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**Academic Journals' Performance:  
 Opportunities for Research Visibility**

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**Abstract**

*Researchers prefer to disseminate their work through high quality journals. For some, publishing in a prestigious journal might ensure a promotion or the international recognition they need in their career. However, in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region, such publishing options for Core Economics research are scarce. This paper investigates the performance of the Core Economics journals published by the CEE countries and identifies the main success factors in improving journal performance, by assessing these journals' experiences based on Journal Citation Reports (JCR) key indicators and Web of Science (WoS) paper citation data, as well as through information provided on the journals' websites. The key indicators analysis looked at the article influence score (AIS) evolution in the past five years (i.e., the 2016-2020 period), the impact factor (IF) for 2020, the total cites in 2020, the citable items published in 2020 (i.e., the number of articles and reviews published in 2020), and the rank based on the 2020 IF. Journals benefiting from (1) funding, (2) publishing at prestigious publishers, (3) inter-university partnerships, and (4) journal management and publishing software could potentially achieve higher performance.*

**Keywords:** academic journal, bibliometric, core economics, research visibility.

**JEL Classification:** A19, I29, O39.

**1. Introduction**

The scientific development of a country is partially defined by the number of papers it publishes in prestigious scholarly journals (Tonta & Akbulut, 2020).

The Thomson Reuters ISI Web of Science database is a leading high-quality database for evaluating the research performance of individual researchers and the quality of academic journals (Chang et al., 2011). Jurajda et al. (2017) compared the publication performance in more than 200 Web of Science (WoS) scientific disciplines for six of the post-communist European Union (EU) states with six

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similarly sized EU states, and concluded that, as of 2010-2014, the post-communist countries were still lagging behind, their research mainly focusing on quantity, rather than quality. Examining whether monetary support could increase journal performance metrics, Tonta and Akbulut (2020) discovered that although subsidies could slightly increase the number of citations, they are not effective in improving the citation impact of a journal. However, looking specifically at the Romanian journals, Pisoschi et al. (2020) showed that paper awarding programs and fiscal incentives, as well as a favourable institutional management and good researcher capabilities could lead to better bibliometric performance.

Studying the publication success of 102 countries, out of which ~50% are Western European and ~30% North American, Erfanmanesh et al. (2017) concluded that the scientific productivity of a country depends on the number of journals they have indexed in citation databases.

Academic journals are important research and knowledge disseminators, prominent journals being especially sought after by researchers. Still, as data manipulation is one of the greatest disadvantages of bibliometrics, some authors recommend combining bibliometrics with altmetrics (i.e., engagement metrics, beyond citations) as an alternative when assessing paper/journal impact (Karanatsiou et al., 2017). Other authors suggest that new ways of ranking academic journals should be implemented. For example, Rosenthal and Weiss (2017) created a model for ranking business journals from different Journal Citation Reports (JCR) categories, instead of focusing on only one field, and concluded that the business publication ranking lists should introduce new journals and exclude some others. Moreover, the COVID-19 experience sparked new trends in the research landscape (Science et al., 2020; Minciu et al., 2020; Maulana, 2020).

Journals are mainly assessed using a number of quantitative performance metrics. One of the most widely used indicators, the impact factor (IF), provides the average number of citations received by articles published in a particular journal in the past two years compared to the reference year. However, as the IF has its shortcomings in evaluating a journal's performance, other indices were introduced, such as the article influence score (AIS). The AIS formula integrates the Eigenfactor, and thus, it overcomes the limitations of the IF by removing self-citations, using five years instead of two years data, considering the quality of the citing journals and adjusting for the differences in citation patterns among disciplines. A value of AIS above 1.00 indicates an above average influence of the journal in its discipline (InCites, 2021).

The Romanian legislation requires higher education and research professionals to publish their work in academic journals with  $AIS > .15$ , as a prerequisite for promotion to university professor or scientific researcher I (Annex no. 27, 2016). However, considering the AIS calculated for 2020, only one Romanian academic journal in the Core Economics categories has an  $AIS > .15$  (JCR, 2021).

The paper investigates the performance of the Core Economics journals published by the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries and identifies the main success factors in improving journal performance, based on these journals' experiences.

