



Introduction

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In the last decades the European Union (EU) faced many changes fuelled by a number of different factors such as the growth in globalisation, the rapid advances in technology and the increased regulatory freedom. In addition, the enlargement process of the EU to several Eastern countries creates further challenges. One of the most notable effects is the considerable expansion of supply chains into international locations. In this scenario, logistics and supply chain management plays an increasing important role in ensuring the competitiveness of the continent. In its Communication to the European Parliament entitled “Freight Transport Logistics in Europe - the key to sustainable mobility” (Brussels, 28.06.06 - COM (2006) 336) the European Commission acknowledges that “advanced quality solutions are needed for Europe to maintain and improve its logistics position in the world market” (p.10). This special issue includes a broad range of papers that witness the expanding scope and importance of logistics and supply chain management in today’s European business environment. The six papers forming this special issue discuss some relevant topics for the today European logistics and supply chain landscape. From the scientific point of view, the six papers provide an useful and up-to-date agenda for developing research in some of the most important areas of action of the EU freight future scenario. The six papers can be divided into two broad categories: i) transportation-focused papers and ii) supply chain-focused papers.

The first category contains two papers. The first paper, written by *Alan McKinnon*, deals with market distortions induced by the increasing of fuel price in the road haulage sector. The paper analyses the case of the UK market where foreign road hauliers increased their penetration and were able to gain a significant cost advantage over domestic companies buying fuel before entering the UK. This situation has been attributed to the high fuel tax level policy adopted by British government in recent years. Using a large amount of data and information drawn from several sources, the author discusses such hypothesis showing how the increased penetration of foreign companies is the result of a number of factors such as the growth of UK imports and differences in other haulage costs. In addition, he notes that the increasing level of fuel market price during a period when fuel tax remained almost stable reduced international variations in pump prices. This mitigate the cost advantage of foreign operators purchasing fuel outside the UK. He also proposes a review of possible ways of correcting the fuel duty anomaly at national and EU level. Finally, the work considers

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possible options for a road haulage company to recover fuel price increases from shippers. The author identifies four possible methods that offer a more practical solution in comparison with European Commission's proposal.

Johan Woxenius analyses the consistency between the choice of a certain type of transport network, the associated level of performance and the ability of current transshipment technologies to fulfil such level of performance. The analysis is limited to the rail part of an intermodal road-rail freight transport service. The author starts discussing six significantly different theoretical design of transport systems. This description is complemented by an analysis on how the choice of a specific transport network design affects the level of terminal performances. Such an analysis is conducted defining seven evaluation criteria that have been applied to the six different transport network designs. In the following step of the work, the author presents a classification of the existing transfer technologies taking into account their technical features. Also in this case, the seven evaluation criteria defined above are applied to the transfer technologies classification. An analytical matching of requirements set by transport network designs according to what different technologies can offer has been obtained. The exercise allows the author to define how well each class of technology matches the demands for each transport network design and for how many criteria the technology does not fully fulfil the demands. Finally, the results put in evidence that although there is a sufficient number of technologies on the market, some of these still need to prove their viability in technical and economic terms.

The second group of works focused on supply chain issues includes four papers. The first paper is written by *Michael Browne, Allan Woodburn* and *Julian Allen* and it deals with the evaluation of the Urban Consolidation Centres (UCCs) potential. UCCs may play a critical role in improving supply chain efficiency in terms of reducing traffic and environmental problems within urban areas especially in the European context where they gained a little success. Nevertheless, traditional literature in urban consolidation research generally shows a narrow focus with no clear and detailed methodology for the evaluation of UCCs. Several schemes have been developed, but these seem to be fairly appropriate and show a lack of clarity in identifying the precise boundaries of the parts of the supply chain analysed. Starting from this, the aim of the paper is to contribute to this stream of literature proposing a new evaluation framework that take into consideration two important elements such as the way in which this evaluation should be carried out and the conditions for UCCs successful implementation. To build up the scheme interviews have been undertaken with relevant actors. A number of key lessons emerges such as: the need for detailed analysis of the traffic flows into and away from the designated area to facilitate the measurement of benefits for potential users; the choice of the appropriate location types to allow the UCCs successful implementation and, finally, the important role that public authorities may play in encouraging the UCCs usage through regulatory and planning actions.

