

**BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS REGARDING THE PHENOMENON OF ECONOMIC
CRIME BETWEEN 1975 AND 2022****Marius-Sorin CIUBOTARIU***Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava, 720229, Romania*
marius.ciubotariu@usm.ro**Adina-Cosmina RACOLCIUC***Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava, 720229, Romania*
adinaracolciuc6@gmail.com**Abstract**

Economic crime is an evolving problem, adapting to the most modern dimensions and forms in a society marked by connectivity and dynamism. This paradigm shift in the global economy brings with it both undeniable benefits and significant challenges. National economies and businesses are becoming more exposed to new threats as technological innovation advances and global communication becomes vital, putting them in an unstable position. Therefore, neither traditional nor geographical boundaries apply to the phenomenon of economic crime. On the contrary, it has become a significant problem with devastating consequences for institutional integrity, market stability and sustainable development. Since the study can no longer be limited to the analysis of individual events, it is necessary to analyse the links between technology, economics, law and human behaviour. This requires an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of economic crime. In order to better understand issues related to economic crime and to address present and future challenges, we aim to identify and map key existing areas of economic crime research, as well as to highlight developments and trends in studies over a long period of time, from 1975 to 2022.

Keywords: *criminal aspects; criminal behaviour; corporate crime; economic crime; economic crime; psychological influences; white collar crime.*

JEL Classification: M40.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since ancient times, offences associated with "white-collar crime" have been a persistent problem that has affected national and international economies for decades, the effects of which are still felt today. White-collar crime has been and is an extremely complex form of crime found in contemporary society, and requires careful consideration of the context in which it takes place, as these actions damage society and businesses worldwide. This phenomenon is mainly the result of economic globalisation and the increasing development of technology, which have opened up new horizons for communication, international mobility and the transfer of capital, and encouraged the barrier-free conduct of transactions of all kinds. Globalisation has enabled interconnections between national economies and simplified international financial flows. This development has been beneficial for the global economic environment, but it has also brought with it significant challenges in the fight against economic crime (Grabosky, 2009). Economic criminals have thus identified new ways to use this expanded framework to take advantage of the benefits conferred by the international financial system to carry out illegal activities such as various types of fraud, corruption or money laundering. In addition, it has also taken advantage of the fact that the legislation governing the conduct of these activities has undergone changes that have become difficult to trace, giving criminals the opportunity to exploit legal loopholes to their advantage. The diversification of economic crime has also been accentuated by the development of stock exchanges and financial markets, leading to insider trading and market manipulation.

In this context, the main aim of the research is to comprehensively review the scientific terms used in the economic crime literature in order to provide a detailed and up-to-date overview of this field of study. In addition, as an objective, we aim to identify and analyze which are the most explored and researched areas related to economic crime, using the Web of Science database as a reference source. In order to achieve this objective, the VOSviewer software will be used to perform a bibliometric analysis that will make a correlation between relevant scientific articles related to the study of economic crime and identify keywords, themes and research directions and the interconnections existing between them. By means of bibliometric maps, we will be able to gain a deeper understanding of the evolution of research trends in the field of economic crime, identifying areas of significant impact in the field. Therefore, through this method, we will be able to obtain valuable information that will provide us with a comprehensive perspective on promising research directions and on the future evolution of concepts and terminology used within the concept of economic crime.

Therefore, the results of the carried out bibliometric analysis will contribute significantly to the further understanding and approach of the phenomenon of economic crime from a rigorous scientific perspective.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Economic crime has gained the interest of researchers in the last two decades due to the complexity of the actions undertaken and the negative effects on the economic development of states and businesses. It has gradually emerged and expanded over the years, but interest in the subject developed mainly at the beginning of the 20th century as a response to negative public reactions (Bissengal et al., 2017). Research in this area also began to intensify in the mid-20th century as a result of the diversification of economic crime and the authorities' concern to maintain economic stability and public trust in existing economic systems. For this reason, the term 'economic-financial crime' was brought into discussion to establish the importance of the link between criminal behaviour and socio-economic factors (Bonger, 1916).

