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SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF AN ORGANIZATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

SPOŁECZNA ODPOWIEDZIALNOŚĆ ORGANIZACJI Z PERSPEKTYWY PUBLICZNYCH UCZELNI

Summary: Due to the changes taking place in the socio-economic sphere, including the expectations of members of the society, the idea of social responsibility is increasingly implemented at universities, including public ones. Therefore, the article is the result of the analysis to answer three questions: why can we talk about the social responsibility of the university, what this responsibility is and what types of activities are undertaken by selected public universities in Poland in accordance with conditions previously defined social responsibility. To achieve this goal, in-depth literature studies, analysis of the content of websites of universities, semi-structured and in-depth interviews with employees of selected public universities were conducted.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, university social responsibility, education, higher education.

Streszczenie: Ze względu na zmiany zachodzące w sferze społeczno-gospodarczej, w tym oczekiwania jednostek, idea społecznej odpowiedzialności jest coraz częściej implemento-wana na uczelniach, również publicznych. W związku z tym artykuł jest wynikiem analizy mającej udzielić odpowiedzi na trzy pytania: dlaczego można mówić o społecznej odpowie-dzialności uczelni, czym się charakteryzuje owa odpowiedzialność oraz jakie typy działań są podejmowane przez wybrane uczelnie publiczne w Polsce w ramach uprzednio zdefiniowanej społecznej odpowiedzialności. W tym celu przeprowadzono pogłębione studia literaturowe, analizę zawartości witryn internetowych poszczególnych uczelni, a także wywiady półstruk-turyzowane i pogłębione z pracownikami wybranych publicznych szkół wyższych.

Słowa kluczowe: społeczna odpowiedzialność biznesu, społeczna odpowiedzialność uczelni, edukacja, szkolnictwo wyższe.

1. Introduction

According to the economic assumptions of the sustainable development theory it is important to aim at and achieve the economy's ability to develop. It is worth underlining that the following two types of fairness must be considered: intragenerational and intergenerational fairness. In particular, this represents the achievement of the goal constituted by the satisfaction of needs of both the current and future generations [WCED 1987]. Additionally, great significance is attributed to responsibility, which is justified by ethical principles according to which, in accordance with the theory, development should occur [Rogall 2010, pp. 130–132]. Economic and social development should be reflected not only in the growing income of individuals, but it also should translate into improvement of other components of social wellbeing.

One of the practical dimensions of implementing the principles characterising sustainable development is implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in various organisations. This concept is implemented primarily in entities that pursue commercial activities. To be more specific, at the initial stage of development CSR principles were introduced particularly in large companies. In the 21st century they still remain those entities that are most active in this context, but at the same time, one more and more frequently notices the need for adopting this approach, not only in companies that are not corporations, but also in entities whose functioning is based on premises other than concentration (and maximisation) of profit. Such institutions are, among others, higher education institutions, including public ones.

Thus, the key research objective is to determine whether it is truly justified to analyse the activities of public universities and academies from the perspective of social responsibility. Given the specificities of these institutions one, however, should not thoughtlessly perceive them solely as companies which provide educational services to individual members of society. Their missions have much wider scopes, the most important of which is not aiming at the maximisation of financial profits.

As such an objective was set, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. Why speak about social responsibility of higher education institutions?

2. What are the characteristics of social responsibility of higher education institutions?

3. What kind of activities are undertaken by selected universities and academies in Poland as far as social responsibility is concerned?

