Foreword

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Biographical notes: Justyna Przychodzen holds a Master's in Finance and Doctorate in Economics. Currently, she works as a freelancer and Business Consultant. For her extraordinary achievements in research, she has been granted by Sendzimir Foundation. She has been appointed Visiting Research Fellow at the Yale School of Management (USA). She has accepted invitation for visiting professorship at IAE Aix-en-Provence (France), Debrecen University (Hungary), School of Business Administration in Riga (Latvia) and Viterbo University (Italy). She is the author of articles and research papers on greening of industry, financial performance of eco-innovators and international environmental management.

Wojciech Przychodzen is currently a Post-Doctoral Researcher at the Deusto Business School. He taught courses in finance and economics area at numerous universities including Corvinus University in Budapest, Aix-Marseille Graduate School of Management, Turiba Business School and Neoma Business School. He is an author of articles and research papers on economic growth, post-socialist transformation, corporate sustainability, sustainable finance and relations between various aspects of CSR and financial performance.

Mark M. Davis is the co-author of two textbooks: *Operations Management: Integrating Manufacturing and Services* (McGraw-Hill/Irwin, 2005) and *Managing Services: Using Technology to Create Value* (McGraw-Hill/Irwin, 2003). He is the former President of the Decision Sciences Institute and former President of the POMS College of Service Operations. In 2000, he was named a Fellow in the Decision Sciences Institute. In 1998, he received Bentley University's Scholar of the Year Award. He has taught courses/workshops at numerous universities including Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration, Instituto de Empresa in Madrid, Groupe HEC in Paris, and Keio University in Tokyo.

Today, with the growing number of ecological challenges that can be linked to the rapid increase in the population of human beings and their behaviour, sustainable development and eco-innovations have become a major part of the public agenda around the globe. More and more consumers want businesses to not only provide eco-friendly products and services but also take the lead in addressing their environmental concerns. As a result, almost 95% of the 250 largest companies in the world now report on their corporate responsibility (CR) activities (KPMG, 2011). National governments are also starting to promote more intensively a balanced approach to business planning and development (Esty and Winston, 2006). Furthermore, an increasing number of shareowners are demanding that corporations develop long-term programmes that are both ecologically sustainable and profitable. Those public companies that comply with these demands will be rewarded with an increase in stock value and a reduction in the cost of capital. As a result, firms that pro-actively address sustainability issues will benefit through a greater likelihood of improved innovative and financial performance due to increased utilisation of inputs and improved product yields (Hart, 1995; Porter and Van der Linde, 1995; Przychodzen and Przychodzen, 2013).

In addition, employees want good and safe working conditions. The communities in which the firms operate also want them to be aware of the social impact of their activities and, in doing so, significantly reduce their possible negative impact on the local environment. Corporations are also being closely monitored by many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that are trying to pressure them into behaving in more socially responsible ways. Companies that ignore these environmental mandates will face the possible loss of their 'license to operate'.

This special issue of the *International Journal of Environmental Technology and Management* consists of a collection of the four best papers presented at the conference on 'Corporate sustainability and eco-innovations', which was held on November 18–19, 2013 at the premises of the Kozminski University in Warsaw. This conference brought together scholars from a variety of disciplinary and methodological perspectives. Their papers will, hopefully, provide a forum for both business people and academics to grapple with some of the most pressing environmental challenges facing businesses around the world, with the new horizons emerging from businesses that will satisfy a wide range of expectations that are focused on sustainable development and eco-innovation.

Gregor Radonjič, in his article 'Reliability of carbon footprint as a decision-making tool for product development – a critical review', discusses the role and significance, as well as advantages and disadvantages, of the carbon footprint (CF) concept. He concludes that although CF has become a popular way of comparing the relative environmental impacts of goods, services and industrial activities, this concept has many shortcomings. Among the most important of these are:

1 a variety of methodologies and lack of verification practices

2 an exclusion of other important environmental impacts such as: air pollution, water use, soil pollution and biodiversity

3 a lack of consistent and transparent boundaries which set constraints on the assessment and comparison of the CFs of different products

4 the energy mix of energy producing technologies may lead to different results for CF of the same products

5 a risk of losing interest in energy efficiency initiatives and programmes

6 a lack of consistent international regulations.

Nikodem Szumilo in his article explores the nature of the relationship between operating expenses and energy certification levels in US office buildings. His analysis is based on a sample of 3502 observations that was taken from panel data for 46,471 office properties in Chicago, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles and Orange County from 2007 to 2011. The results suggest there is a positive correlation between operating expenses and certification of buildings as well as energy certification. The author concludes that a profit maximising behaviour of users with high inherent demand for electricity and the technological challenges of implementation of energy efficient technologies are important factors in understanding its impact on operating expenses. He also recognises that the cost benefit expected from operating expenses may actually not materialise in business practice.

Anna Czarczynska in her paper analyses EU corporate social responsibility (CSR) regulations vs. practice in private and public sectors. Her research, which is based on an analysis of the literature as well as governmental and non-governmental reports and surveys, indicates that CSR implementation is most successful for those organisations that apply it voluntarily; when there are mandatory legal standards for all, CSR policies are simply turned into conventional social or environmental hard-law regulations. Voluntary CSR activities can also have a positive impact on firm-level competitiveness thereby creating additional value for the company but not necessarily in strictly financial terms. The author also suggests that the strongest positive impact of CSR on competitiveness exists in the areas of human resource and reputation management.

Bogna Janik and Marcin Bartkowiak in their article compare socially responsible indices of stock exchanges in Central and Eastern Europe. Their analysis focuses on sustainable companies that are included in the RESPECT (which was created by the Warsaw Stock Exchange), CEERIUS and VONIX (both of which were created by the Vienna Stock Exchange) indices. The comparison of profitability and effectiveness of the analysed indices was made using the Sharpe ratio as well as alternative risk measures such as lower partial moments [LPM and value at risk (VAR)]. The comparative analysis of the RESPECT, CEERIUS and VONIX indices showed only a significant advantage in profitability and effectiveness for the first one, which was the only index that was characterised by positive abnormal daily and weekly returns. The authors conclude that the composition of the RESPECT index, in which highly profitable companies dealing with raw materials that actually do not fulfil the global standards of environmental protection but were also qualified, may have a strong influence on above result.

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