In the early decades of the 20th century, Sutherland (1940) laid the groundwork for analysing the links between the socio-economic environment and economic crime and he also introduced the concept of 'white-collar crime', through which he was able to highlight the fact that individuals with high social and economic positions and considerable prestige in society are often involved in economic crime, often without being detected and punished. Subsequently, this concept has undergone significant changes in terminology and the meaning it refers to, thus becoming synonymous with corporate crime (Markina et al., 2021), which is primarily motivated by obtaining economic benefit without incurring much tax implications. Starting from this basis, the author (Edelhertz & Overcast, 1982), was able to expand the scope of the concept of economic crime, and include other more complex forms of this term, such as: card fraud, cybercrime, accounting misrepresentations, tax evasion, money laundering, falsification of company accounts and fraudulent investments. After this initial research phase, which involved a large number of authors, the study of economic crime has continued to be an area of great interest to many other researchers, institutions and universities who have sought to analyse and make further contributions to the development and wider understanding of this phenomenon. Of these authors, of particular note are García-Rojo et al., (2023), as well as Ragatz et al., (2012), who, through their studies, have brought an innovative perspective to the profiling of economic offenders in terms of mental and motivational aspects. And, through their research, they have thus succeeded in highlighting the fact that, in most cases, psychological influences underlie the predispositions and motivations that lead to the commission of these crimes.

Therefore, the desire to acquire a higher standard of living or to conform to social norms has also been amplified by the globalisation of the economy and technological revolutions that have led to the crystallisation of new opportunities for economic crime. And to better present these issues, the term 'financial crime' has been introduced into the literature and used to describe illegal actions aimed at acquiring financial advantage, particularly involving fraud and abuse in markets. This period has been considered as the stage that generated the onset of cyber economic crime, by virtue of the technological advances that have occurred globally (Nelken, 2010). Since this time, cyber attacks and money laundering on online platforms have become considerable phenomena, leading to the disruption of the entire economic and financial structure of national and international societies as they have led to the undermining of public confidence in financial systems, damaged the stability of institutions and compromised the integrity of data and transactions (Lagazio et al., 2014). Based on the above-mentioned issues, authors and authorities have subsequently tried to focus their attention on analysing in detail the particular aspects of economic crime and investigating the spill-over impact on economic development and on the information and reports submitted by companies to various users. In this respect, on the basis of various studies carried out by certain authors, it has been concluded that the development of a modern economy is mainly affected by the commission of economic crimes such as tax fraud, corruption and tax evasion. By the simple fact that these actions involve manipulation of the quantity and quality of information presented by individuals, businesses and public institutions in financial reporting (Ciubotariu, 2013), they also threaten the transparency of commercial relations and transactions between various parties and stakeholders, the efficiency and effectiveness of justice in the enforcement of legislation and the resolution of conflicts.

Therefore, despite the conceptual complexity and diversity highlighted above, economic crime is a term relevant to all businesses and has been used in recent years by domestic and international official agencies and organizations (FBI, Financial Conduct Authority, IMF) to analyze behaviors that have an inherent commercial dimension, where "conventional usage" suggests that financial crimes include fraud, insider trading, money laundering, and other forms of corporate misconduct for profit (Levi, 2011). By contrast, in the academic literature, economic crime has often been associated with the related term "financial crime" which refers mainly to "property crime involving the illegal conversion of property belonging to another for one's own use and benefit" (Drabineac, 2020). Financial crime, therefore, has subsequently been defined as "profit-driven crime to gain access to and control over property belonging to another" (Gottschalk, 2010). In another view, it has been argued that it refers to the use of deception for illegal gain, which normally involves a breach of trust and some concealment of the true nature of the activities" (Pickett & Pickett, 2002). It can therefore be said that the phenomenon of economic

