

Special issue: supply chain and distribution management in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)

Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) comprises a number of various countries including Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, eastern part of Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Croatia, Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, North Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. As such, CEE is a very diverse geographical area consisting of both highly developed and developing countries; of small countries with really limited markets and countries representing some of the largest European markets; of countries that constitute old core EU-15 and countries that are new Europe on the borders of EU; of countries that have strong integrated supply chains and economies as well as countries that are politically and economically separated from EU although geographically really close to each other. In the last 15 years, all these characteristics have made CEE an “EU’s backyard as threat and opportunity” (Jacoby, 2010).

This special issue (SI) is dedicated to supply chain and distribution management with a special focus on CEE, as insights from CEE countries regarding supply chain and distribution management are still rare and remain on descriptive levels (Lorentz *et al.*, 2007; Petljak *et al.*, 2018).

Advanced supply chain management processes and concepts, such as vendor managed inventory, crossdocking, collaborative planning forecasting and replenishment, collaborative transportation, omnichannel, as well as new technologies in supply chain (i.e. blockchain, automation and robotics, advanced telematics and Internet of things in transportation, RFID, automated guided vehicle, crossdocking) are still overflowing from West Europe to majority of CEE (Damijan *et al.*, 2018). This process is undergoing either through manufacturer-led supply chains (like in case of automotive industry in some CEE countries, e.g. additive manufacturing adoption in the automotive industry (Delic *et al.*, 2018)) or even more frequently through retailing internationalisation where large retailers manage whole supply chains – i.e. retail supply chain management practices (Dujak, 2019a, b) in CEE countries. In the same time, global service supply chains are increasingly finding new off-shore markets in CEE countries (Gal, 2011; Sass and Fifekova, 2011). Situation is very similar with other SCM trends like sustainability (Horváth *et al.*, 2017) – its principles are increasingly actively involved in the daily lives of CEE countries and their supply chains (Raszkowski and Bartniczak, 2019).

As huge concentration processes have been conducted throughout CEE region, findings indicate that the supply chain perspective is often crucial in the decisions on mergers and acquisitions (Mesarić *et al.*, 2015). Although region is of growing economic significance, lack of focus in supply chain and distribution management is surprising.

Lorentz *et al.* (2007) have found overlapping and complex distribution structures in CEE distribution and possibilities for more direct supply chains, while research studies like Paraschiv *et al.* (2010) are proposing different supply chain strategies for improving CEE countries (in this case particularly Romania) competitiveness in the struggle to attract foreign investment.

Owing to relatively lower level of economic development and crucial geostrategic position, some countries of CEE have come into focus of large and powerful nations in certain way of economic confrontation for predominance. And many times, these economic wars are waged primarily by taking control under existing supply chains or by building new more efficient supply chains and processes between them. Knowledge regarding latest supply chain



management theory and implementation practice can enable both companies and governments in the CEE region to adapt more successfully to new circumstances by better representing their positions in current and at the same time implementing themselves even more efficiently in new supply chains.

Due to all these reasons, there is a vital need for more frequent and much deeper supply chain research in this region. This SI is just one step in this direction willing to support and allow visibility of supply chain management theory and practice of CEE.

This SI consists of altogether six papers, which shed light and give us new insights on supply chain and distribution management in Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany and Serbia.

The paper *“Supply chain study in food industry in Bulgaria”* investigates the relations between suppliers and the degree of integration of the activities along the supply chain, namely special focus is put on collaboration along the supply chain and the use of modern information systems and technologies of 93 companies in the food industry in Bulgaria. Research results also shed opportunities for further developing the cooperation of the actors in Bulgarian food supply chain.

The paper *“Management Systems and Improving Supply Chain Processes: Perspectives of Focal Companies and Logistics Service Providers”* examines empirically the impact of implementing standardised management systems on processes related to competitiveness by giving perspective of logistics service providers and focal companies simultaneously. This paper contributes to the further advancement of the knowledge about the impact of standardised management systems on supply chain management practices.

The third paper in this SI, *“Segmenting Logistics Service Users Based on Their Provider Selection Criteria to Succeed in Outsourcing”* focusses on outsourcing, namely, examination of the selection of criterial dimensions which German manufacturing and trading companies use in selecting logistics service providers and logistics service users, in order to make logistics outsourcing more successful.

The paper *“Modelling frequency of visits to the shopping centres as a part of Consumer’s Preference: case study from the Czech Republic”* is a more consumer-oriented paper as it investigates the factors affecting the frequency of shopping centres’ visits, sociodemographic and spatial determinants increasing the shopping centres’ visits and as such providing implications for shopping centres managers.

“The impact of reverse logistics onto green supply chain competitiveness evidence from Serbian consumers” is also a consumer-oriented paper. Based on the results of a survey ($n = 228$), it shows that the influence of reverse logistics onto green supply chain competitiveness depends on the product return option but is mainly negatively associated by Serbian consumers. This research also has high practical value, as its results indicate that the enhancement of the efforts to raise future awareness of the green initiatives is important amongst business partners as well as final consumers in the Republic of Serbia.

The final paper *“Environmental responsibility of road freight transport enterprises in Croatia”* is focussed on the research conducted on the sample of 58 Croatian road freight companies about their corporate environmental responsibility. This paper specially sheds light on the link between corporate environmental responsibility in relation to the company size.

We kindly thank all the authors for telling new stories, sharing unique knowledge and for their contribution and effort in building the CEE SCM and DM research community.

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Further reading

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