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Editorial

The second special issues of the Journal Economic Themes titled “***Cities in Transition: Problems and Policies***”, actually is the first number in 2024. It represents a result of the collaboration among the partners engaged within the Projects “Twinning for excellences in Smart and Resilient Urban Development: Advanced Data Analytics Approach, UR-DATA HORIZON-WIDERA-2021-ACCESS-02”. This special issue with an international group of researchers, as well as a couple authors from Serbian universities, are sharing their knowledge and latest research finds on topics such as cities in transition, problems and policies. The authors in their papers offer clear finding and policy for how to make needed policies for cities in transition, underlining the aim of the special issue – to contribute to a sustainable urban development.

The special issue of the Journal Economic Themes presents to readers six scientific papers, which are the result of researching in a field of main goals of mentioned Project.

The first paper titled ***Prediction of the Freight Train Energy Consumption with the Time Series Models***, the authors highlight that rail transport is one of the most preferred transportation modes since it emits three times less CO₂ and particulates per ton-mile than road transport does. Apart from these ecological benefits, rail transport is the most cost-effective transportation mode. The global energy crisis makes large problems and challenges for rail companies when planning transportation activity costs. Companies must carefully take care of energy spending and consider the ways how it can be decreased. In this paper, we considered the problem of predicting freight train energy consumption in order to help companies when planning their budgets. For that purpose, we applied three-time series methods: the moving average, the weighted moving average, and the exponential smoothing method. These methods were applied to real data collected in the Republic of Serbia. The obtained results showed that the exponential smoothing method makes better results than the other two approaches. Nevertheless, there is still room for improvements in the presented approaches, making some fine-tuning of the used parameters and comparing to other relevant techniques used for forecast.

The authors in the second paper ***Establishment of public charging stations: Factors for their high diffusion in Norway*** introduce that reaching the price stability, *ceteris paribus*, will have a beneficial effect on employment and economic prosperity measured with GDP growth, particularly under the assumption of identifying and maintaining an optimum sill. However, as achieving the ideal deal is quite challenging to the monetary authorities and the unemployment keeps to be one of the main obstacles across the globe, particularly for emerging economies, assessing the relationship among these variables remains in the focus of economic audience. Thus, the aim of this study is to examine the interdependence between the inflation, unemployment and economic growth through an empirical assessment of the inverse relationship between the first two and testing the validity of the Okun’s law for the sample of the Western Balkan (WB) countries and the European Union as a whole. For this purpose, the panel data available on the World Bank platforms for the time period from 2006 to 2021 were used. The results of the regression analysis for all countries show that a rise in inflation and drop in unemployment positively contribute to the countries’ GDP growth.

The next paper titled ***Cost-benefit analysis of building energy refurbishment – case study of a municipal public building*** highlight that in order to achieve transition towards a climate neutral, cleaner and healthier environment we must tackle the issues which contribute most to climate change and pollution, through fossil fuels excessive consumption and inefficient use of other resources. Construction and operation of buildings is certainly one of these issues, with estimation that buildings consume about 40% of the total energy (EU). One of the strategies that is considered most effective in making the building sector more resource and energy efficient is refurbishment of old buildings, which no longer meet criteria for achieving adequate comfort with minimal energy use. Their refurbishment, opposed to their demolition and construction of new ones, brings numerous environmental benefits, and drives the transitions of entire cities and communities towards a more resilient and better environment. Recent policies (Energy Efficiency Directives, EU Green Deal, The New European Bauhaus initiative) also highlight the importance of building refurbishment and set goals for ambitious refurbishment rates for the entire building stock. At the same time, they highlight the importance of refurbishment of public buildings, because of the positive implications it has in terms of showcase and educational purposes. This paper presents the case study of refurbishment options for a characteristic municipal building, through cost-benefit analysis of different refurbishment scenarios.

In the fourth paper titled ***The development of mass assessment and taxation of real estate as a basis for increasing the source income of the local self-government units of the Republic of Srpska***, explores that municipal budgets represent the basis of the development of an area with a certain number of inhabitants. The quality of life of the population will depend on the size of the budget and the potential for the development of the municipality. The budget system of the Republic of Srpska includes the budget of the Republic, the budgets of municipalities and cities, and the budgets of funds. Local self-government units form part of the overall public finances of the Republic of Srpska and they play an important role in maintaining fiscal stability and responsibility in the Republic of Srpska as a whole, but also individually from the aspect of quality of life. Public finances of local self-government units make up 15% of the total public finances of the Republic of Srpska. Therefore, from the aspect of the stability of public finances, it is very important to establish a database that will contain the exact number of immovable properties on the basis of which the local self-government units of the Republic of Srpska would increase the income item from property tax, and therefore the total budgets, especially bearing in mind their financial problems. That is why it is necessary to analyze with special attention the possibility of increasing the income of the local self-government units of the Republic of Srpska.

In the fifth paper named ***Rurban: strategic, smart and innovative development model***, introduces that a large number of authors, organizations, and institutions have addressed the issue of uneven regional development over time. As a result of their research, numerous theories have been developed that examine and analyze the field of regional development from various perspectives. The evolution of economic thought on regional development has led to changes in understanding the most significant factors and drivers of regional growth and development. In contemporary research, there is increasing dominance of certain intangible factors such as knowledge, innovation, strategic management, smart specialization, intellectual capital, and modern digital technologies. Thus, current research in the field of regional development, as well as

regional realities, confirm that these factors play a dominant role in achieving more equitable regional development in modern conditions. Accordingly, this paper will analyze the theoretical foundations of contemporary approaches to regional development that emphasize the importance of strategic planning, smart specialization, innovation, and modern digital technologies, aiming for a better understanding and incorporation into an integrated urban-rural model of regional development, as well as their application by economic and regional policymakers.

Exploring the pillars of business models for smart cities and their applicability in Serbia is a title of the sixth paper. The key research question of this study focuses on analyzing the Smart Sustainable District project started in 2021 and one of its outcomes was the publication of a 'white paper' that aims to describe principles, solutions, tools for the realization of the SSD model in urban areas. In the paper, objectives, trends, solutions, tools and some good practices are presented for the following three pillars of business models for smart cities: 1) collaborative models and symbiosis, promoting outcome based PPPP (public-private and people partnership), and sustainable co-production and co-management of both material and immaterial resources and goods; 2) innovative consumption patterns, including for instance attention to sustainability and local needs, sharing practices, collaborative consumption of goods and services, new “presumption” practices; 3) modular systems for circular economy, an economy based on the maximization of resources over time through the re-design of both the property concept and products and services through their whole life-cycle, including processes and consumption models. Then, their application in Serbia and specifically in the city of Niš is analyzed, also comparing, as a benchmark, Italian and Serbian reference strategies and policies.

Publishing of the issue would significantly contribute to the strengthening the scientific recognition of the Journal Economic Themes.

We would like to express special thanks to authors for cooperation and their excellent work and dedication and to reviewers who provided invaluable feedback and guidance throughout the review process. We hope that this issue will inspire further research and action towards achieving cities in transition without the problems and adequate policies. We encourage all readers to engage with the ideas presented and to use them as a basis for further discussions.

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