crime has, over the years, seen successive conceptual approaches to the terminology used to define and express the aspects covered by this phenomenon, which have provoked a number of debates and controversies. This subject has been analysed over a long period of time in different parts of the world in order to arrive at a comprehensive and overall picture, and to this end, numerous studies and articles have been published in the literature, combining several fields of research and directions of study which we propose to identify through bibliometric analysis, the results of which will be presented below.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Based on the idea that bibliometrics represents a statistical processing that deals with the measurement and quantitative analysis of academic literature, scientific publications and research papers, which allows the identification of the most influential publications in a given field of study, we conducted a bibliometric analysis with the aim of identifying the main research directions addressed by researchers on the phenomenon of economic-financial crime, whereby we highlighted the most common themes and keywords in this field. On this basis we grouped terms into clusters, which we then presented according to the frequency with which they appear in the literature. The main objective behind this analysis was to quantify the current level of knowledge about the research identified in existing scientific articles on the Web of Science (WoS) platform and based on the extracted data we found that it includes over 1423 journals, articles, books, patents and datasets related to economic crime. As an operational objective, the aim is to obtain term networks and citation maps that will result from the use of VOSviewer software, which will be applied to studies addressing the phenomenon of economic crime selected from the Web of Science. As for the actual methodology of the bibliometric analysis, it involved searching and querying the data, pre-processing them, extracting them, generating the network, analysing and visualising them in the form of maps, according to the steps described by Cobo et al. (2011), whose search protocol was configured according to the steps shown in the figure below:

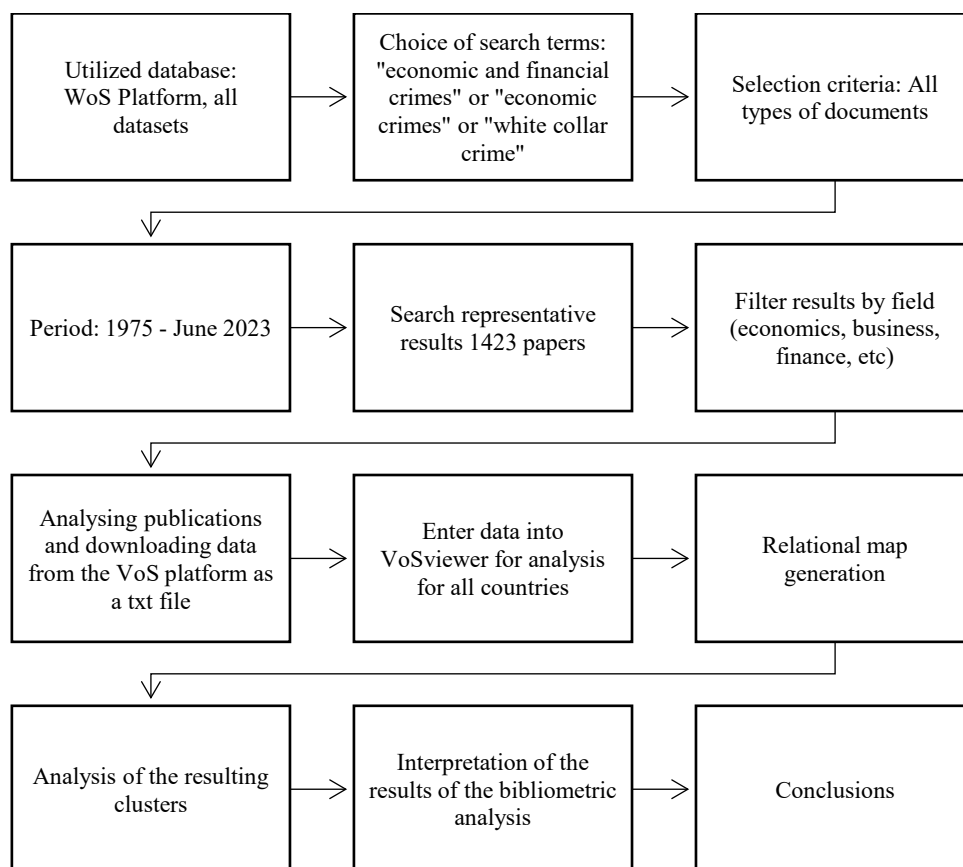


Figure 1. Stages of bibliometric analysis
Source: own design based on ISI WoS

Following the queries on the Web of Science platform, we note that the results of the bibliometric research reveal a total of 1423 papers, structured into 942 articles, 102 book reviews, 98 proceedings and papers, 113 book chapters and 257 papers in the form of books, editorial materials and reviews. This situation of papers was obtained by eliminating areas of research irrelevant to the topic under analysis. Therefore, by examining the literature we

are able to show that the works on economic crime cover a wide range of research fields, such as criminology, law, sociology, economics, business, finance, management, psychology and political science, etc., which suggests that a multidisciplinary theoretical and methodological approach is necessary to achieve a comprehensive analysis and a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under discussion.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Economic crime is a global problem that has become increasingly prevalent in recent years and has affected the economies of countries around the world, as existing circumstances, such as economic crises and legislative changes over the years, have put pressure on society and businesses and made it easier for economic crime to flourish. The scientific research in this field has experienced an oscillating trend at the beginning of the analysed period, but has increased significantly in recent years as a result of the intensification of interest in preventing and halting this harmful phenomenon, which can be seen from the bibliometric analysis whose results were obtained from queries on the Web of Science platform.