O'Riordan and *Sweeney* investigates outsourcing practice in Ireland. In order to survive in a more competitive business landscape, many companies focused their resources on core activities and outsourced significant parts of their operations. In the last decades, such phenomenon increased significantly involving many company's functions such as IT, personnel, logistics, finance and accounting, manufacturing and R&D. Outsourcing is an important concept in supply chain management also as a wide range of logistics and supply chain activities are often performed outside the company such as transportation, warehousing, inventory and order management, etc. Business

practice evidenced that the performance of outsourced logistics activities has a direct effect on the company competitive advantage in terms of cost and service level. The paper is basically theory testing. Its main aim is to test the current theory on outsourcing through both a field survey and a case study analysis conducted in the Irish context. The findings suggest that outsourcing is a critical area for companies in Ireland especially for multinationals companies that used the island to move their manufacturing operation. Nevertheless, the survey put in evidence that Ireland is now becoming an outsourcer itself as many Irish companies are outsourcing to lower cost countries. Manufacturing outsourcing is now the most popular function to be outsourced for both small and large companies. With reference to logistics activities outsourcing specifically, the empirical evidences shown that they receive a higher priority in comparison with other business functions within the company.

Evangelista and *Kilpala* analyse the impact of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) on small logistics service providers in two different EU geographical areas. ICT has triggered multiple waves of changes in the logistics service industry in recent years. New technology is reshaping the organisation and structure of the industry as ICT impacts significantly on logistics companies' operations. Within this process, while large logistics groups gained substantial benefits from technology usage, the nature of changes resulting from ICT usage in small logistics companies remains unclear. This is reflected by the existing gap in the literature where ICT in large logistics service companies has been widely investigated while there is a shortage of research in the field of small logistics service providers. This is particularly critical for the EU logistics service market that is populated by a large number of small logistics service companies. The paper tries to fill this void and it deals with the use and implementation of ICT in the logistics service sector. The focus is on information technology capability of small and medium-sized logistics service providers in Europe. The work compares two recent surveys conducted in Italy and Northern Europe. The results indicate that in both study regions, the majority of the logistics service providers are familiar with basic information technology (e.g. mobile phone, internet access, email) while the use of more sophisticated technologies (e.g. ERP, CRM) is relatively low. Small logistics service providers typically offer a limited range of value-adding services. ICT has the potential to enlarge the range of and improving the customisation of services provided. The survey results put in evidence that this can be reachable if these companies will overcome the barriers for ICT investment. Finally, the survey results allow to draw a future research agenda in this field.

Finally, *De Martino* and *Marasco* deals with another important issue supply chain management research: supply chain integration. Integration of different supply chain actors and processes is one of the most important goal in any SCM project considering that the more integrated, the better the performance of the supply chain. The paper considers supply chain logistics integration an important lever for the competitiveness of firms in the textile/clothing (T/C) industry, given its potential to enable cost reductions, shorter lead times and customer service enhancements. However, the T/C sector has been neglected in terms of supply chain management research in general and of logistics integration studies in particular. The paper contributes to fill this gap analysing supply chain integration practices in small textile/clothing (T/C) manufacturing companies in the Southern Italy. The paper explores the approaches to supply chain integration adopted by T/C companies in the Campania Region. The investigation has been based on number of case study. The results of the study suggest

that prevailing approach to supply chain integration is limited to functional boundaries within the firm regardless of the specific characteristics of the companies such as manufacturing specialisation (clothing or fabrics), type of production (fast fashion or planned seasonal) and critical success factors (cost or quality).