

PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract: Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is becoming increasingly often an essential element of a strategy of modern enterprises. CSR activities include a wide range of relationships with stakeholders, that is entities who are associated with the activity of an organization or are under its influence. The natural environment is one of most important stakeholders. The CSR strategy implements the postulate of the pursuit of sustainable development, that is, the development where the economic issues are treated equally to social and environmental issues. Over the years there were taken many initiatives which were aimed at the promotion of this idea. The article discusses the selected initiatives, paying a particular attention to the elements concerning the natural environment.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility, sustainable development, ISO Standards, Eco-Management and AuditScheme (EMAS), Cleaner Production UNEP IE Framework.

1. The essence of corporate social responsibility

The idea for corporate social responsibility (CSR) was both in the 1930s in the United States. The premise was initially dismissed, and it was only in the 1950s that the business environment started to develop it, considering the role and responsibility of business for the society. At that time, Howard R. Bowen used the term “social responsibility” for the first time, defining it as “the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action that are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society.” (Bowen, 1953)

The history of corporate social responsibility is therefore long. However, it was in the 1990s that the theory gained momentum (particularly in the United States, Western Europe and Japan). Since then, companies have been taking on responsibilities derived from the social responsibility of business. Social organizations display this responsibility by acting according to the law and by respecting the collective agreements signed with their social partners. They are also obligated to fulfill the requirements formulated by sustainable development, and strive

to improve the quality of life of the current and future generations. Therefore, corporate social responsibility is a concept, by which companies build their strategies by voluntarily including social interests and environment protection, as well as relations with various stakeholder groups. Corporate social responsibility is the responsibility of businesses for the effects of their activities on third parties. It can be therefore claimed that companies take social responsibilities upon themselves that ultimately limit their choice options. To be recognized as a socially responsible company, a business must go beyond mere observance of applicable formal and legal requirements (an obligation which applies to all legally operating organizations), but needs to take additional responsibilities, such as environment protection. W. Gasparski claims that corporate social responsibility is an effective management strategy which contributes to the increase in competitiveness of businesses at global level by conducting effective social dialogue at local level, and which shapes the conditions for sustainable social and economic development (Gasparski, 2004). Responsible business is a strategic, long-term approach based on the principles of social dialogue and the search for solutions that are beneficial for the company and its environment, its employees, all stakeholders and the society, within which the company operates. The idea of corporate social responsibility has been spreading all over Poland, going beyond companies with foreign capital (Pakulska, Rutkowska, 2018).

Corporate social responsibility is an element of the company's strategy, one that can also contribute to its competitive advantage. Therefore, CSR produces measurable economic results. Socially responsible companies draw the public attention to their focus on the stakeholders' interests (Nakoneczna, 2008). Social responsibility therefore stands for socially reliable business, conducted transparently in full observance of the law and ethical standards, taking responsibility for the society, the client, the environment, the employee and the investor. The contemporary definition of this idea is closely related to the concept of sustainable development. Corporate social responsibility is an investment in the company's reputation, one that produces long-term benefits for the company. Among many CSR advantages are building a positive image, building a good reputation of the company in the environment and solidifying the interest, favor, trust and loyalty of current and future stakeholders, such as clients, suppliers and investors, as well as improving the situation of the company, e.g. by improving the satisfaction and loyalty of employees. The positive impact on the resolution of social, economic and ecological problems is also noteworthy.

2. CSR and the natural environment

Business activity is based on the human use of natural, capital and human resources. For ages, natural resources were recognized as given by the environment in abundance and worthless as devoid of the human labor factor. Dynamic socioeconomic development which

started in the 20th century led to a significant degradation of the natural environment. Deteriorating quality of the environment, i.e. a set of features defining the degree, in which satisfies economic needs, was first recorded in the 1980s-1990s. The concept of eco-development – sustainable and rational development which recognizes environmental requirements as superior to economic development – was the response to this trend (Pakulska, 2002). The problem of environmental threats has become one of the most burning problems of the contemporary world. Initially, the authorities alone adopted total responsibility for the environment, as they legally defined permissible business interventions in the natural environment. Gradually, companies started to include pro-environmental measures in their strategies, both within their business milieus and beyond. Apart from measures to limit their negative impact on the environment (e.g. by the implementation of environmental management systems), these companies started to get involved in various pro-ecological initiatives, such as the world cleanup or tree planting projects.