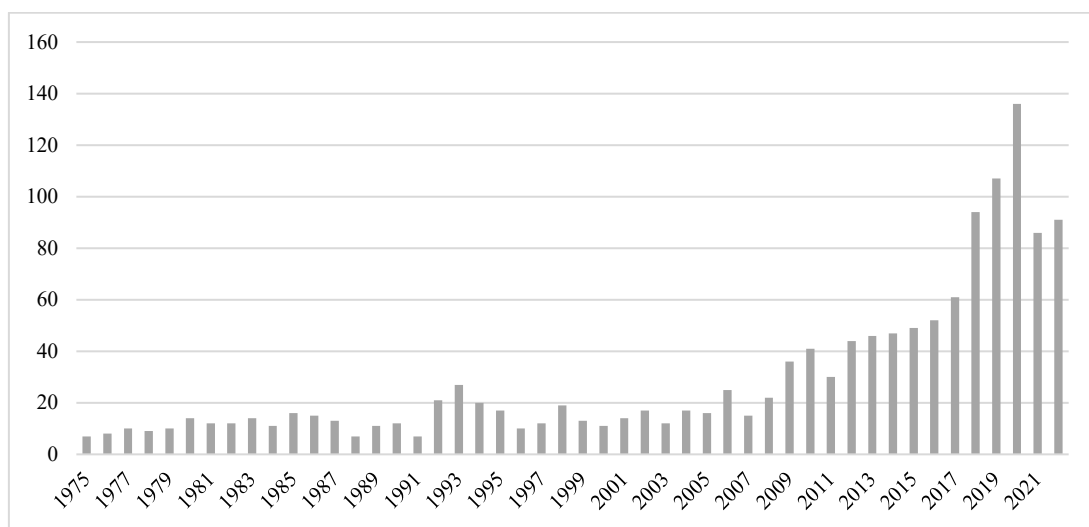


Figure 2. Evolution of the number of papers published between 1972-2022

Source: Own processing based on data extracted from Web of Science

From the figure 2 above we can see that the number of articles published in the period 1975-1990 was very low, ranging from 7 to 16 papers per year, which is mainly due to the low level of knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of economic crime existing in that period, marked in most countries by the communist system that was in power. On the other hand, the year 1989 represents a turning point in the evolution of research, because with the fall of communism in 1989, there was a significant change in interest in economic crime and an increase in the number of articles published. During this period, researchers and major universities began to pay more attention to this area of research, taking a keen interest in analysing this phenomenon in order to highlight and understand the underlying causes of these crimes. Another important moment in the upward evolution of economic crime research is the 2000s, as during this period, authorities became more aware of the complexity and the damaging impact of these types of crime on society and the economy itself.

After a period of relative stability, since 2017, the number of papers published on the Web of Science platform has increased remarkably, reaching 84 articles. Also, in 2019 and 2020 the research in the field of economic crime reached impressive figures of 90 papers and 121 articles respectively as a result of the diversification of forms of crime and the acceleration of the process of digitization of activities. However, in 2021 and 2022, the development of papers has seen a decrease in the number of papers, which indicates to us a change in trends and priorities in research in the field. Many researchers have focused their attention more on analysing the effects of health and energy crises and military conflicts, and because of this economic crime research has regressed. According to the information presented above, we can state that the field of economic crime research is a growing one, and most authors and researchers are actively focusing their attention on understanding and solving the problems associated with economic crime. For this reason, the study also involved a presentation of the geographical distribution of existing works, which facilitated us to obtain a mapping of the trends and preferences of writers for the development of knowledge in the field of economic crime according to the regions in which they are located.

