

Foreword

Miltiadis D. Lytras

Department of Computer Engineering and Informatics
University of Patras
Argolidos 40–42, 153–44 Gerakas, Attica, Greece
E-mail: Lytras@ceid.upatras.gr

Patricia Ordóñez de Pablos*

Faculty of Economics
Department of Business Administration and Accountability
The University of Oviedo
Avd del Cristo, s/n, 33.071 Oviedo – Asturias, Spain
E-mail: patriop@uniovi.es
*Corresponding author

Biographical notes: Dr. Miltiadis D. Lytras is an Assistant Professor in the Computer Engineering and Informatics Department (CEID) of the University of Patras, Greece. His research focuses on semantic web, knowledge management and e-learning, with more than 80 publications in these areas. He has co-edited/co-edits 25 special issues in international journals such as *IEEE Transaction on Knowledge and Data Engineering*, *IEEE Internet Computing* and *IEEE Transactions on Education*, etc., and has authored/edited 12 books. He is the Founder and an Officer of the Semantic Web and Information Systems Special Interest Group in the Association for Information Systems (<http://www.sigsemis.org>). He serves as the (Co-)Editor-in-Chief of 12 international journals, and is also the Associate Editor or an Editorial Board member in seven more.

Dr. Patricia Ordóñez de Pablos is a Professor in the Department of Business Administration and Accountability at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Oviedo, Spain. Her teaching and research interests focus on the areas of strategic management, knowledge management, intellectual capital measuring and reporting, organisational learning and human resources management. She is the Executive Editor of the *International Journal of Learning and Intellectual Capital*, the *International Journal of Strategic Change Management* and the *International Journal of Chinese Culture and Management*.

The Arab world straddles two continents – Asia and Africa – and its long coastline gives it access to critical waterways. Although there are differences among the Arab people from Morocco to the Persian Gulf, they enjoy a common bond in history, culture and tradition. It is a region of many people with histories and cultures. It is a place with a great past and a highly promising future.

In past centuries, the Arab world was the centre of knowledge and innovation. Arab peoples demonstrated long ago their capacity for enlightened and creative engagement with the rest of the world in ways that left an important mark on the course of civilisation. But as the *Arab World Competitiveness Report* states, a gradual return to that golden age requires a clear comprehension of the problems and challenges which the region faces today, an acceptance of the need for change and the formulation of viable paths of reform.

Nowadays the Arab world is facing an amazing opportunity to play a critical role in the global economic and cultural scene; not only because of the plethora of resources, and the geostrategic position of the region, but mostly due to an unforeseen effort to transform the unique characteristics of Arab culture and management into the key enablers of a developmental process in the area.

There is a growing consensus among the leaders in the Arab world that sustained economic and political reforms are the only ways to boost the growth performance of the Arab countries. These countries vary significantly in their levels of per capita income, the degree of political and economic liberalisation that underpins them and the structure of their productive apparatus, with many being unduly dependent on the energy sector. The Arab world finds itself at a critical crossroads.

Within this context, the global community is interested in a deeper understanding of the culture, business perspective and realities of the Arab world, as well as the opportunities in this region. From this perspective, the *International Journal of Arab Culture, Management and Sustainable Development (IJACMSD)* aims to provide an international forum towards global economic, educational, cultural and business collaborations in the Arab world. Promoting dialogue for the sustainable development in the Arab world, the *IJACMSD* plays a key role in synthesising opinions, providing sound propositions and bringing together ideas and thoughts for the prosperous future of the Arab world.

The inaugural issue of the *IJACMSD*, titled 'The challenges and opportunities in the Arab world', is formed by seven papers.

The first paper, titled 'The management of technological innovation in the Lebanese industry' by Mezher *et al.*, states that technology and innovation are two important elements in improving efficiency, productivity and competitiveness in organisations. According to them, what differentiates successful organisations from others is their management of technology and innovation. The authors focus on the strategic management of technology and innovation in established Lebanese firms and in different economic sectors. A total of 40 Lebanese companies that operate in the financial, manufacturing, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), food and software technology sectors were surveyed.