International academic rankings are very important tools for assessment of university performance based on journals' visibility and classification (Q1 to Q4). The classification of the journals on the four categories (Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4) is based on the AIS and IF values published every year. An important factor for academic rankings (Shanghai Ranking) is the correspondence of the specialization with the journal category. In the Core Economics field, the most appreciated journals should be in the Q1 category according to AIS, in the management, business, economics or finance categories.

## **2. Methodology**

The objective of this research is to further develop an assessment model for journal classification and performance evaluation. This paper will particularly analyse the experience of the CEE countries in the region and set up some lessons for Romanian journals.

The investigation was divided into three steps.

Firstly, CEE journals' data was extracted from the Journals by Rank section of the Web of Science (WoS) InCites Journal Citation Reports (JCR) platform (JCR, 2021). The following search criteria were defined: (1) Categories: Core Economics (i.e., Business; Business, Finance; Economics; Management), (2) JCR year: 2020 (i.e., the newest scores available), (3) Edition: Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), Science Citation Index Expanded (SCIE), (4) Open access: not mandatory, (5) Category schema: Web of Science, (6) Countries: the CEE region (i.e., Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovenia, Slovak Republic), and (7) Impact Factor range, Average JIF percentile range, JIF Quartile, and Publisher: undefined.

Secondly, Web of Science citation data was exported for each journal and used for creating a citation network in VOSviewer.

Finally, the analysis was rounded through the publishing information available on the journals' websites.

## **3. Findings**

The search on the JCR platform returned 19 journals. The key indicators analysis looked at the AIS evolution in the past five years (i.e., the 2016-2020 period), the IF for 2020, the total cites in 2020, the citable items published in 2020 (i.e., the number of articles and reviews published in 2020), and the rank based on the 2020 IF.

Table 1 provides an overview of the 19 CEE journals, sorted in descending order by their 2020 AIS. The journal names were coded throughout the paper, in order to unbiasedly focus on their performance.

**Table 1. Overview of selected key indicators for the 19 CEE journals indexed in Core Economics, WoS. Table sorted in descending order of the 2020 AIS**

Journal	Country	AIS*					2020 IF	Total cites in 2020	Citable items pub. in 2020	Rank **	
		2016	2017	2018	2019	2020					
1	JC1	Czech Rep.	AIS not available for 2016-2019				0.502	4.725	849	40	Q1 Ec Q2 B Q2 M
2	JL1	Lithuania	0.507	0.442	0.457	0.352	0.498	3.970	2213	62	Q1 Ec
3	JL2	Lithuania	0.189	0.174	0.183	0.190	0.361	2.028	1579	84	Q2 Ec Q4 B
4	JL3	Lithuania	0.150	0.221	0.186	0.182	0.322	2.093	769	33	Q4 M
5	JP1	Poland	AIS not available for 2016-2019				0.305	4.274	476	32	Q1 Ec
6	JLa	Latvia	0.099	0.110	0.150	0.194	0.286	2.150	133	10	Q2 Ec
7	JC2	Czech Rep.	0.115	0.067	0.095	0.112	0.204	1.711	792	58	Q3 Ec
8	JL4	Lithuania	0.097	0.092	0.086	0.088	0.181	1.292	765	50	Q3 Ec
9	JL5	Lithuania	0.043	0.085	0.056	0.070	0.171	1.725	668	32	Q3 Ec Q4 B
10	JR1	Romania	0.049	0.062	0.060	0.057	0.169	1.983	768	72	Q2 Ec Q4 B Q4 M
11	JC3	Czech Rep.	0.067	0.090	0.070	0.086	0.164	1.446	551	55	Q3 Ec Q4 M
12	JHu	Hungary	0.048	0.049	0.057	0.052	0.153	0.875	275	37	Q4 Ec
13	JR2	Romania	0.039	0.093	0.100	0.100	0.143	0.885	464	76	Q4 Ec
14	JR3	Romania	0.038	0.025	0.051	0.070	0.133	0.831	346	40	Q4 Ec
15	JC4	Czech Rep.	0.108	0.086	0.088	0.100	0.126	0.481	308	35	Q4 Ec
16	JC5	Czech Rep.	0.133	0.123	0.084	0.099	0.124	0.792	268	20	Q4 B, Fin
17	JSv	Slovak Rep	0.043	0.031	0.045	0.065	0.093	0.690	309	53	Q4 Ec
18	JC6	Czech Rep.	0.053	0.043	0.038	0.035	0.074	0.319	172	29	Q4 Ec
19	JP2	Poland	0.047	0.025	0.020	0.030	0.071	0.368	94	27	Q4 Ec

\* Green shading => AIS > .15

\*\* Rank by JCR IF; Ec=Economics; B=Business; B, Fin= Business, Finance; M=Management

Source: Selected InCites JCR data.

