

**CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY  
ACTIVITIES OF MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES  
LOCATED IN THE WESTERN REGION  
OF ROMANIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The globalization phenomenon has created new opportunities for companies, but also got to an increased organizational complexity, having to assume new responsibilities, especially in developing countries. In the light of social responsibility, environmental performance and the company's relationship with the stakeholders suppose also the creation of optimum work environments, which could facilitate innovation, getting to the increasing of the needs fulfillment of the consumers. This paper aims to approach the concept of sustainable development in multinational companies which activate in Romania with the intention of assessing the degree of integration and promotion policies and practices in social responsibility. We tried to identify how many of these companies have social reports, which of these companies have and publish ethical codes or evaluate social investment programs and to what extent can it be judged as credible. Our research objective is to track which are the Romanian Western multinational companies businessmen's items regarding the policies of transparency in corporate accountability and credibility of companies carrying out social programs. In order to assess the transparency, we*

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*tried to track the companies that could have defined and published the code of ethics, or if they relate to the principles that guide the organization, if they have a set of ethical standards to determine the rights and obligations. By arranging interviews and sending questionnaires we tried to find the way in which communication occurs related to social responsibility through the correct marketing company policy to employees of the company, environment and community involvement in the company. The research methodology is based both on quantitative (through questionnaire) and on qualitative approach (through interviews). The expected result is that in Romania, the corporate social responsibility is far from being understood today as a practice management.*

✂ Social responsibility, multinational companies, Romania

## **INTRODUCTION**

In context of globalization and expansion of multinational companies on emerging markets, the economic and social centre shifts from the state to the private sector, and particularly to multinational corporations. Their power has become enormous, but in the same time their impact on society has increased as well. Under these circumstances, the range of responsibilities that a multinational company has in society have diversified and expanded.

Corporate Social Responsibility refers to the manner in which companies correlate their values and behaviour with the expectations and needs of those concerned – not just clients and shareholders, but also employees, suppliers, communities, authorities and the society as a whole. The balancing of all these interests, the company's ability to meet all expectations and to deliver solutions should be organised by full integration of the Corporate Social Responsibility concept in management systems, and therefore, in all of the company's activities, in its organisational culture, in the core business. This integration process takes time and is based on certain guidelines, management models and, often, on agreements signed by companies globally with international bodies (OECD, 1997). Thus, international rules and standards are imposed to ensure measurement and comparability of performances achieved by companies in the field of Corporate Social Responsibility (GRI, 2006).

Our research aims to track the positions of companies' managers within multinational companies in western area of Romania on two of the most controversial issues of Corporate Social Responsibility: transparency in Corporate Social Responsibility policies and credibility of companies developing social programmes.

In recent decades, several tools have imposed themselves in the western business environment in order to improve Corporate Social Responsibility transparency and credibility: social and environmental audit, social reporting and ethical codes. By means of our investigation, we aim to show how the companies in Romania are using these tools.

We performed our study due to the fact that at this stage we do not have a complete knowledge of Corporate Social Responsibility in Romania. There is some information on social investment programmes in the form of sponsorship and donations or corporate philanthropy. But, Romanian companies could improve their Corporate Social Responsibility strategies by means of additional research, analysis and communication. However, we have little information on Corporate Social Responsibility strategies, on companies' policies towards groups involved in or affected by the companies' activities.

We have divided the study in two parts. The first part presents the theoretical background for the corporate social responsibility, the literature review for this concept and some of the features of corporate social responsibility in Romania. In the second part we present the methodological issues and the research results that have been highlighted based on the analytical investigation and the interviews with the managers of the multinational companies that operate in the western area of Romania. Our paper ends with the conclusions regarding the behavior of multinational companies due to their social responsibility in the region.

## **1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

The topic regarding Corporate Social Responsibility has achieved absolute size only in the early '90s, with a considerable acceleration in 2000. The debate on the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility is integrated into the global analysis regarding the future of the planet (from the economic, social and environmental point of view), revolving around the concept of "sustainable development", formalized by the UN in 1992 at the World Summit in Rio. The topic of sustainable development was introduced already in 1970, when the Club of Rome published its first report called "The Limits of Growth". The Brundtland Report (1987) defines sustainable development as the "current generations' capacity to meet present needs without compromising the next generations' capacity to meet their own needs".

