War in Ukraine	3616
The Operation Models of Local Public Transport an Economic and Legal Perspective	3622
Fear Of Missing Out Vs Joy of Missing Out: A Literature Review on Keeping Critical Mindedness a Top Priority in The Era of The Big Tech Boom	3631
A Case Study on Work Values as Displayed on Job-Hunting Reality TV Show	3641
The Use of Guide Services by Young People in The Era of The Development of Modern Technologies in The Opinion of Young People from High Schools in The Tri-City Agglomeration (Gdańsk, Sopot, Gdynia). <i>Marzena WANAGOS</i>	3656
Determinants of Live Streaming Influencing Purchase Intention for Online Computer Video Games: A Quantitative Study	3663
The Impact of Tax Regulations on The Structure of Employees' Remuneration - An Example from Poland Agnieszka JUDKOWIAK and Beata ZALESKA	3675
The Influence of Selected Elements of Human Resources Management on the Knowledge Management and the Functioning of Enterprises	3684
Frugal Innovations in The Food Industry – The Possibilities for Implementation and The Direction of Future Research	3694
Optimization of Pollard's Rho Method for Factorisation	3697
Examination of The Features of Character in a Cybernetic Approach as Condition of Knowing the Causes of Human Behavior	3708
Artificial Intelligence in Accounting - Review of Research Areas	3717
Cross-Industry Differentiation High Technology Sector in The European Union	3725

Forecasting Medium-Term Territorial Natural Gas Consumption: An Economic Perspective of Quantitative	
Research	
International Hotel Systems (IHS) As A Research Problem in Polish and Foreign Languages Scientific Literature	
Malgorzata JANIAK and Marzena MAKOWSKA-ISKIERKA	
Concept of Research on Entrepreneurship and Innovativeness of Enterprises in Peripheral Regions of North-Eastern Poland	
The Condition and Prospects of Innovativeness of Enterprises in Peripheral Regions of North-Eastern	
Poland	
The Potential of Social Entrepreneurship in The Organization of a Comprehensive Reintegration System Anna PIOTROWSKA	
Hotels Environmental Certification Systems: Essence, Characteristics, Review	
Improving The Food Safety in Constanta County: ANSVSA Controls, Results and Recommendations (2021)	
Iuliana CONDULEȚ and Silvius STANCIU	
Food Quality in Europe: A Brief Assessment Based on RASFF (2021)	
Dynamic Capabilities as a Determinant of Small Enterprise Development: The Case Study of Poland	
The Importance of Engaging Employees in Times of Crisis Through Empowering Them	
Innovation As a Factor of Economic Development: A Comparative Analysis of Economic Theories of Joseph Schumpeter and Mariana Mazzucato	
Fare Integration in The Urban Public Transport: A Literature Review on Regulatory Perspective	
Management Approach to Manufacturing Process Technology Improvement: The Case of a Small Shipyard	
Ryszard BIELSKI, Łukasz SZYSZKA and Jacek WACHOWICZ	
The Influence of Satisfaction and Trust in The Digital Loyalty of Digital Banking Service: A Qualitative Research	
Daniel MEDINA, Daniel ZAVALA and Manuel Luis LODEIROS-ZUBIRIA	
Marketplaces: The Post-Purchase Stage of The E-Commerce Consumer Concerning Satisfaction and Its Impact on The Intention to Repurchase	
The Essence of Internal Audit and Its Objectives	

Study of University Students' Quality of Life and Their Attitude to Health During the Third Pandemic Wave: A Quantitative Research	3858
Cross-cultural Competence as Success Factor of Employee Retention?	3864
Effect of Employee Participation on Organizational Performance in Manufacturing Firm (A Study of Dufil Prima Food Plc, Ogun State, Nigeria)	3868
Proactivity, Interactivity and Community As 3 Pillars of Onboarding Programs - An Outline of Empirical Research in Human Resources	3873
The Length of Onboarding Processes and Their Impact on Employee Efficiency - An Outline of Empirical Research	3876

The Role of Accountants in Encountering Climate Change and Its Impact on the Industrial Sector Companies Sustainability: A Conceptual Model

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Abstract

Climate change is a big issue and impacts the business sustainability of industrial companies that depend on fossil fuel energy. The current climate change condition is still an externality that has not been considered by the government, private, and community sectors. Accordingly, it has not been fully anticipated and realized by the three sectors. Internalization of climate change issues has not been reflected in the financial statement accounts due to the difficulty in measuring the potential of climate change to the company's operations in the future. One of the criteria used by accountants in determining whether information should be reflected in the financial statements is materiality. An information has materiality if the negligence of the information in the financial statements will change the decisions taken. This research is expected to contribute ideas on how an accountant handles climate change issues in financial reports by looking at the applicable Indonesia Accounting Standards (PSAK). It aims to reflect climate change issues in financial statements. The research method used is narrative analysis to describe the past, current, and other events. Finding the causes of climate change and its impacts will contribute to the accounting profession tackling climate change issues.