To accomplish the assumed research goals, the first step of the research was an in-depth study of the literature. Additionally, the analyses have been based on reports, documents and papers focusing on socially responsible activities, including materials provided by the higher education institutions themselves. In this case, the desk research method was used. Then followed an analysis of web sites of individual schools and institutions involved in the popularization of social responsibility in the higher education sector. Due to the character of the problem, it was decided to

use the case study method. The study also utilised materials collected during semi-structured interviews and (in some cases) during in-depth interviews in selected public higher education institutions in Poland. Because the preliminary study showed that Polish public universities have a very different approach to the application of the principles of social responsibility, so it was not decided to use structured interviews. In turn, due to the underlying CSR approach, it was recognized that the highest level of advancement in the implementation of its principles should take place at economic universities. Therefore the interviews covered the employees of economic universities, who were the most involved in the implementation and apply the social responsibility concept in these academic centers. In total, eight interviews were conducted (in case of some universities – with more than one person).

The main purpose of the desk research was to find the fundamentals for finding arguments confirming the reality of the statement regarding the presence of social responsibility in universities and its character. The analysis of the websites content was carried out first of all to examine what information about social responsibility are made available by universities, how it is done and what universities understand by the term of social responsibility and in which areas they are active. As a part of the discussion, attention was also paid to whether the activities undertaken are differentiated at particular universities and whether it can be find the initiatives which are implemented by most of the academic centers covered by the study. Due to the different nature and sometimes selectivity in posting information about the implementation of the social responsibility approach, it was decided to deepen the research by conducting interviews. Thanks to this, the knowledge was deepened, especially in the organizational structure of units responsible for activity in the studied area, to obtain information of methods of fulfilling socially responsible initiatives that were not included on the websites and to learn the idea of the development of this concept on examined public universities in Poland.

2. The variation of the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility presented in the literature

Sustainable development most frequently applies to the following three aspects: economic, social and ecological – which should comply with J. Elkington's Triple Bottom Line (3BL) concept: the economic bottom line, the social bottom line and the environmental bottom line [Elkington 1994]. According to H.-B. Cheah and M. Cheah this peculiar triangle should be supplemented with ethical responsibility. Then, by implementing corporate social responsibility assumptions, the organisation avoids unwanted behaviours and undertakes actions exceeding the legal limit [Cheah, Cheah 2003, p. 225]. On the other hand, A.B. Carroll arranges CSR elements in the Carroll pyramid, with the philanthropic aspect at the top, as it stresses the voluntary nature and beyond-statutory character of CSR activities, while at the same time remaining in compliance with the stakeholders' expectations [Carroll 1979, p. 500].

The sustainable development theory makes a kind of starting point for the CSR, but they should not be treated as one concept.

Although issues related to ethics in business or to responsibility connected with ethics many a time emerged during business operations, including provision of services, works that allowed systemisation of service provision and creation of an approach of organisations' social responsibility were not published until the 20th century. The term "social responsibility" was first defined in 1953, in a book titled *Social Responsibility of Businessman* [Bowen 1953]. Its concept stems from business ethics, which one may find confirmations for in extracts of a book *The Gospel of Wealth*, in which A. Carnegie defined two goals of the ethics of business, compliant with the concept of CSR: charity (the rich should help the poor) and stewardship (the rich manage wealth on behalf of others so they should use it in a manner acceptable by people) [Ryan, Sójka 1997]. In the work that was published over a century later by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), in the definition of social responsibility also is stressed its ethical aspect with the aim being not only economic development, but also the improvement of the life of society as a whole and the life of an individual, as well, in various areas of their functioning [WBCSD 1998]. If one follows CSR principles, they should be able to gain balance between business entities' aiming at profits and achievement of sustainable development of society.

However, a peculiar issue isolated from the concept of social responsibility and nested in the area of business ethics is the stakeholder theory. According to this theory, a stakeholder may be any individual, group or circle of people that, on the one hand, is within the range of influence of a given entity, but on the other – may influence that entity themselves [Jastrzębska 2010]. The basis for such an approach is the assumption that the process of decision-making should take into account not only traditionally understood stakeholders, but also, for instance, local authorities or media. This also means that it is necessary to first scrutinize their specificities, attitudes and behaviours, hold dialogue with them, and means that stakeholders' actions may affect the operations of a given organisation. Thus, this concept is actually in contradiction with the approach saying that economic activity may be considered as undertaking socially isolated projects [Janeczek 2014].