By means of internet, any aspect of global economy and politics can become in a snapshot the centre of stakeholders' permanent attention and concerns. Therefore, stakeholders of any organization play an increasingly important role in setting standards for Corporate Social Responsibility. Basu and Palazzo (2008) emphasized that the approach of Corporate Social Responsibility from the stakeholders' point of view is crucial for a content approach, while an organization should know and implement successfully the stakeholders' standards. To achieve

these standards companies should combine a good planning with performance. It is important for stakeholders to adapt themselves. A successful Corporate Social Responsibility is based on an outside-in thinking. Regarding the stakeholders' substantiation, equity is considered "a reserve of willingness", that could help an organization to recover from a crisis. To obtain full functional quality of each relationship, the organization should have certain management procedures and a cultural commitment to generate rather admiration than public complaints.

The continuous expansion of multinational corporations' operations sustains the argument of a changing economic world, exerting its contributions by means of a fair distribution of social welfare between the nations within an area in a globalization process and therewith limited in terms of more or less significant participations in the formation of extensive marketing structures for products and services.

Correlations between multinational corporations, civil society and host countries' governments address issues relating to investment codes of conduct such as human rights, labour code and environmental regulations in the considered production sectors and branches.

Economic prosperity can not exist without respect and care for people, environment or community, as a whole. The current economic crisis is also a consequence of the neglect of Corporate Social Responsibility by many companies. The Corporate Social Responsibility concept penetrated in our language only short-time before, although the system operates in the USA for nearly three decades. Responsible companies are those that take different actions, beyond the purely contractual ones, pursuing employees' welfare, health and comfort. These actions increase employees' loyalty and promote a positive image of the company in the business environment, but also in the social environment, with long-term effects on its competitiveness.

Corporate Social Responsibility stands out of all other forms of social implication, such as corporate philanthropy or sponsorship, having some specific elements:

- it considers the interests of all interested groups (stakeholders), from shareholders, employees, business partners, such as suppliers, clients, creditors, distributors, to consumers and community (Donaldson & Preston, 1995);
- it develops a social involvement strategy that should be integrated in the company's development strategy and corporate communication strategy on medium and long-term; Corporate Social Responsibility programmes can no longer be conceived separately, beyond a vision that integrates it in the company's management and marketing objectives.

Transparency is the condition of an efficient communication between the company and the interested groups. More than transparency in communication, credibility presumes an agreement between the company's statements and actions.

As regards transparency, it is reflected in Corporate Social Responsibility policies as following:

- definition of an ethical code, of principles that guide the organization in its actions, or a set of ethical standards to determine the company's rights and obligations in front of interested groups;
- publication of the code of ethics and its promotion among employees and business partners;
- preparation of periodic social reports that reflect the extent to which the company complies with the assumed obligations;
- publication of used reporting standards and of the auditor who prepared the reports;
- assess the social investment programmes, their impact on the targeted social groups and publication of the results of social investment programmes.

The *Corporate Social Responsibility* (CSR) is a concept defined first by Bowen in the year '50. Bowen (Bowen, 1953 cited in Carroll, 1999) assumes that companies should have obligations, should follow lines of action compatible with the "values of society", later McGuire (1963) stated that economic and legal duties of companies should be extended to some society responsibilities. Epstein (1987) suggests that social performance of a business may also have an impact on public policy in the form of judicial decisions, legislation and administrative regulations. Carroll (2004) presented the four components of social responsibility: economic, legal, ethical and discretionary or philanthropic. Kotler and Lee (2005) had defined the CSR as a commitment to contribute to the welfare of the community through their business practices and contribution of company's resources.

In the later 90's CSR became an organizational imperative concept to address known as the "triple bottom line" (Elkington, 1998) of "people, planet, profit" and different organisations started to issue models and guidelines for CSR reporting.

There are also authors that have a complete different view about CSR (Friedman, 1970; Handy, 2002; Kooskora, 2006). They considered that "there is one and only one social responsibility of business - to use its resources and engage in activities to increase its profits".

The Romanian literature is not abundant, being highlighted by some sound press articles posted on the internet. As an example one of these is "CSR in Romania" (<http://www.responsabilitatesociala.ro/csr-in-romania.html>) where there are presented CSR programs elaborated by the Romanian companies.

## **2. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN ROMANIA**

In Romania, as in other transition countries the topic of corporate social responsibility is powerfully linked with the multinational companies that have introduced ethical business principles. On the other side, Romanian Government shows interest for the problem of social responsibility and the legislation in the field of environment, employment, restructuring of local authorities that have been permanently improved. But, there are still many claims coming especially from the civil society and also from the business sector for improving legislation in order to support institutions for actions of social responsibility.

Lack of tradition in Corporate Social Responsibility can determine the existence of a state of scepticism on the companies' investments in social responsibility programmes. A number of companies set up Corporate Social Responsibility programmes just because they can not advertise in other way due to legal restrictions.