It can be observed that out of the ten CEE countries, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Estonia do not have any journals indexed in the Core Economics categories of WoS, in the SSCI or SCIE indexes.

Out of the 19 CEE journals returned by the search, 12 had an AIS >.15 in 2020, and only three out of them consistently did so in the past four-five years (these three journals are all Lithuanian).

The Czech “JC1” and the Polish “JP1” got their first AIS score in 2020, as their WoS data did not cover five years until then. Both journals also had high IF scores

compared to the other journals in Table 1, and are ranked as Q1 or Q2 in their respective Core Economics categories.

The 19 journals have an average 2020 AIS of .214, an average 2020 IF of 1.717, average total cites in 2020 = 621, and an average of 45 citable items published in 2020 (i.e., articles and reviews), as presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the 19 CEE journals indexed in WoS, the Core Economics categories**

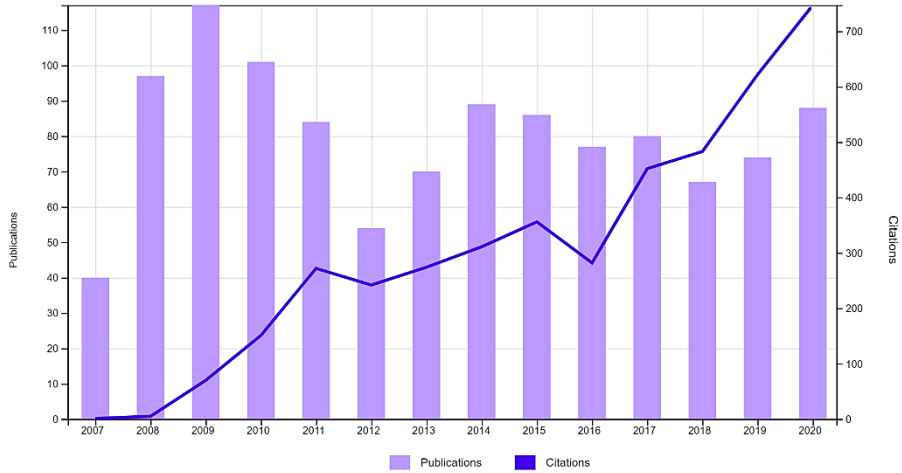
	N	Min.	Max.	Mean
AIS (2020)	19	.071	.502	.214
2020 IF	19	.319	4.725	1.717
Total cites in 2020	19	94	2213	621
Citable items pub. in 2020	19	10	84	45

Source: SPSS analysis of InCites JCR data.

The analysis was expanded by consulting the WoS citation data on the 19 CEE journals for all years available (i.e., the 1975 - July 2021 period). The search returned 16,334 papers (i.e., articles, review articles and proceedings papers) published by the 19 journals as part of the Core Economics categories. A number of 11,222 papers are written in English.

Out of the total 16,334 papers, 16 papers are considered highly cited at the end of July 2021, having 1,436 citations total (excluding self-citations), with an average of 101 citations per paper and *h*-index = 15. The authors of these papers come from the People’s Republic of China, Lithuania, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Iran, Montenegro and the USA. A number of 13 out of the 16 highly cited papers were published in “JL1”, while “JL2”, “JR2” and “JL5” have each published one of these papers. The highly cited paper (cited 134 times) published in 2016 in the Romanian journal “JR2” was written by authors with affiliation to Vilnius Gediminas Technical University – Lithuania and Allameh Tabataba’i University – Iran. Two of this paper’s authors also published the highest cited paper in the whole set of 16,334 papers, cited 390 times since it was published in “JL1” in 2011.

