

EVALUATING THE STRATEGIC APPROACH TO CSR IN SERBIA^a

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Abstract

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become an important element of corporate strategy today. In this article, we wanted to examine whether CSR in the transition market of Serbia is conducted as an integral part of the business strategy based on core activities and stakeholder relations. A quantitative research involving business managers was further validated with the in-depth interviews with business executives, and compared to the theoretical concepts on CSR, domestic studies and the internationally accepted Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) on the impact of CSR. The results show that CSR has become an applied business activity for many companies in Serbia, but generally devoid of a strategic approach. We also confirmed the gap between the more and less developed economies in applying advanced business strategies, which includes the social responsibility of enterprises.

Key words: corporate social responsibility (CSR), business strategy, Serbia.

ВРЕДНОВАЊЕ СТРАТЕШКОГ ПРИСТУПА ДРУШТВЕНО ОДГОВОРНОМ ПОСЛОВАЊУ У СРБИЈИ

Abstract

Друштвено одговорно пословање (ДОП) постало је данас важан елемент пословне стратегије. Овим чланком желели смо да испитамо да ли се ДОП на српском тржишту у транзицији спроводи као саставни део пословне стратегије засноване на основној делатности и односима са заинтересованим странама. Квантитативно истраживање у којем су учествовали руководиоци из пословног сектора

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додатно је унапређено дубинским интервјуима са извршним руководством и упоређено је са теоријским концептима ДОП-а, истраживањима на домаћем тржишту и међународно прихваћеном Глобалном иницијативом за извештавање о учинку у ДОП-у. Резултати су показали да је ДОП постао саставни део пословних активности за већину предузећа у Србији, али да му недостаје стратешко усмерење. Потврђен је и јаз између више и мање развијених привреда у примени напредних пословних стратегија, где спада друштвена одговорност предузећа.

Кључне речи: друштвено одговорно пословање (ДОП), пословна стратегија, Србија.

INTRODUCTION

In a more globalized, interconnected and competitive world, the way in which environmental, social and corporate governance issues are managed is part of the companies' overall management quality needed for high competitiveness. Companies that perform better regarding those issues can increase their shareholders value by properly managing risks, anticipating regulatory action, or accessing new markets, whilst at the same time contributing to the sustainable development of the societies in which they operate. Moreover, these issues can have a strong impact on reputation and brands, an increasingly important part of company value (The Global Compact, 2004, p. 1). Whether CSR is a desirable, expected or useful business strategy, which CSR activities business sector should focus on and how to find the desired balance between short-term business goals and long-term sustainability goals, are the frequent topics of discussion among the prominent international organizations, non-governmental sector and academic circles.

Triggered by the ongoing debates on the necessities versus the needs of conducting CSR activities, our article examines whether the companies in Serbia integrate CSR objectives into their strategic management. Our key assumption was that the CSR in Serbia was not institutionalised, but rather confused with corporate philanthropy. Through a comprehensive survey involving business managers, accompanied with the selected interviews with top executives, the aim was to assess the level of CSR development in a transition economy on the case of Serbia, along with any gaps in employing advanced business practices which may ultimately impact the wider economic development. We have based our research on the principles and framework of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), as an integral set of criteria that covers the concepts discussed both in business practice and academic literature. Finally, we could conclude that there is a high awareness of the Serbian business sector about the concept and importance of CSR, although it lacks a systematic and long-term vision, as well as a clearer understanding of its impact on business results. The solutions can be

presented through business management education, where CSR topics should play a key role.

Overview of the Reference Literature

The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) introduced in the early 1950s by Bowen (1953, p. 6) as a social responsibility of business people, developed today to a widely-known management concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and interactions with stakeholders (Raynard & Forstater, 2002, p. 6). CSR today has become an increasingly important element of corporate strategy, as stakeholders want to be aware of the company's values, missions and goals to grant their trust and/or loyalty to the products and services. Empirical studies have demonstrated that positive corporate social performance correlates with an increase of sales and market share (Auger, Burke, Devinney & Louviere, 2003), reduced business risk (Orlitzky & Benjamin, 2001) and a higher commitment of employees (Greening & Turban, 2000), but only when the appropriate CSR policy is strategically defined and well communicated to stakeholders (Amaladoss & Manohar, 2013). By engaging stakeholders, a company establishes long-term relationships with its customers, suppliers, employees and communities (Tepper & Tepper, 2003), which renders CSR an essential element of competitive advantage (Jones & Bartlett, 2009). In practice, corporate success becomes a result of a balanced strategic plan that integrates the core business and CSR objectives to which the management and employees genuinely commit and have capacity to fulfil.