The analysis of the literature of the subject shows that "social responsibility" is a complex term that may hardly be clearly defined, particularly by pointing to actions which may be deemed socially responsible and therefore focused on the social interest. When analysing just the concept of "corporate social responsibility" one may conclude that it is a certain relationship that may, or even should occur between companies and society; society understood as a stakeholder, or recipient of the company's actions, who may contribute to those actions [Geryk 2012]. Such an approach to CSR was also applied by the European Commission, according to which this concept represents companies' acceptance of responsibility for their influence on societies. The EC also stresses the voluntary nature of CSR initiatives [European Commission 2011].

The definition included in the international ISO 26000[1] norm treats CSR as responsibility of an entity for the impact its actions have not only on society, but also on the environment. Its goals should be achieved through transparent and ethical actions and address not only the business area. According to this norm, following of social responsibility principles should simultaneously: (1) be legal, (2) take into account stakeholders' expectations, (3) lead to prosperity and wellbeing of society and sustainable development of the environment, and at the same time (4) be consistent with the company's goals. It should support the accomplishment of both external and internal objectives, and so it brings profits to the socially responsible company itself [Ślęzak-Gładzik 2013].

To make the dialogue initiated by the organisation and its surrounding environment effective, CSR tasks in the company must become its strategic goals. Due to the long-term nature and the fast-changing environment as well as people's expectations, it is important to continuously monitor the needs of the stakeholders and to control the impact of CSR activities on the manner in which the company is perceived by the outside world. In this way, the analysed approach may prove to be the key tool when building the entity's competitive edge. One should also not forget that the accomplishment of CSR tasks must also lead to generating profit, though in an ethical and socially accepted manner. Then, this profit gains a different dimension, which is the social dimension [Jastrzębska 2010].

Considering the topic discussed herein and taking into account the aspects of an organisation's social responsibility described above, it seems that the most universal definitions are the proposals of B. Rok and J. Adamczyk. According to B. Rok, CSR is an art of fulfilling expectations through the search for a dynamic balance between various interests, enabling the accomplishment of the economic strategy of an organisation operating on the market [Rok 2007, p. 242]. According to J. Adamczyk, this concept sets the terms on which the entity is obligated to perform transparent activities according to the principles of sustainable development and works to ensure society's wellbeing, compliant with the stakeholders' expectations, in agreement with the law and social norms [Adamczyk 2009, p. 10].

3. The universities as socially responsible entities

Originally, the concept of social responsibility was associated with companies only, which is clearly seen in the abbreviation of CSR which stands for Corporate Social Responsibility. Along with changes occurring in social and economic systems and the corresponding evolution of attitudes and expectations of individuals, the approach discussed herein was no longer associated with large organisations only. Now, CSR

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[1] *Polska Norma PN-ISO 26000:2012 Wytyczne dotyczące społecznej odpowiedzialności* was developed in KT 305 for Social Responsibility and was published November 5th 2012, https://www.pkn.pl/informacje/2013/09/iso-26000 (25.05.2017).

is more and more often believed to be implemented by all entities providing services to the public, including higher education institutions. However, it remains obvious that CSR functions realised in individual institutions will vary. This will particularly apply to those entities which are financed with taxpayer money or perform unique services to society or local communities and higher schools are undoubtedly such institutions.