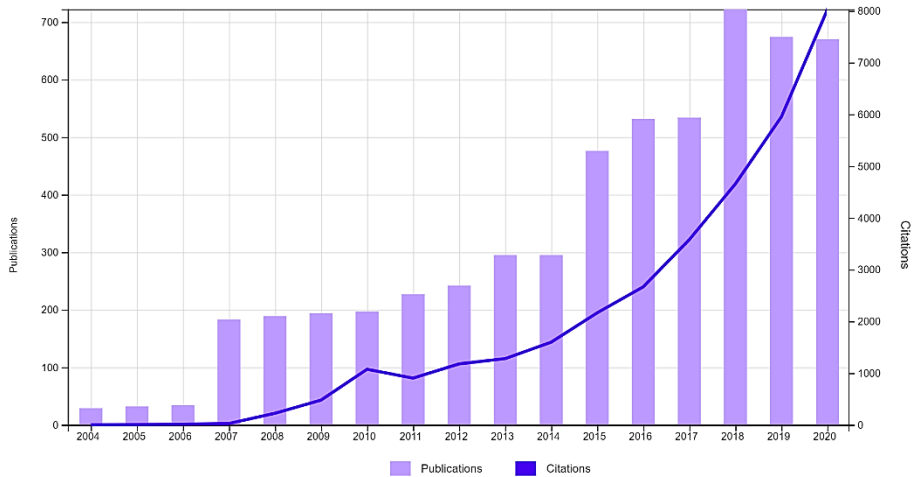
Looking at the full set of 16,334 papers, authors with affiliation to the Bucharest University of Economic Studies have published the highest number of papers (i.e., 1,171 papers, ~ 7.17% out of 16,334), followed by the Czech Academy of Sciences with 867 papers (~ 5.31%). The papers with Bucharest University of Economic Studies affiliation have an average of 3.97 citations per item, with *h*-index=22, a visual representation of their citation evolution being available in Figure 1. The highest cited paper out of them has 80 citations (as of the end of July 2021) and was published in “JR1” in 2010.



**Figure 1. Citation evolution of the papers with Bucharest University of Economic Studies affiliation indexed in WoS, the Core Economics categories**

Source: WoS, 2021.

The citation evolution of all the open access papers (5,836 papers out of 16,334) is available in Figure 2.



**Figure 2. Citation evolution of the open access papers published by the 19 CEE academic journals indexed in WoS, the Core Economics categories**

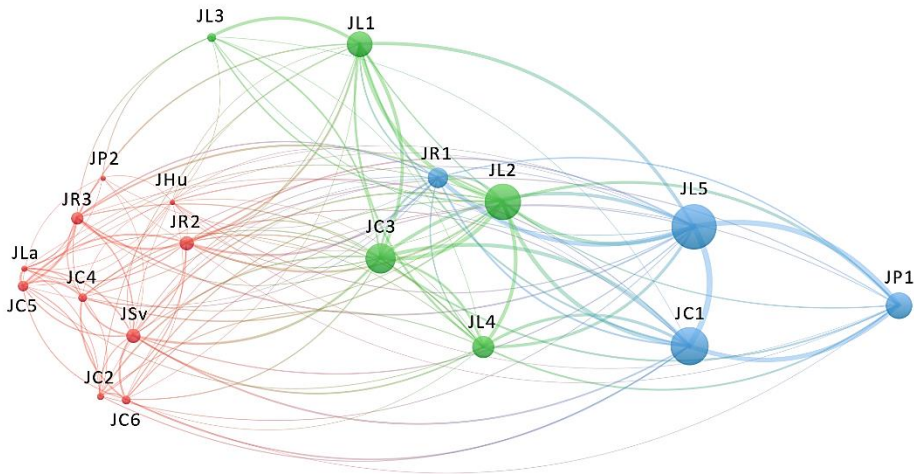
Source: WoS, 2021.

As for the number of papers published by each journal, “JSv” published the most papers (i.e., 2,734), followed by “JC6” with 2,701. The Romanian journals “JR2”, “JR1” and “JR3” are on the 5<sup>th</sup> (943 papers), 6<sup>th</sup> (897 papers) and 12<sup>th</sup> (657 papers) places, respectively.