Although some studies indicate that many businesses still perceive CSR as an additional cost and/or a brand management tool financed through marketing and/or PR budgets (Pelozo, 2006, p. 55), there is a clear notion that CSR brings multiple benefits to companies (Marti, Rovira -Val & Drescher, 2015), moving corporate strategy from the age of philanthropy or marketing, to the age of management and responsibility (Visser, 2011, p. 18). In that respect, the management challenge is to counter the risk of conflicting or unclear CSR objectives stemming diverse stakeholder demands (Huang, 2013, p. 235), with effective CSR actions addressing carefully selected issues, producing a meaningful social impact and creating synergy that Porter and Kramer describe as a shared value (2006).

Although the academic literature recognizes different definitions of CSR, they all contain five general dimensions (Dahlsrud, 2008, p. 4):

1. The environmental dimension,
2. The social dimension (relationship between business and society),
3. The economic dimension (socio-economic or financial aspects),
4. The stakeholder dimension,
5. The voluntariness dimension (actions not described by law).

Dimensions related to the impact of the business sector on the society and stakeholders are the most common in the accepted definitions of CSR.

Furthermore, it should be stressed that the global CSR practice is still widely unbalanced. Companies in developed countries are more successful in strategically locking social aspects of business within corporate management, while those in developing countries struggle to do so due to lack of corporate resources, political will or positive practice (Amaladoss & Manohar, 2013). Finland, Netherlands, France, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Australia already have mandatory corporate sustainability reporting imposed by their governments (Ioannou & Serafeim, 2014), and the European Commission has produced their own framework on CSR, defining it as the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society (2014, p. 6). Such high-level decisions have led to an increase in the number of social reports published globally, which are used for additional corporate performance evaluation and scrutiny.

CSR in Serbia

Philanthropy in Serbia has a rich tradition, rooted in the religious philanthropy championed by the Serbian royalty and nobles, followed by significant endowments in the 19th century made by prominent wealthy individuals (Jugović 2010; Vejinović 2012). This tradition was interrupted during the Communist era, with public enterprises taking over the role of supporting various social issues. Consequently, the CSR practice became perceived as a relatively new concept by the Serbian businesses, developing as part of the market transition since 2001. A research study carried out in 2005 (Responsible Business Initiative) showed that the business sector in Serbia does not differentiate CSR from charity, philanthropy, or even legal compliance. However, more recent studies (Smart kolektiv, 2013; BCIF & Institute for Sustainable Communities, 2012; Forum for Responsible Business, 2014) have detected a noticeable shift in awareness among citizens and businesses sector regarding CSR, although devoid of a strategic orientation. Serbian companies mostly communicate their CSR activities on their web-presentation and through media outreach; only a few follow the GRI principles in reporting, predominantly without external verification (Krstić, 2014, p. 168). The internal dimension of CSR (business ethics, corporate governance) receives significantly less attention in comparison to the practice of advanced European economies (European Commission, 2014). Only a handful of companies employ a CSR or Sustainability / Foundation Manager, whilst the majority assigns CSR activities to the public relations (PR) or marketing sector (Šentevski & Marinović, 2008). However, the overall trend is improved transparency about the company's operations and financial results. Another factor to be considered is the predominance of small and medium companies (SME) on the Serbian market, which do not possess the same reporting and outreach capacities,

although they may achieve a deeper relationship with the local community (Nagypál 2014, p. 329).

