

**Interview with the 2022
CEEMAN Responsible Management
Educator of the Year
- Alberto Frigerio**



Alberto Frigerio

Živa Žmavc Thongvanh: You are originally from Italy, how did life bring you all the way to Kazakhstan? What was the most surprising thing you learned about the local culture and people that you were not aware of before the move?

Alberto Frigerio: The reason why I moved to Kazakhstan is that my wife, whom I met in Lucca (Italy), is Kazakh and she wanted to get back for a few years to her motherland after our doctoral studies. A few years then turned into nine years and now I can joke that she just stole my passport, thus impeding me to leave the country. For a strange twist of fate – or sorcery – my brother is also married to a Kazakh lady, so I knew pretty well about Kazakhstan even before moving there. Still, the most surprising aspect is how close Italian and Kazakh cultures are notwithstanding over 6.000 km of distance.

ŽŽT: Moving from one country to another often brings about new perspectives and opportunities. How has your relocation to Almaty enhanced your understanding of sustainable development and responsible management practices, particularly within the Central Asian context?

AF: Almaty is a wonderful city! I would not stay there for nine years if I would not appreciate its features and, perhaps even more, if I would not love the people living there. But this city suffers from two key problems: high-rate air pollution and a noticeable socio-economic gap between the center and the periphery. In such a framework, it became a natural duty to promote the principles of sustainable development and civic responsibility to my students. Indeed, as soon as I became the Dean of the AlmaU School of Politics and Law, I created a 17 ECTS module on “civil society and sustainability” whose aim is to introduce students to the principles of social responsibility and sustainable development by

addressing them both from a theoretical and practical perspective.

ŽŽT: Your nomination for CEEMAN Responsible Management Educator of the Year by Almaty Management University points out a significant number of sustainability related projects that you have initiated or were involved in up until now. Which one is the dearest to you personally? Could you tell us about it?

AF: One initiative I am proud of is the launching of the AlmaU international conference on “public trust and social capital”. In 2022 it reached its third edition and, once again, it was attended by hundreds of people from academia, government, business, international organizations, NGOs, and mass media. Such an event is important because it shows the role universities must play in the XXI century: they have to act as a bridge between public institutions, businesses, and civil society. Of course, this is a complex role that requires patience, attention, and constant effort.

However, as claimed by Uncle Ben in the comix Spider-Man, ‘with great power...comes great responsibility’ and it is now time for higher education institutions to take action for the good of the entire community in which they operate.

ŽŽT: You are the author of a very interesting monograph titled *Dystopian World*. In the book, you mention a series of contemporary global challenges that could potentially lead to a dystopian world. How can dystopian narratives related to climate change inspire individuals, communities, and policymakers to take proactive measures towards environmental sustainability? Which three movies on this topic would you recommend to a business educator that wants to use them as a starting point for discussion?

AF: The first question I ask my audience when I talk about my book “*Dystopian World*” is: do we live in a dystopian world?

Comparing fiction with data taken from reality is a provocative approach aimed to show that many times those terrible scenarios we see in movies are not so distant from our contemporary reality.

So, fiction can be a tool to raise thought-provoking reflections about where are we now, what should we do, and why it is important to take action. Moreover, movies can show us how climate change is a complex matter that has to be considered not only from an environmental perspective, but also from a social, economic, and political one. So, the three movies I would definitely recommend to begin a discussion on these themes are *Wall-E* (2008), *The Road* (2009), and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015).

ŽŽT: Responsible management education involves not only imparting knowledge but also instilling values and ethical principles. How can business schools effectively foster a culture of integrity, accountability, and ethical leadership among students? Are there any specific initiatives or best practices that you would recommend?

AF: AlmaU is a member of the League of Academic Integrity in Kazakhstan and we take the respect and implementation of ethical principles very seriously. Still, I believe that the only way we have to foster fundamental values and ethical principles among our students is to consistently integrate them into all our courses. As educators, we are not exclusively responsible for sharing our knowledge and providing new skills, but we have also a moral responsibility of raising critical minds. And the best way to do that is through open debates in which students are encouraged to explore complex matters and challenge their beliefs.

Moreover, business schools should consider adding in their programs special courses on key areas like empathy, cultural diversity, and sustainability. They might offer valuable insights to cultivate those leaders of tomorrow that the world really needs.

ŽŽT: What does the CEEMAN Champion Award mean to you personally and for AlmaU?

AF: For AlmaU this prize is proof that we are moving in the right direction from an institutional perspective. From my personal view, this award is a well-appreciated recognition of my efforts to make something valuable for my students and for the city of Almaty itself. But I am just at the beginning of my work and there are many ideas I want to test... so, the best has still to come!