The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility is just emerging in Romania and, therefore, it is not very well understood yet. Many times it is confused with particular activities, donations, sponsorships, patronage, etc., different from what it should represent – large responsible programmes, with planed objectives. The lack of credibility might result here from.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) does not mean only fulfilling a duty to the society. It is a new style of doing business, integrated into the company's culture, at all its levels.

A company can not be assessed for Corporate Social Responsibility only through the actions dedicated to community, without showing care for its employees first. Development of human potential could be included in this concept. Companies are required by law to provide periodical training to their employees in order to meet their professional tasks. But a responsible company does much more.

Communication related to Corporate Social Responsibility, considered as a form of undertaking the company's responsibility in front of its own employees, clients, business partners and local community members, can be assessed through several dimensions:

- company's correct behaviour on the market - companies which transmit information about their efforts to dictate ethics in marketing policy, advertising and consumer rights, the use of fair prices, criteria for the selection of business partners, clients constancy, etc.
- company's policy regarding employees - companies that offer information on training and career development actions, facilities for health and sports, equal employment and promotion opportunities, life/work balance, etc.

- environment protection - companies that offer information on their initiatives – other than mandatory actions – which contribute to energy preservation, prevention or reduction of air and water pollution, decrease in use of dangerous chemicals, maintaining bio-diversity, waste recycling, etc.
- company's involvement in community - information on the company's voluntary actions for sustaining local suppliers, supporting healthcare or education in the community, cultural or recreational activities, supporting local infrastructure development.

Romanian companies could improve their Corporate Social Responsibility strategies. At this stage we do not have a complete knowledge of Corporate Social Responsibility in Romania. There is some information on social investment programmes in the form of sponsorship and donations or corporate philanthropy. However, we have little information on Corporate Social Responsibility strategies, on companies' policies towards groups involved in or affected by the companies' activities.

The study on the Corporate Social Responsibility of multinational companies from western part of Romania aimed to identify how CSR policies are perceived and applied in our country.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study investigates the extent of Corporate Social Responsibility among the multinational companies in the western area of Romania. We have tracked the positions of these companies' managers on two of the most controversial issues of Corporate Social Responsibility: transparency in Corporate Social Responsibility policies and credibility of companies developing social programmes.

For this purpose using as research instruments questionnaires and interviews we have conducted an investigation on the above mentioned companies during the period: January-March of the current year. First, we distributed the questionnaires, and then we conducted four interviews with the managers of the biggest companies from the western part of Romania (e.g. Delphi, Smitfield Ferme, Drexelmaier and Flextronics).

The investigation addressed management representatives from the business environment, namely persons involved in Corporate Social Responsibility. The following relevant persons have answered to our questions: human resources managers, financial managers, representatives of trade union organisations. The response rate was of 85%.

The criteria assessing communication transparency and credibility were covered by a number of 20 questions. Our questions addressed issues regarding social and environmental audits (social auditing and areas covered by audits), social reporting (publication of reports, their credibility, the target groups considered in the report), code of ethics (its existence and publication), social investments (evaluation and publication of its results, valuation methods used, social investment fields, target groups), company's correct behaviour on the market, its policy regarding employees, company's involvement in energy preservation, in prevention or reduction of air and water pollution, as well as in supporting local infrastructure development.

#### **4. RESEARCH RESULTS**

Our research results had two stages, the quantity and the quality dimension; the latter consisted in analysing responses to a set of questions addressed to those who answered to the questionnaires.

##### **4.1 Results of quantitative research**

Although they deal with Corporate Social Responsibility, 25% of the managers say that they do not know if the companies they are working for are subject to social audits.

Out of our respondents, 45% of the multinational companies' representatives prepare social reports, 15% say that social reports are not credible, and 55% say that social reports are credible.

Managers consider that the main issues to be considered by a social audit refer, in order of importance, to relationships with local communities (79%), employees' rights and working conditions (80%), consumers (55%) and environment (65%). Respondents argue that recycling, decrease of energy consumption and prevention of water and soil contamination are the main environmental problems their company should be concerned of.

80% of the respondents say that their companies have ethical codes. Also, the main ways in which organizations promote their code of ethics are the following: internal communication channels (74%), training (35%) and corporate web-site (54%). According to our research, ethical codes are primarily addressed to employees or trade unions (85%), clients (40%) and shareholders (60%). Corporate codes of conduct differ according to specific investment areas and used implementation methods. In conclusion, we can appreciate that sustainable development of codes of conduct is highly dependent on how they reflect the values and behavioural expectations of corporate owners, their employees, consumers and communities where those entities exert all investment transactions.