METHODOLOGY

Our research aims to observe whether companies in Serbia successfully integrate CSR objectives into their strategic management, thereby assessing the level of CSR development in a transition economy along with any gaps in employing advanced business practices which may ultimately impact the wider economic development. Therefore, we have defined the following research question: *Has CSR become an integral part of strategic management in Serbia?*

For the purpose of examination, we combined a one-time online survey involving 92 business managers with in-depth interviews conducted with 8 Serbian top executives, selected based on the successfulness of their business operations, sound CSR practice and personal reputation. The research was conducted within four months (January to April 2015). The dataset for the online survey included the most successful Serbian companies - top exporters, companies recognized for their CSR practice and members of the leading national CSR associations – the Serbian United Nations Global Compact Network (UNGC) and the Forum for Responsible Business. Although large enterprises dominated, the mapped SMEs fulfilling the described criteria were also surveyed, together with the executives in civic organisations dedicated to CSR. The high response to the survey (n=100; response rate 92%) points to the potential that CSR has for business leaders, as well as their expectation that the subject in management practice will gain more significance in the forthcoming period.

The survey consisted of 23 mainly close-ended questions or questions with a response scale (with 1 as the lowest and 5 as the highest grade), structured to assess the understanding and implementation of GRI principles. The in-depth interviews used the same framework but were geared to stimulate a discussion on these topics rather than generate closed responses. The gathered information spanned from assessing the survey sample (Table 1; Table 2), to conducted CSR activities, strategy development, implementation and reporting, aimed to assess the understanding and implementation of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) framework as an integral set of criteria that covers the concepts discussed in academic CSR literature. The core findings are presented in the form of figures (survey) and pertinent statements (in-depth interviews). For the quantitative part of the research, the Survey Monkey platform was used, which collected and processed the responses and presented the basic results of descriptive statistics in the form of appropriate charts. Since we do not have a table with the answers from each respondent, but only the summary results, it is difficult to extract some common inferential statistics, such as the

correlation or regression analysis. Nevertheless, for a better consideration of the research question and our topic, the section “Discussion” encompasses an overview of some possible inferential statistical analyses.

Table 1. Online survey sample (n=92 business managers)

Industry	Production: 40% Services: 60%
Organisational form	Large companies: 46% Medium companies: 23% Small companies: 31%
Number of employees	1- 250 employees: 53% 250-1,000 employees: 21% >1,000 employees: 26%
Ownership	Private, foreign capital: 58% Private, domestic capital: 31% Public: 11%
CSR awards and recognitions	Yes: 68% No: 32%

Table 2. Qualitative research survey sample (n=8, business executives)

Industry Position	Size	Number of employees	Ownership Legal form
Food & Beverage General Manager	Large	870	private, foreign limited liability
Media company President of the Foundation	Large	250 – Company 10 – Foundation	private, foreign, non-profit
Marketing agency CEO	Medium	52	private, domestic, limited liability company
Healthcare industry CEO	Small	50	private, foreign, representation office
Pharmaceutical industry CEO	Large	600	private, foreign, holding company
Finance industry, Banking Executive Board Member	Large	510	private, domestic, joint stock company
Finance industry, Banking Chairman	Large	1,500	private, foreign, joint stock company
Media company General Manager	Large	315	private, foreign, limited liability company

RESULTS

Two-thirds of the surveyed managers confirmed that their organisation had a regular CSR activity in the past year, whilst the clear majority (91%) reported to be aware of CSR, applying it both regularly and occasionally in some form (Figure 1). This response serves to validate our research sample.

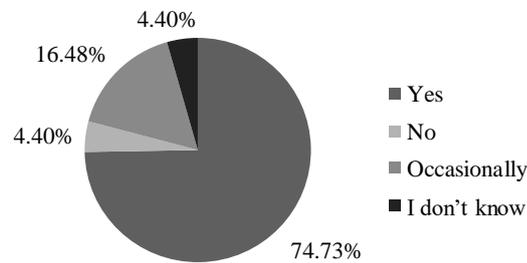


Figure 1. CSR application in the surveyed companies (n = 91)

Likewise, all interviewed executives agreed that CSR is of high importance for the long-term sustainability of their company and the broader market. *“Any firm with a long-term view should employ CSR, but its methods, implementation and activities vary depending on the core business”*, stated a marketing agency executive.