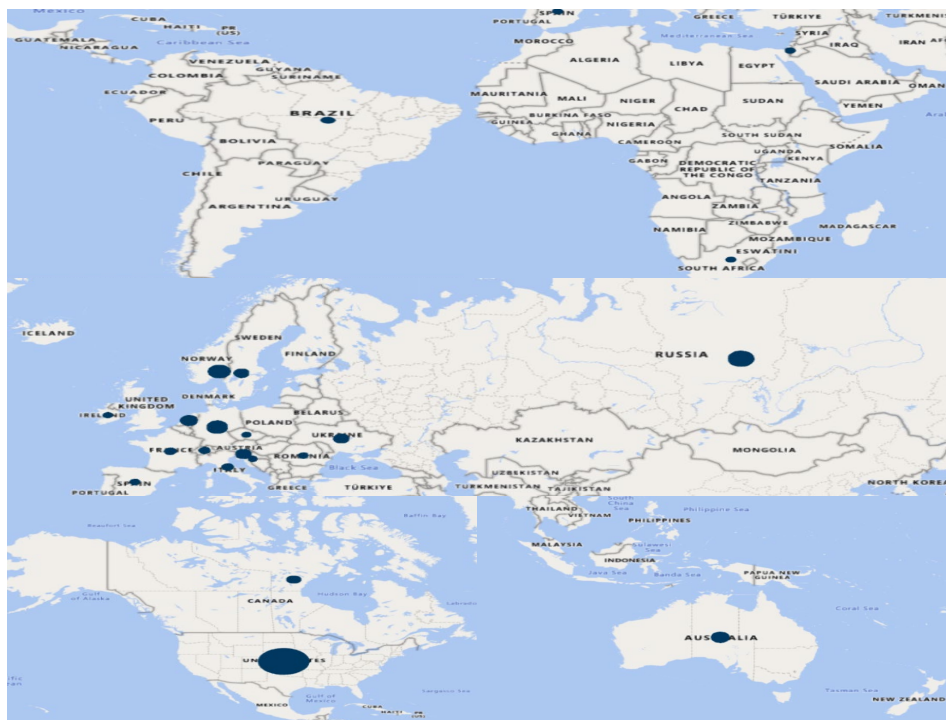


Figure 3. Countries/regions most concerned with economic crime research

Source: Own processing based on data extracted from Web of Science

From Figure 3, we see that there is a very interesting and uneven distribution of studies on economic crime by nation. The United States of America ranks first internationally with a substantial 463 published papers, which is primarily due to the economic dimension and the R&D infrastructure that encourages researchers to focus on economic crime analysis in support of the major authorities. On the other hand, the United Kingdom (75 papers), Russia (56 papers) and Germany (42 papers) occupy important positions due to their important roles in international financial markets and considerable economic history. In contrast to these countries, Romania, ranked 15th globally with 12 published papers, stands out in the field of economic crime studies with a relatively small presence. This could be justified by the fact that it receives little funding for research, the focus of studies is on other areas or there is little awareness of the importance of economic crime investigation. However, as more resources are allocated to this area or through partnerships between researchers and major institutions in this field, this presence could become more pronounced in the future. From our analysis of the distribution of papers by region, we have been able to see that interest in economic crime is influenced, in particular, by the level of development of countries and the way in which research and development budgets are allocated. However, in order to gain an overview of this issue, we also need to carry out an analysis of the research areas specific to each region in order to identify the topics and sub-areas that have captured the attention of researchers in the study of economic crime. Through this analysis we also hope to identify how different academic disciplines have been used to analyse and investigate different perspectives on this global issue.

According to the figure 4, we can state that interdisciplinary approaches to economic crime are presented in a complicated and illustrative manner across different fields of study. With a total of 559 research publications, Criminology and Penology are the most common fields of study of economic crime, marking the significant interest in the criminal and penal aspects of the studied phenomenon. With a total of 133 research papers, the legal sector represented by Law, ranks second in the investigation of economic crime, and highlights the major importance of legal analysis in the context of economic crime and its countermeasures. Another area that broadly highlights some important aspects of economic crime is Sociology, with a number of only 94 publications, creating an essential framework for understanding the social and behavioural aspects underlying the nature and manifestations of economic crime. In contrast, the discipline of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences, which includes 104 research papers, focuses on broad investigations that cover the issues in depth. As for the Economics and Business disciplines, they stand out in relation to the economic elements of the studied phenomenon, with 108 papers and 86 researches respectively. These figures demonstrate the increasing attention paid to the operational and financial effects of economic crime in the context of international trade.