87% of the respondents say that their company is investing socially. An even higher percentage of managers, 93%, consider that the organisations they work for should invest in community issues. On the other hand, 35% of the respondents confess that their company does not evaluate social investment programmes. In order of importance, the main social investment evaluation methods are the invested budget (70%) and press articles (52%). Companies prefer the following social investment areas: training and professional development opportunities for employees (80%), education (70%), working conditions for employees (69%), culture and arts (63%).

Romanian companies could improve their Corporate Social Responsibility strategies by means of additional research, analysis and communication. Research results have highlighted that there is insufficient information on the significance or importance of CSR programmes. Even if some companies fall within this concept, formally they are not marked out as such. That is to say, there is no special budget for CSR programmes and specific reports.

#### **4.2 Results of qualitative research**

The qualitative research aimed to identify answers to some problems suggested in the research. Transparency of Corporate Social Responsibility policies and the credibility of companies are highly determined by how companies make public the results of their social programmes. Companies' social reports represent evidence of transparency and meet the public's needs for knowing the companies' actual actions in this respect. They tend to exaggerate results and pursue almost exclusively image issues.

To be credible, a social report should show in a transparent manner the company's strategy and the progress made every year. One should not forget the difficulties encountered in carrying out programmes and what are the next steps planned.

Publication of companies' social reports is a duty towards the community, employees and shareholders. Their credibility is directly linked with communication transparency and frequency, as well as with the tools and channels used for transmitting the message. Social reports should focus on the company's objectives, as well as on their stage of achievement.

Each company should assess its Corporate Social Responsibility. However, Corporate Social Responsibility programmes should be based on clear eligibility, sustainability and evaluation criteria.

In Romania, Corporate Social Responsibility is far from being understood as a management practice. This is a task of the human resources department, but in fact it should be one of the concerns of the company's management. It is rather a charity or patronage tool and not a tool for long-term development planning. There are very few real Corporate Social Responsibility programmes in Romania, with real objectives, budgets, valuation methods, performance indicators.

Assessment of Corporate Social Responsibility programmes should increase readers' confidence in the reliability of such investments. Evaluations ensure transparency of these programmes.

In recent years, large companies started to publish social and environmental reports; the number of such reports has increased since 1993 and only a small part of these reports use internationally accepted rules and principles, involving independent monitoring and review.

The Parliament should support the companies for an integrated publication of social, environmental and financial information, by means of regulations that should perhaps include a minimum threshold to avoid disproportionate costs for small companies. This goal calls for thorough research on the application of minimum requirements for social and environmental reporting, in particular on the actual interpretation of social and environmental risks within the existing information requirements.

It would be necessary to broaden the responsibility of the managers of large companies, so that they engage in reducing to minimum any social and environmental negative impact resulting from the company's activities.

Consumers, clients, employees and investors should be able to select or reject products/suppliers, jobs and companies, depending on their degree of responsibility in terms of environmental and social conditions. Consumers play an important role when it comes to encouraging a responsible production or business practice (Ellen *et al.* 2006); however, there is a lack of transparency with regard to consumers, due to the confusion between different product standards and labelling systems used by different countries. This makes social labels of existing products to be inefficient.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In most cases, multinational companies are subject to legislation of their host countries and, by default, to minimum standards of social conduct that ensures streamlining of social behaviour within their own organizational system and, implicitly, towards the communities where their main production structures are located. Therefore, the correlation legal system – organizational system, in terms of marketing policies used by multinational companies for promoting their own public image, lies in how the mechanism of structural assimilation of social conduct elements, governed more or less in implantation economies (developing countries), is valued by simultaneous satisfaction of social needs, as well as of certain widely accepted conduct principles and values, aspects that relate particularly to how all social standards and those regarding the conditions of functioning of integrated production processes are assimilated in both organizational and operational plans.

Items related to the development of corporate implantation regions (areas), such as technology transfer, permanent training of human resources and last but not least, promotion of entrepreneurial skills within the integrated production structures, are subject to minimal debates in developed countries, when one speaks about resonance of multinational corporate operations on the civil society. On the other hand, debates are at maximum intensity in developing economies, supporting the explanatory arguments existing in the area of Corporate Social Responsibility analysis in host countries and, therefore, the avant-garde expressions of conceptual forms, particularly extensive in case of debates regarding the scope and content of Corporate Social Responsibility policies and programmes. Meanwhile, the globalization process of international capital flows, technology, human resources, information, etc., felt by the today global business environment, engraves an upward trend in the role of social assistance programmes in the structure of competitive relationships in host countries.