Investment wise, the past CSR surveys in Serbia (BCIF et al., 2012; Forum for Responsible Business, 2014) showed a general reduction in related activities compared to the 2003-2010 period, which is also confirmed by our study. The managers from the surveyed companies stated that many CSR activities became financially unsustainable after the onset of the global crisis due to limited funding and inability to prudently plan business development, combined with the low public appreciation (Figure 2). The interviewed executives also cited budget constraints, but in a more profound manner. A food and beverage executive revealed that *“the overall reduced budgets for PR and CSR are a fact, but could also serve as an excuse.”* The funding dilemma was aptly described by a healthcare executive: *“Our everyday operations are considered from the survival perspective. In such circumstances, should we decrease our headcount, or invest in education of physicians, which might be considered as a form of CSR?”*

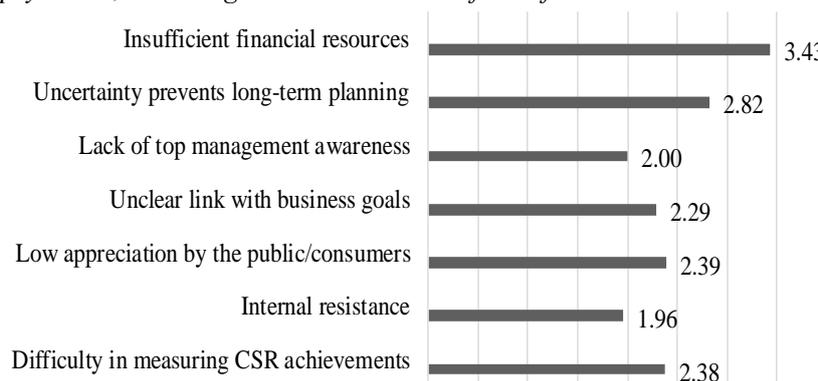


Figure 2. The reasons why Serbian companies are not devoting more attention to CSR (Likert scale)

In terms of the structure of CSR activities, local community development projects and partnerships are predominant, in cooperation with the municipalities that host the companies' business operations. Second ranked are charitable donations, whose significant percentage demonstrates a lack of a systemic CSR approach, but could also reflect the current poverty level in Serbia (Figure 3). A positive signal is that about one third of the surveyed companies partnered with civil society organisations in conducting CSR projects, such as youth organizations or organisations supporting persons with disabilities (Smart kolektiv, 2013; Forum for Responsible Business et al., 2014). One-fourth of the participants belonging to multinational companies opted for implementing globally designed CSR activities drawing from a wealth of experience. Our findings demonstrate a low level of sophistication of the CSR practice in Serbia, with certain positive developments, usually led by multinational companies sharing their best practices.

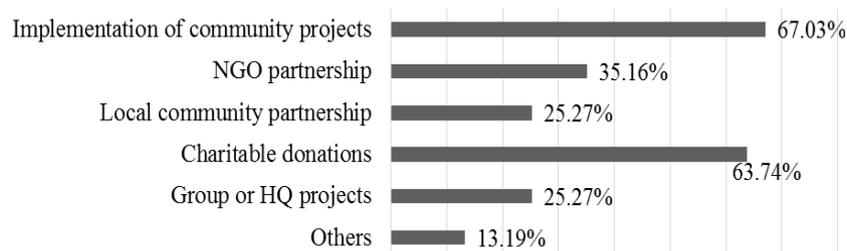


Figure 3. The implementation of CSR activities in the surveyed companies (multiple answers, n = 91)

The strategic task of CSR is to focus on areas of social context with the greatest strategic value, deriving impact from the nature and quality of the relationship with stakeholders (Porter & Kramer, 2006). A predominant share of the surveyed companies stressed the importance of stakeholders, identifying the consumers as the most significant stakeholders, followed by employees, regulatory bodies, and the media (Figure 4). By seeing the subject inversely, the respondents considered CSR to be important for consumers, but only in the case of a negative experience, confirming that a minimum attention to CSR may be a competitive necessity rather than a competitive differentiator (European Commission, 2009, p. 110).