At the same time, studies in Management (59 researches) and Social Psychology (60 researches) contribute significantly to the understanding of the behavioural elements and management techniques of economic crime.

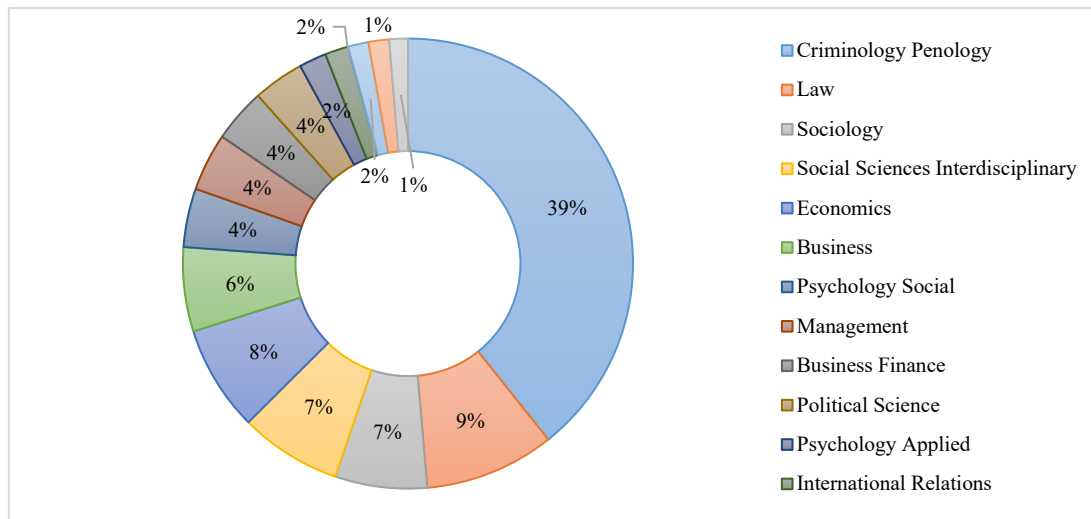


Figure 4. Most common areas of research in the literature on economic crime
Source: Own processing based on data extracted from Web of Science

Therefore, based on the findings discussed above, we can conclude that economic crime, as a dynamic and pervasive problem in modern society, is of great concern to the academic community and policy makers. Thus, the study of economic crime in academic research has increased its relevance globally, highlighting its importance in a variety of sectors. For this reason, we conducted a bibliometric analysis using the Web of Science (WoS) platform to find key terms and prevalent concepts in order to explore the breadth and depth of research in this area. To this end, we retrieved keywords from the titles and abstracts of publications published in this field, and using VOSviewer software (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010) we identified a total of 2829 relevant terms with various appearances in the scientific literature. Of these, 189 terms are considered relevant in this context because they have at least 5 occurrences.

As a result, the network of relevant terms examined in the figure below (Figure 5) reveals the key relationships and structures that characterise the study of economic crime. The conceptual landscape of this topic will be better understood and any major subdomains or concepts that have attracted the attention of researchers around the world will be identified as a result of this thorough investigation of the network of terms.