The “Slovak Academic Press Ltd” has published the most papers (i.e., 2,792, ~16.% out of 16,334). These papers have an average of 1.36 citations per item,  $h$ -index = 18. They are followed by “Vilnius Gediminas Tech Univ”, which has published 1,955 papers (i.e., ~12% out of 16,334) having 12.32 average citations per item,  $h$ -index = 58.

The top three funding agencies based on the number of financed papers are: “National Natural Science Foundation of China – NSFC” (with ~1.61% out of 16,334 papers), “Grant Agency of the Czech Republic” (~0.96%) and “European Commission” (~0.8%), as of the end of July 2021. These papers have an average of 6.23 citations per item,  $h$ -index = 26.

A citation network of the journals was created in VOSviewer based on the citation activity of the 19 journals in the past five years (i.e., 2016-2020, with 4,462 paper records for the period), as available in Figure 3.



**Figure 3. Citation network of the 19 CEE academic journals indexed in WoS, the Core Economics categories, for the 2016-2020 period**

*Source: VOSviewer analysis of WoS data, 2021.*

Each circle in *Figure 3* represents one of the 19 CEE journals. The circle size represents the total link strength of the journal (i.e., the total number of times their papers published in the period were citing/being cited by the other journals in the network). The distance between the journals and the clustering show their relatedness. A thicker line between two journals represents a higher number of citations between their papers.

One of the Lithuanian journals, JL5, has the highest total link strength for 2016-2020, its 448 papers published in the period citing/being cited 417 times in 17 out of the other 18 CEE journals. The Romanian journals had total link strengths of:

96 (with 14 links and 371 papers published in the period), 154 (16 links, 317 papers), and 83 (13 links, 203 papers).

Some of the 19 CEE journals are self-published and work as revenue generators for their institutions. For example, “JL1” is owned and published by Vilnius Gediminas Technical University and is publishing open source under a fee of 45EUR/page + 21%VAT rate. For an article of approximately 23 pages, as of the 2019 information provided by the journal, the authors, or their funding institutions, have to pay 1,253 EUR. According to the JCR data provided in Table 1, “JL1” published 62 articles in 2020, attracting revenues of approximately 77,686 EUR with VAT, if the papers had ~23 pages. More details on the publishing aspects of the journals are available in Table 3. With the exception of “JL5”, all journals are (or have the option for) open access, as of May 2021 information published on their websites.

**Table 3. Publishing information for the 19 CEE journals indexed in WoS, the Core Economics categories**

	Journal	Institution	Publisher	Fees (2021)
1	JC1	Tomas Bata University in Zlín	Tomas Bata University in Zlín	450 EUR/art + VAT for publishing
2	JL1	Vilnius Gediminas Technical University	Vilnius Gediminas Technical University	45 EUR/page + VAT 21%
3	JL2	Vilnius Gediminas Technical University	Vilnius Tech Press (2003–). Co-published with Taylor & Francis in 2011–2017.	60 EUR/page + VAT 21%
4	JL3	Vilnius Gediminas Technical University	Vilnius Gediminas Technical University (1997–). Co-published with Taylor & Francis (2011–2017).	60 EUR/page + VAT 21%
5	JP1	Institute of Economic Research (Poland) and Polish Economic Society, in collaboration with universities in the Czech Republic, Romania („Constantin Brâncuși” University in Târgu Jiu), Hungary, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Spain, Slovak Republic and Lithuania	Institute of Economic Research (Poland)	40 EUR/art for submission, and 500 EUR/art for publishing
6	JLa	Stockholm School of Economics in Riga, and the Baltic International Centre for Economic Policy Studies	Taylor&Francis and Routledge	-
7	JC2	Czech Academy of Agricultural Sciences	Czech Academy of Agricultural Sciences	320 EUR/art + VAT
8	JL4	Kaunas University of Technology	Kaunas University of Technology	322.31 EUR/art + VAT 21%
9	JL5	Vilnius University (Lithuania), Brno University of Technology (Czech Republic), University of Latvia (Latvia)	Vilnius University (Lithuania), Brno University of Technology (Czech Republic), University of Latvia (Latvia)	-