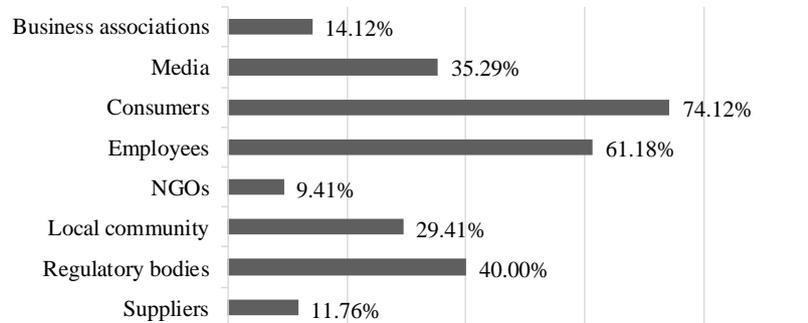


Figure 4. The importance of individual stakeholders (up to three answers, $n = 85$)

Consequently, the interviewed executives granted the utmost importance to consumers, but equally emphasised the role of the media due to their top hierarchical position. In reverse, the Serbian executives consider CSR activities to be less important for the consumers compared to factors of price and quality, as aptly illustrated by a pharmaceutical executive: “*A price incentive will always beat CSR.*” Thus, the executives strongly considered that the vast majority of Serbian consumers would not pay more for a product made by a company with sound CSR practice. This confirms De Cremer and Van Dijk research findings (2002), where the elements of price and quality dominate in the process of making the purchasing decisions: when there is a conflict between the consumers’ interest (i.e. to purchase high quality products) and social interests (i.e. to purchase pro-social products), the consumers hesitate to sacrifice their own interests in favour of social interests. Furthermore, one third of those interviewed marked shareholders/owners as important internal stakeholders, but also top executives. “*Executive management should keep a balance between shareholders and the society creating a value-add strategy to the firm, so that the owners would not consider CSR a cost, but rather a gain. That’s why CSR should be a part of the education of managers,*” concluded the media executive. This is a pertinent comment, since the studies show that CEOs holding the Master of Business Administration (MBA) degrees record better CSR performance (Huang, 2013). Most global business schools have started to integrate CSR in their curriculum design (Wu et al. 2010), and universities may prove to be an important and constructive link between businesses and the society (Huang, 2013, p. 242). Consequently, in rank of the stakeholder importance, employees were amongst the lowest, although the executives claimed that their CSR activities were partly motivated by the potential to use CSR as a tool to attract and retain high-quality workforce, having in mind that employees increasingly value the employer’s CSR record (Fox, 2007). Finally, none of the executives noted

suppliers as an important stakeholder, explaining it by the less developed and organised supply chains in Serbia.

Next, the interviewed executives explained that the companies they belong to were mostly motivated in conducting CSR activities by the goals to improve reputation, brand values and attributes. These findings show similarity with the conclusions made by Werber and Wortman (2000, p. 125), who deduced that firms primarily use corporate investments for social purposes as a short-term strategy to counteract the negative reputation. The second most cited factor was the local community development, not only *“because of the plant we have, which is virtually the top employer in town”* (pharmaceutical executive), but also because *“we cannot continue to develop, if our community is underdeveloped; it’s a two-way process”* (bank executive). Finally, three executives stated to be occasionally motivated by their personal beliefs. Although channelling CSR initiatives towards the objectives favoured by the top executives at first does not appear to validate a strategic approach to CSR, some international researchers have concluded that it could strengthen the firm’s long-term competitiveness and performance (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Melo & Garrido - Morgado, 2011).

Only a few of the surveyed business managers asserted to have a defined CSR strategy on company level, most of them being unaware thereof. Yet, when asked whether the company had procedures and guidelines covering different CSR areas, about half of the respondents provided positive replies/answers (Figure 5).

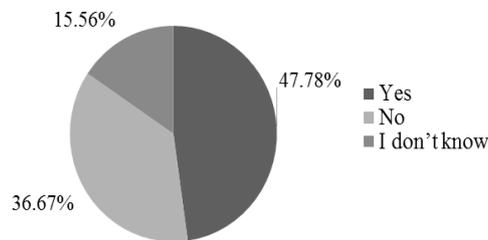


Figure 5. Presence of procedures and guidelines related to CSR activities (n = 90)

Consequently, although the interviewed executives unanimously agreed that every firm with a long-term strategy should be socially responsible, they also affirmed that their organisation does not have an official strategy which defines CSR. Moreover, some respondents did not differentiate among the CSR strategy, the company’s mission and its corporate culture: *“The firm has documented its mission and vision, CSR being an integral part thereof”* (media executive). The bank executive confirmed possessing *“several procedures and bodies which govern CSR,*

such as Declaration of Anti-Corruption, Procedure for Clients' Complaints, Code of Responsible Advertising, Code of Conduct, Ethics Committee.“ The presence of individual policies, procedures, systems and governance bodies is a step towards the adoption of a comprehensive CSR strategy, which would be measurable, facilitating external reporting in accordance with the international standards. This weakness has also been identified globally, and the adoption of a CSR strategy has become a requirement of the latest G4 standards of the Global Reporting Initiative (2015, p. 24).

