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Special track: European agrifood business in transition towards social responsibility

Editorial

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This special IFAMA Europe track of the IFAMR is devoted to the topic of transition towards social responsibility of European agrifood businesses. Thanks to the complex requirements of sustainability at various levels (Dentoni and Peterson, 2011; Dentoni *et al.*, 2012) in a context of a diversified organizational and institutional landscape, European agrifood companies actively search for new ways of innovation towards social responsibility. The necessity to better understand the innovation processes for sustainability implemented by agrifood companies has been frequently emphasized in the management literature (Barth *et al.*, 2017; Blok and Lemmens, 2015; Lubberink *et al.*, 2017; Tell *et al.*, 2016). These innovation trends can be summarized around two axes.

The first axis questions the strategic intertwining and convergence between technological opportunity and the organization of the agrifood chains (Bigliardi and Galati, 2013; Carayannis *et al.*, 2018; Golembiewski *et al.*, 2015; Kalaitzandonakes *et al.*, 2018). The strategic convergence leading to a reconfiguration of the bioeconomy has been acknowledged (Boehlje and Bröring, 2011; Golembiewski *et al.*, 2015). The food-water-energy nexus (Mohtar and Daher, 2012), concomitantly with the systemic view of innovation (Fearne *et al.*, 2012), brings expanded strategic opportunities. Similarly, there is probably the possibility of collaborations among the quadruple helix of partners (Carayannis *et al.*, 2018; Kalaitzandonakes *et al.*, 2018) that will drive successful strategies in the future. From that point of view, the specificities of the European context (Sarkar and Costa, 2008), notably thanks to its organizational diversity (Martino *et al.*, 2017) and to the originality of its informal and formal organizations and policy devoted to innovation (Batterink *et al.*, 2010; Touzard *et al.*, 2015), serve as active drivers of technological and organizational transformation.

The second axis puts forward the learning dimensions of the innovation processes (Bossle *et al.*, 2016; Hinrichs, 2014; Olsen, 2015). The move of companies and of partnering research/policy organizations towards design activities constantly drives the players toward upstream activities. The objective of innovation strategies is to promote an innovative continuum (Lubberink *et al.*, 2017), i.e. transformations in the design of complete innovation processes integrating new stakeholders, new activities and new partners (Kalaitzandonakes *et al.*, 2018; Meynard *et al.*, 2017; Procopio Schoen, 2017; Wognum *et al.*, 2011). This focus on design induces renewed roles of organizational learning: types of knowledge, integration of science, technology and management, new categories of intermediaries and of devices for collaboration (Abdirahman *et al.*, 2014; Deiters and Schiefer, 2012). The innovation strategies of agrifood companies move toward a reconfiguration

of their knowledge-based activities and partners (Colurcio *et al.*, 2012; Meynard *et al.*, 2017; Procopio Schoen, 2017).

The articles presented in this track are in line with these trends, with a focus on specific topics, such as partnerships and relational advantages at a network level, the need for organizational innovations at a supply chain level, the importance of evaluation criteria, and behavioral issues linked to innovation strategies, with case and sector perspectives from various European countries.

The first article ‘Development of sustainable resource ties in the agrifood industry: the case for the Polish fruit and vegetable industry’ by Wisniewska-Paluszak and Paluszak (2021), contributes to the overall discussion on the relational resources – in particular, attempts to recognize inter-firm investments in the agrifood industry. It is grounded in an integrative approach which combines relational and resource-based views. The goal is to find out if and how relational investments contribute to a sustainable relational advantage of business relationships in the agrifood industry. On this basis, a model of resource-based sustainable relational advantages in agrifood business relationships was executed. It was found that relational investments aimed at optimization of supply and provision, as well as food safety and social responsibility, create and sustain a relational advantage. Those investments that include technology and ecology implicate an unexploited relational advantage. Subsequent human, financial and real capital investments implicate a temporary relational advantage. Consequently, the implementation of an integrative approach to investigating the development potentially sustainable resources that tie in the agrifood industry is necessary.

The second article, ‘Sustainable demand-supply chain: an innovative approach for improving sustainability in agrifood chains’, is proposed by Filippi and Chapdaniel (2021). Increasing price volatility and the decrease in both raw material prices and farmers’ incomes, all underline the depths of the French agricultural crisis. How should the relationships within agrifood supply chains be envisaged in order to obtain greater sustainability combined with better added-value distribution? This article introduces a new approach for supply chain organization and management: the sustainable demand-supply chain. The article mobilizes both management, organization, and innovation literature, together with a case study based on data from farmers, cooperatives, and distributors in the pork sector. The article develops a modelization of sustainable demand-supply chains. The results show that new relationships need to be implemented between all stakeholders, including consumers, both to share information and to define their new added-value distribution. The results identify the key points of this new supply chain coordination and indicate policy recommendations for organizational innovations.

The third article, ‘Conception and evaluation of a structural equation model to measure the reputation of German horticulture’, by Isaak *et al.* (2021), focuses on the reputation of a sector seen as an important strategic resource. The aim of this article is to develop a measurement model for the horticulture sector. Reputation is a latent variable and is represented by formative and reflective indicators. A theoretically elaborated model is evaluated and completed with the help of experts, and the segments that influence reputation, are identified. The quality assessment of the formative indicators, using multiple regression, and the reflective indicators, using an explorative factor analysis, led to a model with a total of 15 indicators. With the help of open questions, it is possible, to specify the indicators already considered or to include them in the model as new indicators. A reputation map shows the interaction between the reputation of horticulture and that of the individual segments. This shows a much greater influence of the service segments on the sector reputation compared to the production segments.

The fourth article, ‘Innovation behavior of agri-food small and medium-sized enterprises: the case of Europe’s emerging economies’, by Kussainova *et al.* (2021), examines the innovative behavior of agri-food firms located in Central and Eastern Europe. In the literature, empirical analyses on innovation activities of firms focus on various case studies from around the world. However, very few studies explore the innovation of small and medium sized enterprises from Central and Eastern European agri-food sector. The analysis uses the logit estimation method and firm-level data, which are obtained from ERBD-World Bank Business

Environment and Enterprise Performance Survey. Results suggest that firms that spent some proportion of their financial budget on research and development, had workforce training programs, and bought fixed assets, are more likely to launch product, process, organizational, and marketing innovations.

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