Keywords: climate change, environmental accounting, financial statement, materiality

Introduction

One of the factors that cause climate change is the increasing concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere due to fossil fuels, namely coal and oil. The use of fossil fuels is also one factor that causes global warming. According to Choi et al. (2013), the issue of climate change is considered a political and economic issue. It becomes a challenge for every business entity to contribute to reducing the carbon emissions they produce. Irwhandoko (2016), stated that industrial activity also increases the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. As a developing country, Indonesia is not required to disclose emissions; nevertheless, Indonesia's participation is needed to achieve the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change goals. The carbon emissions disclosure as an accounting treatment in presenting the use of carbon for company activities is expected to prevent and reduce emissions.

Without efforts from the government, private sector, and society to change the humans way of life that depends on fossil fuels with high carbon content, in the next few decades, a tragedy on the horizon might occur (Anindita, R., & Hamidah, 2020; Gibassier, D., Michelon, G., & Cartel 2020). Currently, local and international research on the climate change issue in financial reports has not been accommodated (Csutora, M., & Harangozo, 2017; Hopper, 2019) on accounting rules. It means there is no specific standard that regulates how to disclose the issue of climate change in financial reports. Accountant contributes to increasing their role and responsibility for recording transactions, making financial reports, estimating the impact of business activity on climate change, and disclosing this impact in financial statements.

An accountant is known as a profession responsible for recording financial transactions and issuing financial statements. The problem of climate change that threatens all human life requires an accountant to be active in dealing with climate change. They must understand the issue of climate change, starting from the causes of climate change to its impact on economic activities. The condition that has occurred so far is that the issue of climate change is not reflected in the financial statements because the accountant does not consider it.

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Literature Review

Major Causes of Climate Change

Climate change that is currently happening is the impact of the carbon dioxide (CO2) gas accumulation in the atmosphere. CO2 gas absorbs infrared contained in the sun's rays. The ability of CO2 gas to absorb infrared heat is the leading cause of the increase in global temperature (Domino et al., 2015; Kumarasiri & Gunasekarage, 2017). This condition is called the greenhouse effect. The heat from the infrared absorbed by CO2 is trapped between the earth and the atmosphere. Natural processes push the release of CO2 into the atmosphere, such as volcanic eruptions. This cycle is a natural carbon cycle that will make the release of CO2 into the atmosphere go down to earth and not accumulate in the atmosphere layer (Bui & Fowler, 2019; Domino et al., 2015).

In addition, the natural carbon cycle also occurs from the photosynthesis process of plants that require CO2. Plants will release oxygen into the atmosphere from this process. All humans and animals need oxygen in their respiratory activities, releasing CO2. The photosynthesis process will pull back CO2 from the results of human and animal respiration and process it into oxygen. This process continues so that CO2 levels do not accumulate in the atmosphere through the photosynthesis process. Many activities carried out by humans have caused high levels of CO2 into the atmosphere and cannot be processed through the natural carbon cycle. It increases the global temperature. Plantation activities carried out by burning forests will exacerbate the situation because the release of CO2 levels will be higher than if using heavy equipment. Each power plant construction will impact increasing CO2 accumulation in the next few decades. It is because the power plant will operate and have an economic life, not in years but decades.

Many activities by humans have caused the high levels of CO2 in the atmosphere and cannot be processed through the natural carbon cycle, increasing global temperature. In fact, human activities from the 1950s to the present have contributed to the accumulation of CO2 and encouraged climate change (Sitorus, 2016; Werasturi, 2017). Human lifestyles that over-exploit nature have contributed to climate change (Csutora & Harangozo, 2016; Zhang et al.,2016). This exploitation is by consuming excessively and using cheap means in consuming it. Based on Pradita's (2017) research, the Kyoto Protocol was established to protect the earth from increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases, not to worsen the earth's climate pattern..