	Journal	Institution	Publisher	Fees (2021)
10	JR1	Bucharest University of Economic Studies	ASE Publishing House	-
11	JC3	Technická univerzita v Liberci Studentská 2	Technická univerzita v Liberci Studentská 2 and Wolters Kluwer	100 EUR (incl. VAT) for review + 500 EUR (incl. VAT) for publishing
12	JHu	Hungarian Academy of Sciences	Hungarian Academy of Sciences	749 EUR/article + VAT for open access
13	JR2	Bucharest University of Economic Studies	ASE Publishing House	-
14	JR3	Institute for Economic Forecasting	Institute for Economic Forecasting	-
15	JC4	Prague University of Economics and Business	Prague University of Economics and Business	60 EUR submission fee
16	JC5	Charles University	Charles University	-
17	JSv	Institute of Economics of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, and the Institute of Forecasting of the Slovak Academy of Sciences of the Slovak Republic	Institute of Economics of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, and the Institute of Forecasting of the Slovak Academy of Sciences of the Slovak Republic	-
18	JC6	University of Economics in Prague	University of Economics in Prague	-
19	JP2	Worclaw Univeristy of Economics and Business	Worclaw Univeristy of Economics and Business	100 EUR/art + VAT 23% for submission, and 200 EUR/art + VAT 23% for publishing

\* Table sorted in descending order of the 2020 AIS.

Source: Authors' analysis as of May 2021 information published on the journals' websites.

### 3.1. Lessons from the Best Performers and Successful Partnerships

Table 4 offers an overview of the partnerships the 16 foreign academic journals have, along with information on their funding and their use of article management systems. Academic journals benefiting from (1) funding, (2) publishing at prestigious publishers, (3) inter-university partnerships, and (4) journal management and publishing software could potentially achieve a higher AIS and better positions in the academia preferences for publishing.

**Table 4. Partnerships, funding and article management systems of the 16 foreign CEE journals indexed in WoS, the Core Economics categories**

	Journal	Partnerships	Funding	Article management sys.
1	JC1	Has partnerships with nine European universities and a Vietnamese university.	<i>unspecified</i>	Uses Open Journal Systems 3.3.0.3 for journal management and publishing.  The author(s) is/are required to provide an editing certificate from a reputable publisher, certifying that the manuscript has received proofreading.

	Journal	Partnerships	Funding	Article management sys.
2	JP1	Has partnerships with several universities and institutions in Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania ("Constantin Brâncuși" University of Târgu-Jiu), Hungary, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Spain, the Slovak Republic and Lithuania.	<i>unspecified</i>	Submitting articles for review is performed through a form available on the journal's website.
3	JL1, JL2, JL3	The three Lithuanian journals, which consistently had an AIS > .15 in the past four-five years, have been published by (or in collaboration with) Taylor & Francis.	JL1 had its publishing fees partially covered by the "Publication and Coordination of Scientific Periodicals, 2016–2019" (Code No. 09.3.3-ESFA-V-711-01-0004, No. PML-2016/03) project in the 2016-2019 period (JL1, 2021a). The project was implemented by the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences in partnership with the Vilnius Gediminas Technical University and other Lithuanian institutions, and had a budget of more than 2 million EUR, funding 22 publications, six of which being in the Social Sciences.	These journals use the ScholarOne platform for uploading and managing articles.
4	JLa	<i>unspecified</i>	The journal does not charge taxes. The article publication is supported by the Bank of Latvia, the Bank of Lithuania and the Bank of Estonia.	The Taylor & Francis platform is used for loading and managing articles.
5	JC2	<i>unspecified</i>	Funded by the Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic.	It uses a platform to centralize received items.
6	JC4, JC6	<i>unspecified</i>	Sponsored by the Czech National Bank, Česká spořitelna Bank (Erste Group), and Komerční banka (Société Générale).	Articles are uploaded through their websites.
7	JC3	Has partnerships with nine universities in the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic.	<i>unspecified</i>	Uses its own platform to centralize articles.
8	JP2	<i>unspecified</i>	Receives funding from the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education.	Is uses the Worclaw University of Economics and Business' portal for article submission.
9	JHu, Jsv, JL4, JC5	<i>unspecified</i>	<i>unspecified</i>	Article submission is performed through their websites or e-mail.

Source: Authors' analysis as of May 2021 information published on the journals' websites.