One may also come across opinions that corporate social responsibility may be realised solely by the broadly understood business sector (private companies), while higher education institutions, according to their statutory tasks, are – by definition – socially responsible, perform social services, but not in terms of the CSR concept. It seems, however, that as a result of challenges faced by higher schools the current perception of the space occupied in the social-economic system by these institutions must change. An important task of higher education is to contribute to the sustainable development and also to ensure education to young people and provide them with such competence that will help them fulfil the employers' requirements on the labour market. According to tendencies intensifying since the beginning of the 21st century, formal knowledge is losing its importance. Greater and greater significance is now attributed to versatility, analysing and ideas generating, skills as well as abilities to perceive one's own goals as equivalent to those of the company. Higher education institutions must more extensively initiate dialogue with employers. At the same time, as a consequence of various factors, such as globalization, demographic changes, the importance of ethical standards or growing social demands, one may observe natural competition on the market of educational services. A question arises here – what makes a given higher education institution have a competitive advantage over others? One of the factors that provide that advantage is the implementation of principles according to which the undertaken actions may be defined as socially responsible [Gulavani et al. 2016, pp. 37, 38].

However, M. Geryk noticed that social responsibility may comprise initiatives undertaken by higher education institutions because, according to R.W. Griffin's definition, the purpose of these actions is to protect and enforce the society within which the entity operates [Griffin 1998, p. 144]. Following the core curriculum is definitely very important, however, not sufficient. Higher education institutions more and more often adopt a holistic approach which covers particularly the shaping of the system of values, ethical standards and civic attitudes in their stakeholders (not only students or employees). Further, it is unquestionable that higher education institutions are entities which, to the greatest extent, interact with their surrounding environments and that these interactions are long-lasting. It thus seems justified to draw a conclusion that this interaction requires the higher schools operate in socially responsible manners.

The review of the literature of the subject points to another justification of allocating the social responsibility concept to higher schools. The starting point for these considerations is the three-level system of education. Primary schools (still

with junior high school classes) adapt the youngest members of society to function within society. Secondary schools educate the students on how to perform future occupations, while higher education institutions influence society's functioning and development. Higher education institutions' tasks may be arranged in a triangle of didactics, research and serving the social values. Passing on knowledge and scientific research would not be possible without a social environment that is properly integrated and focused on accomplishing not its own goals, but common social values. Higher education institutions may be, in a way, perceived as companies. T. Szapiro is right to classify higher schools as providers of educational services consumed directly by students and indirectly by employers, who are interested in hiring qualified graduates [Szapiro 2006, pp. 21–30]. As a higher education institution may be defined as an entity providing a specific type of services, it is reasonable to demand that the institution perform socially responsible activities, like other providers.

Thus, one must notice several aspects demonstrating that higher schools may also successfully perform socially responsible tasks. Firstly, according to the CSR theory, the fact that the entity performs such tasks contributes to its perception by the surrounding community and society as a whole. Thus, higher education institutions, when undertaking CSR tasks, may build their own positive images, which will allow them to more effectively accomplish their primary missions and goals, including social objectives. The role of social responsibility is naturally not only to build positive images of both companies and higher schools, but it should first of all lead to the accomplishment of tasks planned within the CSR domain. Secondly, thanks to social responsibility, higher education institutions may observe the surrounding environment and changes occurring within that environment. Like private firms, thanks to CSR, higher education schools may better adjust themselves to the conditions and evolution of the surrounding circumstances. At the same time, higher schools may perform social responsible tasks more effectively than other entities as in order to accomplish these tasks they may utilise their experience arising from performance of their statutory social functions. As they are research-oriented institutions, academic centres are also capable of comprehensively analysing the needs of people (local communities and also groups in macro dimensions) and consequently may prepare for accomplishing the socially responsible tasks better than companies. However, the most important stimulus for academic institutions to carry out socially responsible initiatives is the fact that it is not enough to teach students what CSR is and how to function in accordance with this concept. The higher schools must themselves be examples to follow, also in the realm of CSR tasks.