The Impact of Climate Change on Economy and Carbon Pricing Implementation

Climate change not only destroys environmental ecosystems but also destroys the economic order. Two risks threaten the economy during climate change: physical and transition risks. Physical risks from climate change are closely related to the destruction of production assets, infrastructure destruction, and other uninsured damages (such as forest fires and the loss of animal and plant diversity). Meanwhile, the risk of transition is associated with strategies to reduce carbon emissions that are not well planned. The two risks are linked and interact (Haslam et al., 2014; Kumarasiri & Jubb, 2016). Physical risks are triggered by an increase in extreme weather, such as heavy rainfall, heatwaves, and strong winds, which have the potential to damage various types of assets and infrastructure. Damage to production assets can occur when multiple machines operate under extreme weather conditions. This condition can shorten the use of machines so that there will be an increase in annual depreciation expenses. In dealing with this, the company can bear the costs by increasing the goods and services selling price or combining both.

The degradation of a machine faced by the producers increases their burden and decreases the number of goods produced from the machine. Some of the accounts affected on the balance sheet are intangible and tangible assets, inventories, receivables, cash, prepaid expenses, equity, accruals, and liabilities. On the other hand, in the income statement, accounts affected by the impact of climate change are sales, energy expenses as part of material expenses, personnel expenses, selling expenses, insurance expenses, non-operating income, depreciation and amortization expenses, disposal expenses, expenses interest, certain costs, and income. Several studies reveal that climate change will impact balance sheet financial statements and income statements (Farouk & Jabeen, 2018; Wrana & Diez, 2018).

The government can prevent physical damage by applying carbon pricing. It is a scheme to impose additional burdens on parties that produce CO2 emissions from an activity. The greater the CO2 emissions from an activity, the greater the burden that must be paid. Carbon pricing will charge the process of CO2 emissions into the atmosphere. CO2 emissions will be subject to consequences in the form of additional burdens that must be paid by the party which makes emissions. The carbon pricing implementation also aims to encourage the private sector and the public to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and switch to renewable energies without carbon emissions.

Carbon pricing is a way that the government can take to achieve the target of limiting global temperature increases that have been agreed upon in the Paris Agreement. However, besides meeting the targets, carbon pricing also has another goal,

namely internalizing the climate change issue in the company's financial statements. In achieving this goal, accountants play a significant role in internalizing climate change issues in the financial statements. Carbon pricing can be applied in two methods: carbon tax and emission trading systems (ETS), Carbon tax as a method to reduce CO2 emissions will fail if the imposed rate is too low. Low rates do not encourage producers and consumers to switch to renewable energy sources. In promoting the carbon tax method and reducing CO2 emissions into the atmosphere, tax rates need to be applied progressively. Thus, the greater the CO2 emissions, the greater the tax rate applied to calculate tax. By introducing a carbon tax, Indonesia becomes one of the countries that will implement it first. Indonesia is the first mover of carbon taxes globally, especially from emerging economic powers (Febrio Kacaribu, 2021).

Emission trading systems (ETS) provide quotas from the government to each business entity. As in the carbon tax method, each entity is given a quota to produce CO2 emissions without being burdened. If an entity requires an additional carbon quota, they can buy from another entity that still has a quota so that a sale and purchase transaction of CO2 allotment will occur. From this transaction, the market price of CO2 will be formed. An increase in CO2 buying and selling transactions will encourage a carbon market that brings together those who need a quota with those who have a quota. ETS implementation can be distorted if short-term business and political interests' conflict with its primary goal of reducing carbon levels. The success of ETS implementation depends on all business actors to complete the principles inherent without outrageous profit motivation (Nartey, 2018; Zhang & Xu, 2015). Carbon pricing implementation can reduce carbon emissions and potentially eliminate the competitiveness of a product. As a result, there is a decline in the gross domestic product (Khan, 2014; Mateo-Márquez et al., 2019). Recently, Indonesia has not implemented a carbon pricing mechanism to control carbon emissions.

The Role of Accountant in Encountering Climate Change

An accountant has been known as a profession responsible for recording financial transactions and issuing financial reports for various organizations. Accountants cannot remain silent in dealing with climate change problems that threaten all human life. They must understand the issue of climate change, starting from the causes of climate change to its impact on economic activities. This understanding helps accountants to think of its contribution to limiting global warming. Accountants need to enlarge their roles and responsibilities as recorders of transactions and issuers of financial statements. They are also required to estimate business activity's impact on climate change and disclose these impacts in financial statements.