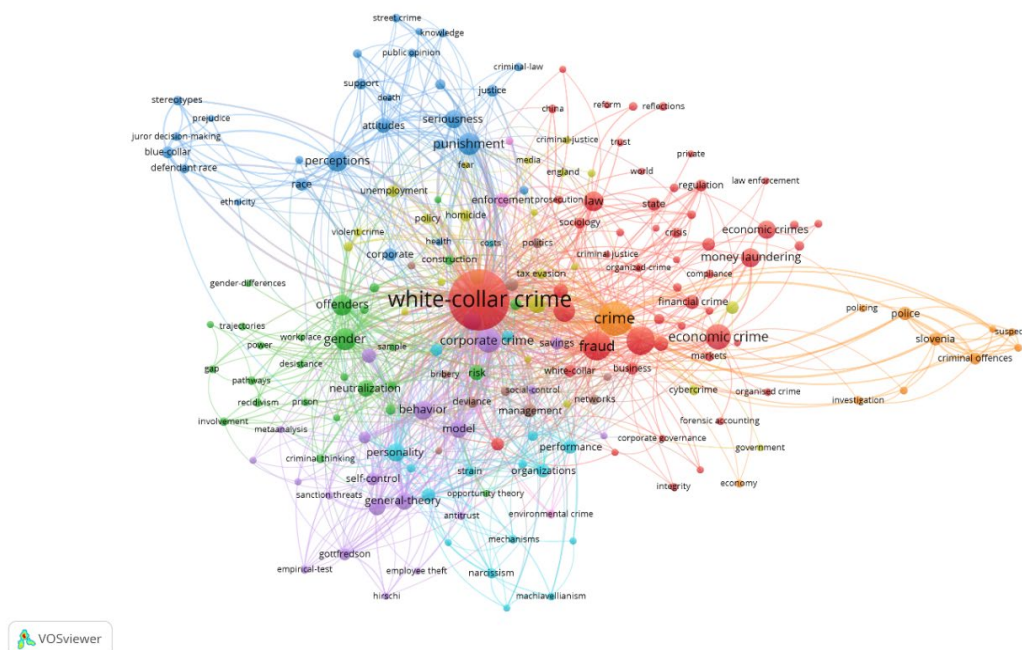


Figure 5. Network of key terms relevant to economic crime research
Source: own projection in VOSviewer

The bibliometric review of the literature resulted in the frequency network of key terms shown in the figure above, which illustrates the links between the concepts of economic and financial crime. Thus, it can be seen that

terms such as 'white collar crime' (with a frequency of 346 and a link of 173), 'murder' (with a frequency of 113 and a link of 128) and 'fraud' (with a frequency of 79 and a link of 112) represent the strongest economic crime links. Other terms that are relevant to economic crime include 'corporate crime', 'gender', 'offenders', 'corruption', 'punishment', 'economic crime', 'perceptions', 'behaviour' and 'personality'. Thus, the 189 terms are grouped according to these key terms, which are divided into nine different clusters, represented in Table 1, which groups the most important terms according to the number of links and frequency.

Table 1. List of key terms most frequently used in the literature to describe economic crime

Cluster	Most occupations/links	
Cluster 1 (red)	Fraud Corruption Economic crime Money laundering Law Financial crime Governance Terrorism	General deformation theory State Regulations Crises Economic security Ethics Globalisation
Cluster 2 (green)	Criminal thinking Life course Identity Relapse Power	Opportunity Victimisation Neutralisation Gender differences
Cluster 3 (dark blue)	Public opinion Public perceptions Punishment Conviction	Perceived severity Jury decision-making Stereotypes Prejudices
Cluster 4 (yellow)	Tax evasion Underground economy cybercrime System Government	Education Inequality Media Unemployment
Cluster 5 (mov)	Employee theft Morality	Low self-control Rational choice
Cluster 6 (light blue)	Organisations Performance Opportunity	Costs Narcissism Cost Mechanisms

Source: own projection based on VOSview results

From the analysis of Figure 4 and Table 1, we can see that the first group contains 52 key terms that delve into the subject of white-collar crime and study the economic and political aspects that influence the conduct of illegal economic activities. The cluster also examines the influence of economic crime on the complexity and diversity of the components involved. In its breadth, this cluster complements previous academic work by authors such as Cerulli et al. (2018) and Shahbazov et al. (2023), which have highlighted the complex interplay between factors that determine economic crime. The second group includes 27 terms, focused on offenders and the behavioral elements that lead them to commit economic crimes, with a particular emphasis on the psychological and motivational characteristics of offenders, as well as the situations that motivate them to participate in illegal activities. The significant contributions of illustrious academics such as Garoupa (2014) and Qingguo & Min (2018), who have investigated the psychosocial and motivational aspects, have provided a deeper understanding of the human factors underlying these illicit actions, which have helped them to further this research direction. The next group, containing 26 key terms, explores people's perceptions of economic crime and the criminal justice system. This group examines how economic crime is viewed and dealt with in the legal system, as well as its social and institutional consequences. Significant research on public opinion and societal attitudes towards economic crime has been conducted in this context by Sims & Johnston (2004) and Stalans & Roberts (2019), providing a valuable insight into the social dimension of this phenomenon.