Institutions like the UN or the European Commission also call for responsible attitudes of higher education institutions. The European Commission pointed, among others, to the role of higher education schools regarding behaviours and attitudes that may be demanded from individual entities, which should operate ethically, respect employee and human rights and also their surrounding environments. In its

Green Paper for CSR[2] published in 2001, the EC stressed that higher schools should conduct research into the impact of social responsibility on conditions and results of companies [Commission of the European Communities 2001]. Following the Green Paper consultations, in 2002, in its White Paper, the EC also stressed the role of education in the shaping of socially responsible attitudes (primarily by allowing to learn the concept and the positive impact on the society and the surrounding environment), pointed out that it is purposeful to include CSR issues in the curricula, and described seven areas of promotions of CSR within the EU, one of which was promotion of managerial qualifications in the CSR area [Commission of the European Communities 2002]. In another paper about CSR, in 2006, the Commission again underlined the role of schools, including higher education institutions, in the process of passing on knowledge on CSR and shaping of proper attitudes and skills in future employees, managers, entrepreneurs, who are graduates of those schools and institutions. The Commission pointed to the necessity to multi-dimensionally educate these groups on CSR [Commission of the European Communities 2006]. The elements stressing the important role of academic institutions in the popularisation of CSR behaviours were once more pointed out by the European Commission in a document published after the global crisis in 2010 (Europe 2020). The document concluded that one of three pillars of the EU overcoming the crisis is sustainable development activity on the basis of which social responsibility is built (the other two pillars are knowledge-based economic development and innovation and curbing of social exclusion) [European Commission 2010].

4. Social responsibility at universities in Poland – selected direction of activities

The role of academic institutions in the area of social responsibility may be analysed from various standpoints. Firstly, due to the growing importance of CSR in companies, it is purposeful to include this concept in the curricula and individual lectures, particularly economic programs and lectures. This matches well the role of higher education institutions in the education process. The goal should be to popularise the concept and knowledge of corporate social responsibility, as well as its proper understanding. The role of higher education schools should be to provide knowledge, to shape appropriate attitudes, particularly of students of economic faculties and to conduct reliable and responsible education of managers. The purpose is also to ensure that society, properly educated on CSR, be aware of the behaviours and attitudes it may demand from individual entities which should operate ethically, respect employee and human rights, as well as their own surrounding environments.

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[2] This document systemically presents the concept of CSR of companies at the European level.

The research carried out by the authors (website analysis and interviews with representatives of selected public universities in Poland)[3] confirms the conclusions of T. Borys that curricula of economic higher schools comprise courses related to CSR. However, the analysis of those courses shows that in the case of most of them, the subjects are either optional or constitute supplements to didactical skills. But the concept of social responsibility does not occur in obligatory minimum curricula thus, consequently, whether it is presented or not during the classes depends on the lecturer [Borys 2006]. These observations have also been confirmed by an online opinion poll, conducted in 2010 by CSRinfo[4], which showed that the number and scope of CSR classes is relatively low and narrow, because only 19% of the online respondents confirmed that their higher schools conduct classes on CSR, 28% – on the ethics of business, 18% – that elements of CSR and business ethics appear during other classes, but 35% of the respondents declared they did not have any such classes and that those topics are not touched upon during lessons[5].

Another area of the activity that has been demonstrated by the analysis is the university's striving to develop ethical standards. Still, not all major public universities in Poland have codes of ethics. At the same time, however, the ethical dimension is very important in realizing the concept of social responsibility. This is about ethical research, ethical conduct of the didactic process and ethical cooperation with the business. The problem with maintaining appropriate ethical principles in the latter issue is particularly pointed out at technical universities in Poland, where, for example, the equipment available at universities is used for the implementation of commercial projects, the benefits of which are only realized by the person implementing them (omitting the interest of the university and other its stakeholders).

It should be emphasized that depending on the profile of the university, activities directly understood as socially responsible and at the same time characteristic of higher education are different from each other. An example of this is the situation when the technical university cooperates not only with scientific institutions (domestic and foreign), but also with industry and companies, e.g. in the form of platforms for experts or centers for the exchange of knowledge and technology transfer. On the other hand, you can indicate free legal advice that some universities offer in special "clinics". What's more, medical schools, their socially responsible activities, focus on improving the transfer of knowledge about health and quality of life and promoting a healthy lifestyle.