Accountants in the company pay more attention to business sustainability in the Corporate Sustainability Report. They maintain the synergy of saving Profit, People, and Planet, with Triple Bottom Accounting. Accountants know and understand that the activities carried out by construction companies harm people, both inside and outside the company and the planet; nevertheless, they are powerless. Thus, the dilemma is which one should come first, going concern or the business sustainability. In avoiding the threat of climate change, especially for construction and property business players, it can use environmentally friendly materials. Since accountants know the contents of financial statements, which are the estuaries of all company operational activities, accountants should be committed to maintaining environmental balance. Mardiasmo, in the international webinar themed "Optimizing Sustainability Governance through a Single Set of High-Quality Global Sustainability Reporting Standards," explained that accountants must contribute to global efforts by reducing carbon emissions. Accountants are considered to have the right skill set to mitigate climate change through sustainability reporting (April, 2022).

Undefined Climate Change Issues in Financial Statements

Undefined climate change issues are because accountants do not consider this issue in their financial statements. Therefore, the consequences are: first; the company does not consider the impact of climate change from its production activities. Hence production activities cannot be categorized as sustainable production. Second, by not considering the climate change issue, product prices do not reflect the impact of ecosystem damage that triggers climate change. Third, the lack of description of ecosystem damage on product prices ultimately makes consumers uncritical in consuming products. As a result, sustainable consumption is not achieved. Fourth, the absence of sustainable production and consumption makes the climate change issue an externality that both producers and consumers do not consider.

Research at the global level has not focused on including climate change issues in financial reports (Csutora & Harangozo, 2017; Hopper, 2019). Explicitly the issue of climate change is not accommodated at the local level accounting rules through Indonesia Accounting Standards (PSAK) or at the international level through International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS). In other words, there is no specific standard that regulates how to disclose the issue of climate change in financial reports.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature review in the previous section, the conceptual model is as described in Figure 1.

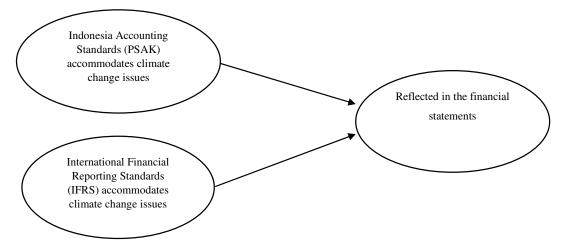


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

Based on the analysis, it can be determined whether the current Statement of Financial Accounting Standards (PSAK) and International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) can accommodate the issue of climate change so that it is reflected in the financial statements. Thus, the preposition proposed in this study are:

- 1. Indonesia Accounting Standards (PSAK) accommodates the issue of climate change reflected in financial statements.
- 2. International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) accommodates climate change issues reflected in financial reports.

Research Method

The research method used is narrative analysis to describe the past, current, and other events (Patten & Shin, 2019). Finding the causes of climate change and its impacts will contribute to the accounting profession tackling climate change issues. The narrative analysis begins by identifying the triggers of climate change based on research under the theme of environment and climate change. Furthermore, research with the same theme will be selected to investigate the impact of climate change on environmental ecosystems. Meanwhile, to identify the accountant's contribution, research related to the effects of climate change on economic activities is contained as material for analysis.

Conclusion and Future Research

Climate change is a big issue that is currently faced by humankind and has not been accommodated in the financial statements, both in the balance sheet and income statement. In economic activities, climate change will significantly impact the sustainability of the company's business. However, the current condition shows climate change is still an externality that has not been considered by the government, private, and community sectors. An accountant is not only the company's transaction recorder and issuer of financial statements but can also play a more significant role in climate change issues. This role requires accountants to internalize climate change issues in financial reports. Accordingly, financial statements users can consider climate change issues in their decisions. The climate change issue will impact the business sustainability of the fossil fuel energy industry and other industries that depend on it. When there is awareness regarding this, the climate change issue should ideally be in the form of disclosure in financial statements and reflected in financial statement accounts. Future research related to the role of accountants in internalizing climate change issues in financial reports can be focused on methods that accountants can use to quantify the impact of damage from CO2 emissions in financial statements.

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