However, the uniqueness of Corporate Social Responsibility derives from its implementation mechanism used by large multinational corporations, the latter being also the expression of social orientation changes in host or home countries, in the meaning of a positive redirection of all operational activities developed in different economic areas. The maintaining of the today's investment and commercial frame, together with the developments in implantation policies and strategies and in international rules and practices, represents the symbol for achieving the highest social standards forming the new configuration of the global economy and meanwhile, of the integrated organizational systems, of multinational orientation.

Also, mutations in the magnitude and nature of activities developed by multinational companies in different competitive locations strengthen the arguments concerning rising importance and relevance of Corporate Social Responsibility in terms of effects on the behaviour of consumers and competitors in implantation economies in the meaning of configuring and adapting their specific cultural values to the social standards imposed by a changing world.

Beyond the social factor assimilated to corporate investment processes, a particular role has the government policies for stimulating certain Corporate Social Responsibility principles in terms of regulations and practices, to enable preservation of certain social programmes sufficiently compatible with the host nations' demands. In conclusion, we can appreciate that sustainable development of codes of conduct is highly dependant on how they reflect the values and behavioural expectations of company owners, their employees, consumers and communities where those entities exert all investment transactions.

In the field of inter-dependencies generated by the emerging globalization process of competitive areas, there is still the need to fundament certain principles of economic policy, sufficiently adequate to sustain the development of Corporate Social Responsibility in the sphere of economic and social development, having in its centre the plan of investment processes for requirements and exigencies formulated by the human society as a whole.

Romanian companies could improve their Corporate Social Responsibility strategies by means of additional research, analysis and communication.

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## Questionnaire (translated from Romanian)

**PART I**

**This section is designed to general information collection regarding the questioned person.**

Please, respond to the following questions.

1. Which is your function in your company?

Manager	
Economist	
Accountant	
Other, mention it	

2. Which is your education level?

Post-university studies	
University studies	
College	
High school	

3. What is your specialty relieved?

Economics	
Social sciences	
Law	
Other, mention it	

4. What is your experience in company?

Less than 5 years	
Between 5 and 10 years	
Between 10 and 15 years	
Between 15 and 20 years	
More than 20 years	

5. How old are you?

Less than 25 years old	
Between 25 and 40 years old	
Up to 40 years old	

6. Company Name:

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**PART II**

**This section is designed to internal information collection regarding the corporate social responsibility.**

1. The company you are working for is social audited?

Yes	
Not	
I am undecided	

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2. Do you appreciate that the company social reports are credible?

Yes	
Not	
I am undecided	

3. What kind of priority is given to the Company...:

Motivation	Total Agree	Partial Agree	Indifferent	Partial Disagree	Total Disagree
	1	2	3	4	5
In relations with local communities, with regard to working conditions of employees					
In relations with regard to working conditions of employees					
In relations with consumers					
In relations with environment					
Other ( <i>Please, detail it:</i> )					

4. The company has an ethical code?

Yes	
Not	
I am undecided	

5. Which do you think that are the main ways in which the company you are working for promote the code of ethics?

Motivation	Total Agree	Partial Agree	Indifferent	Partial Disagree	Total Disagree
	1	2	3	4	5
Corporate web site					
Training					
Internal communication channels					
Other ( <i>Please, detail it:</i> )					

6. Do you think that the company you are working for is socially investigated?

Yes	
Not	
I am undecided	

7. Do you think that the company should invest in community issues?

Yes	
Not	
I am undecided	

8. Do you think that the company you are working for is socially investigated?

Yes	
Not	
I am undecided	

9. Do you think that the company you are working for should invest in community issues?

Yes	
Not	
I am undecided	

10. Do you think that the company you are working for evaluate social investment programs?

Yes	
Not	
I am undecided	

11. Which of the following do you think that are the main social investment evaluation methods?

Motivation	Total Agree	Partial Agree	Indifferent	Partial Disagree	Total Disagree
	1	2	3	4	5
Press articles					
Invested budget					
Other ( <i>Please, detail it:</i> )					

12. Which of the following do you think that are the social investment areas preferred by companies?

Motivation	Total Agree	Partial Agree	Indifferent	Partial Disagree	Total Disagree
	1	2	3	4	5
Culture and arts					
Working conditions for employees					
Education					
Training and professional opportunities for employees					
Other ( <i>Please, detail it:</i> )					

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13. Social Reports are published?

Yes	
Not	
I am undecided	

14. Corporate social responsibility is a task of the human resources department?

Yes	
Not	
I am undecided	

If you want to make any comments, please write them on the following rows:

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Thank you very much for your cooperation!