The fourth category included in the analysis, comprises 22 key terms and focuses on different types and causes of economic crime, highlighting specific facets of economic crime such as corruption, tax fraud and financial market manipulation. Authors such as Button et al. (2022) have made significant contributions that have increased the depth of many elements of economic crime and generated interest for further research. In turn, the fifth group comprising 21 concepts, focuses on the idea of corporate crime and explores how corporations commit economic crime, as well as issues of corporate accountability and the effects of these illegal actions. Recent publications have highlighted the importance of investigating corporate behaviour in the context of economic crime, contributing to a deeper understanding of this element of the phenomenon, examples include Simpson et

al. (2014). There are other clusters in the bibliometric analysis, but these have been considered less important for the presentation of results and have not been discussed in this context. Therefore, by conducting the bibliometric analysis we were able to provide a better and deeper understanding of the phenomenon within the scientific study, to discover and highlight major links and correlations between key concepts in the field of economic crime.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Over the last few decades, economic crime has attracted the attention of researchers, justice professionals and policy makers because of its complexity and dynamism. Any type of crime, whether it takes the form of fraud, corruption, money laundering or tax evasion, has a negative impact on the economy, institutions and society at large. It has therefore become increasingly important to take a rigorous and methodical analytical approach to the literature in this area in order to understand trends in this phenomenon, common investigative techniques and to drive future studies.

By carrying out a bibliometric analysis of publications on the phenomenon of economic crime, we have obtained a basic understanding of the changes that this field of study has undergone over time, which will be useful in identifying potential future topics of study and adapting quickly to new obstacles. For example, an increase in the number of papers in recent years in the field of economic crime may indicate a growing interest in the subject, which points to a growing awareness of its harmful effects on the fundamental pillars of the economy and society in general. Geographical distribution is also another important aspect in the study of economic crime, and we can see from the distribution that the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia and Germany have the most impressive figures in the total number of studies carried out on economic crime research, which is mainly due to the high level of development of the countries and the way in which research and development budgets are allocated. At the same time, the investigation of this issue shows that the problem of economic crime has a global dimension as it affects the whole world and therefore a strong international strategy is needed. Thus, developing a global context for research and management of economic crime requires identifying major contributions from different parts of the world. At the same time, the variety of scientific fields involved further highlights the complexity of the problem. Criminal justice, law, economics, sociology and other interdisciplinary fields are all involved in the study of economic crime, because the underlying reasons for economic crime need to be fully understood in order to use this interdisciplinary approach.

Therefore, through bibliometric analysis, we have been able to provide a richer and deeper knowledge of the problem within the scientific study, which could be useful for further development of studies in the field of economic crime. We have also been able to identify a number of authors who - through their research - have been able to present in detail some fundamental aspects related to economic crime. Through the studies of these authors, we have been able to make a correlation that have highlighted the various motivations behind these illegal actions, such as psychological, socio-economic and political, which will be a starting point in the future in the investigation of these crimes and will guide our attention towards research that will be essential for the foundation of public policies and legal practices to prevent and combat economic crime more effectively.

In terms of future research, researchers and policy makers in the legal field will face considerable difficulties due to the fact that criminals continually change their methods and plans. The fight against economic crime can be designed to achieve real and lasting results by strengthening collaboration between the academic community, policy makers and private sector partners. This coordinated effort can focus on creating a comprehensive framework for the analysis and prevention of economic crime. Innovative ways can be established to rapidly identify new crime trends and advanced crime techniques by combining theoretical and practical knowledge. At the same time, fostering ethics and openness in the corporate world can help to create a solid basis for the fight against economic crime. Also, developing modern technologies for the identification and prevention of economic crime that take into account the increasing complexity and digitised nature of these activities could be another important area of research. Predictive modelling, advanced data analytics and artificial intelligence could support efforts to predict and stop criminal activities early. At the same time, investigating the links between economic crime and other societal issues, such as corruption or environmental effects, may reveal new insights into the sources of the problem and comprehensive preventive strategies.

In conclusion, combating the complex phenomena of economic crime requires continuous multidisciplinary efforts and constant adaptation to technological and environmental changes. To contribute to a resilient society, researchers should combine in-depth studies with practical initiatives, through cooperation between stakeholders, where moral principles and openness encourage the development of a strong and sustainable economic environment.

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