The purpose of a CSR strategy is to achieve sustainable development, i.e. development, in which social and ecological issues are treated equally to economic issues. The strategy assumes three dimensions: the social, the economic and the environmental dimension. An important role is assigned to the natural environment and its protection, since they are an extraordinary stakeholder, compared to the others (the environment is sometimes referred to as a silent stakeholder, since the environment cannot defend itself against the harmful effects of companies). Therefore, strict principles of conduct should be established for the natural environment. A socially and environmentally responsible company is a company that observes all applicable environmental regulations and has established a rational management of environmental resources. A responsible company must promote sustainable development and avoid the waste of natural resources. Environment pollution and inconsiderate use of its resources are the result of technologies, production methods applied and economic growth. A company's responsibility for the environment is perceived as its responsibility for the ecological effects of its activities. Companies should therefore strive to limit the pollution emitted to the maximum, use the resources in a rational manner, and minimize their negative impact on the environment (Nakoneczna, 2008). The scope of environmental measures includes the safety of environment during production (damages, accidents, risk), substance emission control, the use of renewable and non-renewable resources, product and service distribution and design. As part of their pro-ecological enterprises, companies have implemented environmental management systems and have applied environmental marking (eco labels).

CSR can therefore impact the quality of life of the stakeholders and can result in environment quality improvement. Since CSR is referred to as the “responsibility of businesses for their impact on the society”, we can construe it as total activities of businesses which contribute to achieving sustainable socioeconomic development.

3. International initiatives promoting CSR

Since the 1990s, the CSR idea has gained in importance, as expressed by the emergence of international and national organizations aiming to promote the issues that lie at the roots of corporate social responsibility. These have been also raised by dedicated agendas, commissions, and government institutions, the first of which was the Caux Round Table (1989) which associated the leading business representatives from Europe, the United States and Japan. The Round Table adopted global standards for moral behavior in business. According to them, business should be conducted with respect to the rules of the country it is conducted in. One of the seven rules adopted concerns respect to the natural environment (The rule is: Respect to the natural environment) (Nakoneczna, 2008).

The most important initiative for the promotion and implementation of CSR ideas in the world was the adoption of nine ethical principles in 1999 (currently, there are ten principles) referred to as the Global Compact (GC). They were proposed by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan at the Global Business Forum in Davos. A company can voluntarily join the initiative by reporting to the UN General Secretary. After joining the GC, the company is obligated to draw up an “Annual report on the progress of implementation of ten rules of the Global Compact Initiative for stakeholders”. No company is however required to prove the observance of GC conditions. One of the rules also refers to environment protection: it states that business should (Kietliński, Reyes, Oleksyn, 2005):

- support all preventive measures concerning environment protection,
- take measures to promote higher environmental responsibility,
- support the development and promotion of environmentally-friendly technologies.

In the Global Compact, the natural environment was included in one of 4 areas that are governed by strict rules. This area also includes: preventive approach to the natural environment, engaging in initiatives which aim to promote environmental responsibility standpoints, as well as the application and promotion of environmentally-friendly technologies. GC is currently the largest voluntary initiative in the world (associating more than 12 thousand companies from 145 countries, including 183 companies from Poland, put of which the first one joined the GC in 2001) (<http://www.globalcompact.org.pl/>).

