Editorial

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For decades, service sector has been pinpointed as a potential source of productivity improvement, but results have so far been mixed. As this sector is intervened all over the world through interaction of public and private sector actors, current economic slowdown (concerns consumer and private sectors) will affect service sector with a delay, even if we have increasingly older population in the entire world within two decades of time (which mostly grants the service sector existence). It should, however, be noted that constantly changing industrial structures (outsourcing decisions) enable service organisations to attract new business in the future as well (actually, these industrial service organisations have been least affected by the current crisis). Based on Solow's (1958) seminal work, productivity improvements are mostly funnelled through new technology implementation and use; we illustrate that this is the issue still in the service sector too. It could be argued that in the forthcoming decades, information technology is the factor that changes the landscape since it is already a mature technology field, and basically, the only one which has not yet been implemented in a wider scale.

As the research published in this volume illustrates, in the forthcoming years, we will see increasingly more applications of RFID not only in retailing (like empirical examples of *Ferreira* and *Azevedo* from Portugal and Spain as well as *So* and *Sun* from Hong Kong illustrate), but also in hospitalcare – motivation for this is not the plain vanilla applications, but systems, which will create true added value for the user(s). Second major theme in the manuscripts of this volume is the usage of simulation and quantitative modelling applications to increase service system productivity, whether it concerns industrial maintenance or transportation systems (reported in *Saranen's* international survey, *Lupo's* case research from Italy and *Hilletofth et al.'s* case study

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from Sweden). Interestingly, two manuscripts in this volume concern mobile phone technologies – adaptation to use more advanced services in international context (in this issue, concerning USA and Turkey, *Phan et al.*) as well as utilising mobile phone technology in elderly people services (concerning rapidly aging Finnish population, *Häikiö et al*.). Although this issue might bring first impression that service sector future regarding information technology use is hard technological solution alone, but research illustrates that it is increasingly people, and particularly, user-based issue. Firstly, research community and consultants need to make people and service sector aware of these potential technologies, and thereafter, not only implementing organisations (e.g., local hospital) are in need of learning how to apply these new technologies, but also end-users are in focal point in the process (e.g., in retailing, where added value services are produced by the retailers' system for the shopper). Not only implementation of technologies is an important part, but also a constant interaction with the customer base is the differentiator for the service providers in a phase, where little or no differentiation exists among offered products (as case study from Singapore by *Paguio* shows).

Last, but not the least, we would like to express our gratitude for the *authors*, *referees* and the *Int. Journal of Services Sciences*. Thanks to these three groups of professionals, we have enjoyed a high amount of submissions, received very good and constructive revision feedback for the authors, and we are now also able to publish these interesting results to a wider audience. We also do hope that this empirically oriented special issue will not only serve researchers alone, but be increasingly used by the public and private sector in the decision-making process of improving the service sector productivity and quality during forthcoming years.

References

Solow, R.M. (1958) 'Technical change and the aggregate production function', *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, Vol. 39, No. 3, pp.312–320.