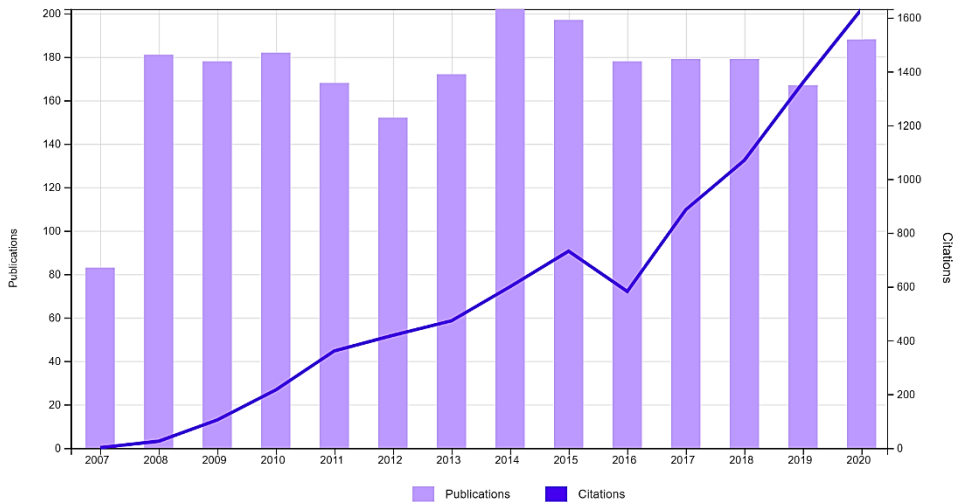
### 3.2. Romania’s Core Economics Academic Journals’ Experience

The Romanian journals indexed in WoS, Core Economics, are published by the institutions they belong to and do not charge fees. The manuscripts are either submitted through a form or e-mail. They have a number of issues per year and are also outlets for papers presented in some international conferences.

The Romanian journals do not provide information on their websites regarding any external funding or inter-university partnerships they might have. Based on WoS data accessed at the end of July 2021, the top three funding agencies for the Romanian Core Economics journals, considering the number of financed papers, are: “National Natural Science Foundation of China – NSFC” (~2.2% out of the 2,497 papers), “National Council for Scientific Research – CNCS” (~1.2%) and “European Social Fund through Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development” (~1.08%).

All of the Romanian Core Economics journals had in 2020 their highest AIS for the past five years, according to JCR (2021) data. “JR1” is the only Romanian Core Economics journal with a 2020 AIS > .15.

As of the end of July 2021, these journals have published 2,497 articles, review articles and proceedings papers since 2007, ~60.2% having Romanian affiliation, and 98% being written in English. The 2,497 papers received 7,632 citations (excluding self-citations), with an average of 3.72 citations per item, *h*-index = 29. The citation evolution is presented in Figure 4.



**Figure 4. Citation evolution of the papers published by the Romanian academic journals indexed in WoS, the Core Economics categories**

Source: WoS, 2021.

## 4. Conclusions

The perceived research performance of individual researchers is very important for hiring, firing, tenure and promotion decisions (Chang et al., 2011). Thus the journal evaluation should be analysed according to the academic criteria for evaluation, selection, and promotion in different countries.

The experience of the CEE countries showed that academic journals benefiting from (1) funding, (2) publishing at prestigious publishers, (3) inter-university partnerships, and (4) journal management and publishing software could potentially achieve a higher AIS and better positions in the academia preferences for publishing.

It should be noted that a fast-growing journal could have a temporary decline in its AIS, as its papers might need more time to be cited, while journals that choose to publish fewer papers could have an artificial increase in their AIS.

Country wise, the research showed that Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Poland and Latvia had the best AIS results for their WoS Core Economics journals in the 2016-2020 period, compared to the other CEE countries.

The study is limited by using only WoS key indicators and analysing the citation network based only on the relationships between the 19 journals. Further research could investigate more indicators, data from other databases, the 19 journals' relationships with other journals, or focus on the trends in their papers' themes or affiliations in correlation with their citing performance.

The investment in the journal international visibility through partnerships with recognized academic publishers, digital submission platforms would provide a preliminary status for attracting high quality papers and citations for better positioning in the journal classifications.

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