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Editorial – Selected papers from the Logistics Research Network (LRN) Conference 2021

“Living in unprecedented times” may well be an overused ubiquitous cliché, but for this special issue (SI) it is considered considerably apt. Never has the LRN conference been hosted in two consecutive years by the same host university and never has the conference been delivered online. When Cardiff University began the process of planning and delivering LRN2020 COVID-19 had never been heard of. When the virus reached the shores of the United Kingdom in early 2020 and with the first lockdown initiated by the British Government in March of that year there was considerable uncertainty created for the joint Cardiff University – Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT) organising committee. Predicting scenarios for September 2020 was extremely difficult and in May, following a risk management assessment, we felt we had several choices:

1. Do nothing and carry on in the hope that COVID-19 would subside and we would run the conference as normal
2. Cancel the conference
3. Plan for an online conference
4. Plan for a hybrid conference

For Scenario 1, we could have put all the necessary arrangements in place with participants making their plans to travel to Cardiff and then at the last minute we may have been forced to follow Scenario 2. We believed that was not right for our community. We needed the opportunity to bring people together and provide mutual support during a time when there were considerable challenges being faced by all of us.

There was a lot of uncertainty and through examination of the situation, we believed that resilience was the committee’s key strength to cope with the disturbance that was caused. Following the RALF (Robust, Agile, Lean, Flexible) model of resilience (Purvis et al., 2016) we felt that we were:

- Robust – having a large and capable team meant we had enough redundancy in place to absorb some of the additional burdens that were placed in planning for a totally new type of venture for the conference with strong support from the academic community and professionals
- Agile – asking our LRN community, through discussions and small surveys, as to what they wanted for September 2020 and then responding to their needs
- Lean – the LRN conferences have always been based on the concept of value for money for attendees and hence we believed it was important to maintain this ethos culminating in a conference that created an engaging platform for knowledge sharing and was free to attend online.
- Flexible – the multidisciplinary organising conference committee consisted of different members that have the skills to ensure that the event could be adapted to all aspects of any disturbances. In addition, pre-pandemic, we had (by luck?) already gained the support of special stream chairs who helped the organising committee to procure and manage papers submissions and keynote speakers who were willing to persevere with any format of delivery for the conference

Nevertheless, we had constraints due to COVID-19 restrictions in the UK and it was agreed that a hybrid model, Scenario 4, also has its own inherent risks as per Scenario 1 for a normal face-to-face event, and was beyond our capacity and technological capability at that time to ensure satisfactory delivery.

Hence, we opted for Scenario 3, which still required a steep learning curve to ensure successful delivery, especially with the potential risks of the technology failing. It was a period when academics and

professionals had to learn about online delivery formats almost right away. But we felt that of all the scenarios, whatever happened, whether COVID-19 subsided or not, by running an online conference, we could have a high degree of certainty to 'guarantee' some form of participatory conference.

Ultimately LRN 2020 was delivered extremely successfully, attracting over 411 registrants, with 250 abstract submissions and the PhD workshop had 63 applicants. The conference was free for participants and we believed that this would be best for our community to get together, learn about the latest research and network.

Many of the challenges and solutions that we faced in 2020 were experienced again in 2021. Ultimately, we again organised an online conference based on our previous experiences. In total, 113 abstracts and/or papers were submitted to LRN 2021 with 40 students registered for the PhD workshop. Of the full papers submitted, 19 were shortlisted for an invitation to submit to this Special Issue, which resulted in 12 submissions. With the theme of the conference being 'Sustainable and resilient supply chains in disruptive times', it is not surprising that following the rigorous peer-review process of the International Journal of Logistics: Research and Applications, we have the final four papers that deal with various aspects of the conference theme:

- Wilde et al. exploit simulation to assess the impact of disruptions, especially focussed on rail delays, on a port and its intermodal hinterland in Sweden. The authors consider the benefits of information in mitigating the disruptions on hinterland operations showing that different actions may result to enhance efficiency based on different levels of information availability.
- Osman et al. explore how the adoption of biomethane in Sweden has impacted green logistics practices (GLPs). Via interviews, the authors find that there is a complex, and at times contradictory, the interplay between the various GLPs, related to drivers, fuel suppliers and local government, that requires further research to ensure benefits are fully realised.
- Nam et al. establish a model, for the benefit of practitioners and academe, to show how blockchain technologies may be integrated into supply chain operations to help meet the challenges faced by the food sector, such as ensuring safety and quality, while the supply chains themselves are becoming ever more complex and fragmented.
- Also related to the food sector is the paper by Colicchia et al. that undertakes a systematic literature review of the utilisation of circular economy (CE) principles in food supply chains with a particular focus on minimising food waste. The authors find that there is a lack of a holistic perspective of in establishing circular supply chains and they give a number of propositions to overcome such a challenge that require tailored CE models to reduce food waste, understanding better the various sources of food waste in the supply chain, enhancing supply chain collaboration, exploitation novel technologies and ensuring that end consumers are engaged in the concept of CE for food waste reduction. Hence, we see that the future research suggested is related to the three-pillar change model that considers processes, people and technologies, and that is inherent in the other three papers of the special issue with Wilde et al. focussed on information flow processes, Osman et al. primarily considering the future needs of various stakeholders and Nam et al. giving due thought to blockchain technologies.

We believe that these papers indicate the considerable breadth and depth of current research that emerged from the LRN 2021 conference, and that they have potential to impact our LRN, IJL:R&A and wider academic communities.

We would like to recognise the hard work and efforts of all the presenters, authors, keynote speakers, chairs, special stream organisers and committee members of LRN 2020 and 2021, which made them such exciting and interesting online events. Our special thanks go to all contributors who submitted their papers and the anonymous reviewers who gave up much of their time to enhance the quality of the Special Issue. In particular, both authors and reviewers were extremely diligent and professional in their approach with excellent adherence to the tight schedule. We also would like to express a special thanks to the journal's Editor-in-Chief and the publishing team for their support.

Mohamed M. Naim and Irina Harris, Cardiff University, UK

February, 2023

on behalf of the whole LRN 2020 and 2021 Organising Committee

Emrah Demir, Beverly Francis, Allison Glandfield, Irina Harris, Angharad Kears, Maneesh Kumar, Mohamed M. Naim, Lucy Hemmings, Stephen Pettit, Vasco Sanchez Rodrigues, Xiaobei Wang, Zara Watson

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