A major weakness of the Serbian companies lies in the unclear linkages between core business operations and CSR projects. A global review of the prevailing approaches the firms take in relation to CSR revealed these efforts to be so fragmented and disconnected from business and strategy, as to obscure many of the greatest opportunities for firms to benefit the society (Porter & Kramer 2006, p. 4). CSR can be effective only if it is based and inspired by the activities that a firm performs best in the market. The executives confirmed their awareness of this notion: *“It is easier to implement CSR projects related to the core business, because they might be connected to new business generation”* (food & beverage executive). The bank executives consider their primary business responsibility to be transparent towards clients, besides developing a culture of entrepreneurship and stimulating the economic growth, linking it with cause-related or projects with a broader social impact: *“We have connected one of our most profitable products, a credit card, with a noble cause –i.e. renovation of playgrounds in kindergartens throughout Serbia.* “Finally, although responsibility should not be equated with legal compliance and regular business operations, sometimes the market anomalies in Serbia create unique forms of CSR: *“When there was a shortage of medicines due to the government debt to wholesalers, we continued to supply the market despite negative margins. In Serbia, CSR from our core business sometimes means selling products without profit”*(pharmaceutical executive).

The financial crisis that has swept through the business world put CSR initiatives under much closer scrutiny in terms of the business benefits received from supporting the demands of non-shareholding stakeholder groups, redirecting the focus of decision-makers to the activities providing the tangible results to the firm (Chiu & Sharfman, 2009). Thus, the interest in measuring the CSR results increased, along with the desire to use CSR as a strategic tool in human resource (HR) management, corporate governance, innovation and cost containment. CSR underwent a turnaround from the “outside” to the “inside”, implying a shift from the initial desire to enhance one’s public reputation, to improving the internal procedures and systems, rendering them more transparent and sustainable. Proper measurement was deemed vital for greater consideration, since CSR is usually either not properly measured, or is considered difficult to measure: *“We measure it through the*

commercial value of media coverage and the influence made on regulatory bodies” (media agency/pharmaceutical executive), or *“Measuring is based on the public response to our actions”* (media foundation executive). Although it is not always possible to measure CSR practices and create indices (Gjølberg, 2009), the business reality proves that what gets measured, gets managed (Dillenburg, Green & Erekson, 2003, p. 170).

Reporting may serve as a differentiation strategy (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001, p. 120), especially in highly competitive sectors, reinforcing the confidence of important business partners and investors and providing a prudent image in corporate governance. However, the interviewed executives were reluctant to engage in official CSR reporting: *“It has potential, but it is not essential,”* claims a bank executive. A pharmaceutical executive pointed out an interesting attitude: *“Stakeholders in Serbia addressed by CSR reports don’t understand their meaning and purpose; it would be better to educate them first.”* CSR reporting entails the collection and analysis of information about the processes and systems that may not have been the subject of prior measurement and analysis and may lead to some new insights on cost savings and general business improvements. Amongst all the respondents, only one company uses GRI principles as an integral part of its annual reporting, although without external verification, while there are also cases where *“the headquarters issue sustainability reports in accordance with the GRI standards”* (media executive). Likewise, the executives did not find CSR standards and certifications (e.g. ISO 26000, Serbian CSR Index) to be managerially useful. Only one executive had some experience with it and recognised its value: *“An interesting experience with certification highlighted the processes in the value chain we could improve.”* Based on this finding, it is first necessary to educate both the executives and stakeholders in Serbia about the benefits of CSR reporting.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Our research demonstrates that there is a high awareness on the part of the Serbian managers and business executives about the concept and importance of CSR, but limited understanding of how CSR could be applied more strategically to reinforce the core activity. Yet, while the awareness has increased since the 2005 survey (Responsible Business Initiative), the CSR practice has not noticeably developed since the 2010 study (Smart kolektiv) and the time of conducting our research. Some companies record a relatively long and sound CSR practice, which evolved over time in a strategic manner, whilst many others perceive CSR only as a branding tool.