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[3] The survey covered 15 leading public universities in Poland and the interviews were conducted at economic ones.

[4] The poll was conducted between 15 October 2009 and 11 June 2010; opinions were given by 449 Internet users visiting the CSRinfo web site: http://www.csrinfo.org/csrinfo/o-csrinfo/ (20.10.2017).

[5] According to E. Jastrzębska the image of Polish higher education institutions presented in the poll is better than in reality, as the CSRinfo site was visited by people who have already had experience with CSR issues.

Pointing to the similarities in initiatives taken by universities in the field of social responsibility, the following can be mentioned: universities for children and seniors, graduate centers, sharing library collections, environmental initiatives and volunteer programs or charity campaigns. Some cooperation between universities (or student research groups) in implementation of projects of a similar nature can be even noticed.

What is important, the activities described as socially responsible are very often undertaken in an informal way. Interviews carried out with people responsible for CSR approach on the economic universities in Poland have clearly acknowledged this assumption. Therefore, they often lack proper coordination, well-thought-out strategy and long-term horizon. In addition, communication of socially responsible activities is usually not very visible and there are difficulties in transmitting it to wider audiences. In turn, in order for universities to be able to implement the principles of social responsibility and they have been benefited from such activity (for universities and their broadly understood stakeholders), further changes must take place, which should include changing the approach of the entire academic community and the environment of higher education institutions.

5. Conclusions

In the context of the definitions quoted herein and the ideas of socially responsible entities, one may spot the emergence of a multi-aspect nature of social responsibility of higher education institutions. Firstly, higher education schools, by undertaking conscious and active initiatives for the benefit of social development, may start initiatives similar to actions of other entities for the benefit of social responsibility. Secondly, through the introduction – in academic curricula – of CSR classes and topics, they may develop, in their graduates, awareness that it is necessary to build and realise socially responsible actions. Further, by involving their employees and students, they form up habits and promote attitudes relevant for the assumptions of the concept of social responsibility. Additionally, experts working in scientific circles, may consult or co-create legal regulations on the theory and practice of social responsibility (including corporate social responsibility).

Academic circles themselves also spot the need for adopting an approach, more broadly than so far, that should ensure successful and effective accomplishment of the mission. Among other things, this results from the dynamically changing conditions of the surrounding environment, gradual evolution of importance of higher education schools and their place in the socio-economic system and from the changing expectations and needs of individuals (not only students). It seems, however, that one of the first steps should be to define ethical standards, according to which the stakeholders of the university should proceed. The study showed that ethical codes were accepted only on a part of the best universities in Poland.

The reason why it is justified for academic institutions to implement social responsibility ideas may be confirmed by the fact that 23 higher schools (both public and non-public) signed "the Declaration of Social Responsibility of Higher Education Institutions" during a seminar "Social Responsibility of Science – challenges for the academic and business circles" held on 16 November 2017 by the Ministry of Development. This document stresses the role of academic institutions as places of both creating and passing on knowledge on the surrounding reality and also as places where academic values are cherished. The paper underlines the need to shape social and civic attitudes in individuals, and also the importance of ethical principles. The text also mentions the significance of cooperation between scientific and business circles.

In particular, the declaration refers to four areas of higher schools' operations: (1) cherishing of values, (2) performance of programs, implementation projects and studies important to the development of social responsibility and resolution of major social problems, (3) organisation of the academic institution's work that boosts the development of the school's social responsibility and (4) cooperation with stakeholders.

This is another stage of the process of popularising and enforcing the significance of social responsibility in higher education. Fulfilment of such postulates creates favourable terms, not only for raising university standards and improving the image of these institutions. It also leads to the education of ethically responsible citizens, who will aim at achieving sustainable development of society. Promotion of development of the personality of school's stakeholders in the modern approach requires extension of the traditional perception of the role of higher education institutions by inclusion of social responsibility ideas.

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