The second paper is titled 'Concepts and measurements of innovativeness: the case of information and communication technologies'. Its author, Khasawneh, defines consumer innovativeness as the degree to which an individual or another unit of adoption adopts new ideas relatively earlier than the other members of a system. He tries to take stock of this issue. In the first section of the paper, the different theoretical definitions of the notion are introduced in a critical way. The second section focuses on displaying the major measurement scales that have been designed with a view to measure this construct.

Mezher *et al.*, in the paper 'Entrepreneurship in Lebanon: a model for the successes and failures', state that entrepreneurs face different types of difficulties and operate in an unstable environment that is characterised by regional political chaos and local financial, legal, infrastructural, educational and cultural impediments. Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) are the heart of any country; they empower its economy, heighten its competitive position and alleviate its employment problems and, in general, constitute the majority of companies. Understanding the causes of the failures of SMEs is a prerequisite for the formulation of public policy and public and private programme assistance. The authors develop a statistical model for small business' failures and successes in Lebanon and to verify whether the failures are caused more by internal or external factors.

The paper 'Democracy's greatest challenge: the legal sources of an Islamic state' by Tavana explores the legal sources of a modern state as described in accordance with Islamic law (shari'a). The author uses two *fatwa* as a starting point to further expound on the nature of the state as described in two legal sources: the Qur'an or Islamic law as revealed to the prophet Muhammad and the Sunna, the record of Muhammad's teachings, sayings and life experiences. The paper will also examine one 'quasi-legal' source, the Constitution of Medina. Jurists developed Islamic law after the death of Muhammad and, as such, we will identify the early elements of the state as described by them. The paper identifies the institutions of a democratic Islamic state and the 'ideal' state, which became the focus of early Islamic philosophers.

The paper 'Global ethics in the light of Islamic political economy' by Choudhury suggests that a theory of Islamic political economy is deduced from the Qur'an. The Islamic political economy is shown to be an interactive, integrative and evolutionary system that endogenously combines moral attributes with knowledge formation. All of these are premised on the Episteme of the Oneness of God, bringing out its epistemological role in the construction of relations in world-systems. The attributes of knowledge formation in Islamic political economy are particularised to Mercy and Forgiveness combining into Love, Justice, Fairness and Compassion. These attributes are taken as the elements of global ethics in the light of Islamic political economy.

Haidar, in his paper 'Infrastructure privatisation sustainability: a multinational review of the five initiatives in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region', investigates the potential impact of privatisation on the financial performance of infrastructure State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) in the MENA region. It advances the privatisation literature in this region by considering the initiatives taken in Tunisia, Morocco, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Jordan, whereas the only five previously published studies about the economic impact of privatising SOEs in the MENA region focused mainly on Egypt. This case study introduces the current challenges in the MENA region and the possible solutions before briefly discussing the opinions of the supporters and opponents of SOEs' privatisation in MENA. Then it raises and answers the question 'What is the effect of privatisation on the financial performance of infrastructure SOEs in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region?' and focuses on five SOEs that were privatised during the period between 1988 and 2003.

The last paper of the special issue is 'Views on the globalisation of higher education' by Alfantooh and Bakry. Their paper is an elaboration on a Stanford University panel discussion entitled 'Looking ahead: governance and democracy', which is available on Stanford iTunes. In exploring the topic, the panel discussed ways and previous

experience concerned with driving less developed countries towards a better future. The panel discussion was useful and enjoyable and the speakers sounded highly sincere in their cause. Professor Collier suggested 'four instruments' for influencing development in these countries.

Finally, before closing this foreword to the special issue, we would like to invite all our colleagues who are interested in Arab issues and the knowledge society to attend an important event in 2008: The 1st Athens World Summit on The Knowledge Society, to be held in Athens, Greece, on 24–28 September 2008. There will be a mini-conference for these topics, as well as Best Paper Awards. For more details, go to <http://knowledge-summit.org>.