With the intersection of the research findings about the current state of CSR application, the conducted CSR activities and the existence of CSR-related procedures and guidelines, we could conclude that:

- 75% of the surveyed companies applies some form of CSR (Figure 1);
- About two thirds of the companies conducts philanthropic donations (64%) and community projects (67%) (Figure 3).
- Almost a half of the surveyed companies (48%) holds policies and procedures regulating different CSR topics and areas (Figure 5);

The testing of the zero hypothesis that two relative frequencies are the same in one population (Kadijević, 2012, p. 28) indicated the following:

- Relative frequencies 48% and 75% are not the same in statistical terms ($n = 90$, $Z = -2.381$, $p = 0.017$), with more presentation of companies with some form of CSR;
- Relative frequencies 48% and 64% are equal in statistical terms ($n = 90$, $Z = -1.451$, $p = 0.147$);
- Relative frequencies 48% and 67% are equal in statistical terms ($N = 90$, $Z = -1.708$, $p = 0.088$).

Could it be argued that the existence of CSR-related policies and procedures (Figure 5) is connected to the presence of some form of CSR (Figure 1)? Such a question can be asked when it comes to linking CSR policies and procedures (Figure 5) with the existence of philanthropic donations and the implementation of projects in the community (Figure 3). Furthermore, it is also possible to consider the connection of the presence of some form of CSR (Figure 1) with the existence of philanthropic donations, or the realisation of the projects in the community (Figure 3). However, the available data do not provide the reasoned conclusions such as "there is a connection" or "there is no connection", as exemplified by the argumentation concerning the question raised at the beginning of this paragraph. If, for example, in 45% companies which possess CSR-related policies and procedures¹ there is some form of CSR, the result of the Chi-squared test would be significant at the level 0.01 (so we could conclude that there are some connections), whilst in 40% of such companies the results of this test would not be significant due to $p \approx 0.08$ (so it could be concluded that there is no connection).

Therefore, referring to our research question, we could *not confirm* that CSR became an integral part of strategic management in Serbia. The results suggesting that in about half of the surveyed companies there are policies and procedures related to CSR and that three-quarters of companies apply some form of CSR, are contrary to the fact that only a handful of business managers could confirm the existence of an umbrella CSR strategy in their organisation, according to the G4 Sustainability Reporting Guidelines (GRI) which require from companies to have a long-term CSR strategy. This indicates that CSR in Serbia has still not

¹ The share of these companies is certainly larger than 23 (48-25) %

been implemented in a strategic and systematic manner. The above-mentioned connections, along with the fact that charity projects prevail among the CSR activities in our research, further reveals a lack of a strategic approach to CSR and the insufficient knowledge about the benefits of implementing it as part of the core strategy, which was also confirmed by other authors (Predić, Stefanović & Ivanović-Đukić, 2013). Due to a general decline of business revenues, aggressive cost containment strategies have been applied, influencing corporate philanthropy and social cause projects. Therefore, the limited financial resources and the impaired ability to plan future business operations have been assessed as the two most key factors hindering Serbian companies from currently paying more attention to CSR.

In order to avoid using the economic crisis as an excuse or justification and to promote the role of CSR in enhancing business results, it is necessary to measure its outcomes, as it is the case with other business strategies. However, our research has indicated that the Serbian executives have insufficient CSR expertise, even in the leading firms where they could not clearly differentiate between a CSR strategy, the firm's mission and vision and its corporate culture. Most CSR achievements to date in the Serbian business sector have been reached thanks to the introduced international practices or personal philanthropic beliefs, the executives using their personal sense of humanity rather than their professional expertise.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions of our research, while relevant to the study of global business practices, are especially pertinent to the understanding of the role of businesses, and particularly their CSR practice in contributing to the corporate success in a transition economy and making a wider economic impact. CSR could be beneficial in times of crisis, which was confirmed by Ducassy's research (2013) which found that a good CSR practice reassures investors during the troubled periods. However, while the accumulated goodwill resulting from the sound CSR practice acts as a buffer in the times of a financial performance decline, the effect does not seem to be long-lasting, which is why CSR needs to be linked to the core strategy. By comparing percentages in our research, we can see that the share of companies which apply some form of CSR (75%) is significantly higher than the share of companies which possess CSR-related policies and procedures (48%), which confirms that there are more companies conducting CSR activities on paper than those applying CSR and sustainability in a strategic and long-term manner. When it comes to the relationship between the existence of CSR-related policies and procedures and the application of some form of CSR, the reported results

