

## Introduction

**J. Ateljević**, *University of Banja Luka, Bosnia-Erzegovina*

**M. Cucculelli**, *Università Politecnica delle Marche, Ancona*

**D. Iacobucci**, *Università Politecnica delle Marche, Ancona*

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The articles contained in this Special Issue were presented at the IX REDETE conference that was held in Ancona on the 15 and 16 of September 2022. The REDETE annual conference (Researching Economic Development and Entrepreneurship in Transition Countries) was started in 2011 with the aim to promote debates and scholarly research on issues concerning economic development in transition countries. REDTE was promoted by the University of Banja Luka in collaboration with other universities in the Western Balkans and the EU, among which Università Politecnica delle Marche. Indeed, REDETE is also a professional network of academics, businesspersons and professionals in the Western Balkan region producing, in cooperation with other international institutions, applied research on the impacts of globalisation and European integration on Balkan communities. In 2022 the REDETE conference was held for the first time in Italy, and specifically in Ancona, hosted by Università Politecnica delle Marche. This was not by chance. Ancona and the Marche Region played a key role in the set-up of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative in 2001 and the subsequent launch of EUSAIR (the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region) in 2014. For this reason, the IX REDETE conference gave specific emphasis on the role of EUSAIR for the economic development of the area and the further integration of Western Balkan countries.

Entrepreneurship was one of the key themes of the REDETE conference since its inception. This is because of the role played by entrepreneurial activity to promote economic development and social progress. In the case of Western Balkans entrepreneurial activity plays an even greater role given the need to speedy the transition towards a free-market economy and to provide occupational opportunities especially to young and educated people.

In the Ancona conference there were several sessions dedicated to entrepreneurship, exploring different dimensions of the phenomenon. The five papers contained in this special issue is a subset of the papers submitted for the conference. After an initial selection based on the draft versions, the remaining papers went through a review process which lasted from March to September 2023.

The five papers contained in this special issue offer interesting insights on several aspects of the entrepreneurial activity in countries and regions belonging to the Adriatic and Ionian macro region.

Specifically, the paper by Bugarčić examines the role played by different types of education on the innovativeness of start-up firms. It is based on a questionnaire administered to 121 Serbian start-ups. The

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paper shows that informal education has a positive statistically significant impact on the innovativeness of start-up firms, while formal education does not have a statistically significant impact. From a management perspective these results point-out to the importance of sharing knowledge among employees in start-up firms.

The paper by Kraia and Berberi examines the differences between native and return migrant entrepreneurs. The latter are specifically relevant in many Western Balkan countries given the importance of emigrations from these countries in recent decades. Return migrant entrepreneurs are expected to contribute more to entrepreneurship success given the experience, knowledge and connections they acquired in foreign countries. Indeed, 69 % of return migrant entrepreneurs underlined that foreign experiences and international networks provided them advantages over native owners. Moreover, return migrant entrepreneurs are more confident about their entrepreneurial capabilities. On the other side, native entrepreneurs think that their main advantage is that they know the “rules of games”, which characterize the entrepreneurial environment, much better than return migrants entrepreneurs. In fact, corruption was perceived as one of the main problems for all entrepreneurs. Policy makers should pay greater attention to this and to the creation of a positive environment for entrepreneurs.

The paper by Ivanović-Đukić, Stefanović, Rađenović and Stevanović examines the impact of the covid 19 pandemic on the entrepreneurial activity of several EU and Adriatic-Ionian region. The empirical part of the paper is based on GEM (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor) data referring to 13 European countries, of which 4 in the Adriatic Ionian region. The pandemics had a strong impact on entrepreneurial activity with no significant differences between counties in the Adriatic and Ionian region. In all countries, entrepreneurship was significantly influenced by the changes in household income and the reduction in recognized market opportunities. Moreover, the decrease in household income encouraged entrepreneurship driven by necessity rather than by opportunities during the pandemics. The paper also highlights the importance of government interventions to counterbalance the negative effects of the pandemic on the entrepreneurial activity.

The paper by Milanović and Talić the factors affecting the social entrepreneurship intentions of university students in the Republic of Serbia. Social entrepreneurship is defined as a form of entrepreneurship that has as its main goal the creation of social value and the use of innovative solutions to solve societal issues. University students are expected to be highly motivated to engage in entrepreneurial activity, especially social entrepreneurship. The empirical part of the paper is based on a questionnaire administered to 350 university students enrolled in the Faculty of Economics, University of Niš. The empirical results show that previous experience has a significant positive influence on social entrepreneurial intentions but a negative influence on moral obligation. Given the importance of previous experience on social entrepreneurship intentions, universities should pay attention to creating and promoting opportunities to gain experience in solving common social problems. In addition, there is a need for the development of support institutions for the initiatives of social entrepreneurs, such as the creation of incubators for social businesses, or the development of centers for social businesses.

The paper by Panetti, Pietronudo and Cangiano analyses entrepreneurship and innovation policies adopted by three Italian regions belonging to the Adriatic and Ionian macro-region, i.e., Lombardy, Molise, and Calabria. The research aim is to better understand how Italian regions approach the EUSAIR challenges through entrepreneurship and innovation policies. The empirical part of the paper is based on a text analysis of regional operating programs for the allocation of EU structural funds, specifically European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) which is mainly addressed to promote competitiveness and innovation. Three policy directions emerged from the analysis of regional programs related to the EUSAIR strategy: remedial and basic policies; reinforcing policies; and shooting policies. The paper shows that the adoption of these different policies is strongly related to the level of development of regions. Calabria, which is the less developed region, has applied policies defined as remedial and basics within the EUSAIR strategy,

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reflecting a nascent ecosystem. Molise, which represents a strengthening ecosystem, adopted mainly reinforcing policies. Finally, Lombardy, which is the most developed region, adopted shooting policies that reflect a resilient ecosystem. The main contribution of the paper is to provide a categorization of entrepreneurial and innovation policy and highlight how, depending on the stage of development, different types of policies and measures are adopted and implemented.