of the Chi-squared tests indicated that a grounded conclusion cannot be made. In other words, the two might or might not be related. As it is important to uncover under what conditions this relationship is positive (e.g., the companies with CSR policies and procedures apply CSR versus those without CSR policies and procedures do not apply CSR), this (and other relevant aspects such as the difference between possessing an umbrella CSR strategy and CSR-related policies and procedures) may be examined in future research.

Based on our research findings, we are advocating changes in the education of managers. This recommendation is especially pertinent in a transition economy exemplified by the case study of Serbia, which confirmed a significant gap in the CSR understanding and practice compared to the developed economies. For a country undergoing market transition, CSR could be particularly useful in advancing corporate governance, business ethics, green procurement and anti-corruption.

Further research could be conducted to study the role of personal attitudes and values of the executives in shaping the CSR practice, especially in transition economies where the introduction of CSR practice often facilitates an advanced corporate culture. The executives we interviewed indicated a desire for CSR to become an integral part of their corporate culture, but also expressed an apprehension that the path to that goal would be extremely challenging, which again can be interpreted as a lack of knowledge about the strategic CSR application. Nevertheless, most respondents confirmed that these topics are discussed within the firm and that there is an acknowledgement that the CSR process should be improved. To make progress in terms of the CSR corporate culture, a strategic involvement of HR managers in addition to top executives may be crucial. This is another field of research to be explored further.

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ВРЕДНОВАЊЕ СТРАТЕШКОГ ПРИСТУПА ДРУШТВЕНО ОДГОВОРНОМ ПОСЛОВАЊУ У СРБИЈИ

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Резиме

Друштвено одговорно пословање (ДОП) старо је колико и сам бизнис. Облици и активности ДОП-а на почетку 21. века претежно су се манифестовали кроз спорадичне филантропске активности и пројекте службе за односе с јавношћу, са циљем да се унапреди углед предузећа у заједници и друштву. Област је добила на већем значају са глобализацијом пословног сектора, као одговор на све већа очекивања различитих заинтересованих страна на које се утиче пословањем. Радити добро у заједници у којој се послује, након избијања светске економске кризе дало је ДОП-у потпуно нову димензију. Да ли је ДОП пожељна, очекивана или корисна пословна стратегија, на које врсте и активности ДОП-а пословни сектор треба да се усмери, балансирање између краткорочних продајних и дугорочних циљева одрживости – постале су актуелне теме у дискусији међу истакнутим међународним организацијама, у пословним и академским круговима.

Сprovedено истраживање показало је висок ниво свести о друштвено одговорном пословању међу руководиоцима у Србији, али због недостатка стручно-

сти из предметне области уочен је раскорак између жеље да се буде одговоран и способности да се ДОП стратешки реализује. За извршно руководство у Србији, унапређење угледа и вредности бренда представљају водеће мотиве у ДОП-у. Насупрот томе, етичност и одговорност у пословању (још увек) нису јаки покретачи за српске потрошаче, што доводи до парадоксалне ситуације у којој предузећа спроводе ДОП активности како би их фаворизовали потрошачи, који пак дају предност ценовним подстрецима над одговорном пословном праксом. Највеће одступање уочено је код анализе трошкова и користи од ДОП-а, с обзиром на то да ДОП има тенденцију да се третира као инвестиција која доноси нематеријалну вредност, коју у садашњем изазовном пословном окружењу оптерећују трошкови. Користи и прилике из ДОП-а леже у већој способности да се привуче, мотивише и задржи квалитетна радна снага, створи и негује култура иновација, оствари смањење трошкова и доведе до бољих односи с добављачима. Посебно охрабрује налаз да код средњег руководства, које представља будуће пословне лидере, преовлађује став да у пракси ДОП не захтева нужно улагања, јер се прилагођава новим начинима пословања. Како би српска предузећа имала користи од стратешке примене ДОП-а, потребно је уврстити га у обавезну едукацију менаџера.