Another initiative which raised environmental issues was the Global Resources Initiative (GRI) which published the first set of GRI Sustainable Reporting Guidelines in 2000 (updated in 2004, 2006, 2014). GRI guidelines currently include 35 environmental indicators, including 16 basic indicators and 19 supplementary indicators. Similarly to GC, there are no procedures in place for verifying the observance of these guidelines (Kietliński, Reyes, Oleksyn, 2005).

The development of the CSR idea in Europe gained new momentum in 2001, when the European Commission published the Green Paper devoted to corporate social responsibility. The document described corporate social responsibility as voluntary inclusion of social and

ecological issues in the company's activity. It was defined as "a concept whereby companies decide voluntarily to contribute to a better society and a cleaner environment. Where corporate social responsibility is a process by which companies manager their relationships with a variety of stakeholders who can have a real influence on their licence to operate, the business case becomes apparent. Thus, it should be treated as an investment, not a cost, much like quality management. They can thereby have an inclusive financial, commercial and social approach, leading to a long-term strategy minimizing risks linked to uncertainty. Companies should pursue social responsibility internationally as well as in Europe, including through their whole supply chain". (http://emas-register.eu/statistic.php?view=all_sites).

In 2001, the European Commission published the White Book, or the so-called "European Governance", in which the need to notify the public opinion of measures taken to promote corporate social responsibility in the EU was emphasized (Corporate Social Responsibility: A Business Contribution to Sustainable Development). Communication titled "Implementing the Partnership for Growth and JOOobs: Making Europe a Pole of Excellence on Corporate Social Responsibility" was published in March 2006. In 2010, the European Commission indicated that companies have started to implement CSR as a means to improve their image (Kietliński, Reyes, Oleksyn, 2005, Koneczna, 2014).

Standards of conduct for international companies, as prepared by 37 OECD states are an important global document. Similarly to the previous documents and initiatives, their implementation is voluntary. Among the OECD environment protection principles are (2004):

- pursuit of permanent, sustainable development,
- care for human life and health,
- surveying and monitoring environmental impact,
- consultations with local communities and employees,
- assessing the impact of goods produced and services on the environment,
- counteracting extraordinary threats,
- making production processes more ecological,
- promoting ecological awareness among clients,
- employee training.

4. Standards and systems supporting the management of corporate social responsibility in environment protection

Various standardized programs, such as standards from the ISO 14000 or the EMAS systems, as well as non-standardized programs, such as the Clean Production Program serve to assist organizations which want to act responsibly in relation to the natural environment.

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) is an international organization which associates domestic standardization organizations. It is a non-government organization, although some member organizations operate within government structures. ISO establishes practical norms in all disciplines, and their observance is voluntary.

The beginning of ISO 14001 is dated for 1991, when a group of 100 experts from 20 countries and 11 international organizations started to work on this standard. Their goal was to support the concept of sustainable development, as coined at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. The result of their work was a series of 14000 standards (see the table) (Nakoneczna, 2008). In applying the standards from the 14000 series, companies can perfect their environmental management, which has become particularly important due to growing standard requirements and growing costs of pro-environmental enterprises implemented by companies.

ISO 14001 is based on ISO 9000 which concerns quality management in companies. The purpose of this standard is to ensure continuous improvement of environment quality. ISO 14001 contains requirements which, when fulfilled, qualify the company for receiving a certificate of conformity for the functioning of environmental management (Koneczna, 2014). ISO 14001 is one of the most popular environmental management standards, as certificates of conformity with its requirements were issued for 300 thousand certified organizations from more than 170 countries (http://www.iso.org/iso/home/store/catalogue_tc/catalogue_detail.htm?csnumber=42546).

Table 1.

ISO 14000 series standards

Description	Standard
Environmental management system	ISO 14001, ISO 14004
Ecological audits	ISO 14010-14012, ISO 14015
Eco-labeling	ISO 14021, ISO 1024, ISO 14025
Assessment of outcomes of environmental activity	ISO 14031, ISO 14032
Life cycle assessment	ISO 14040-14043, ISO 14048, ISO 14049
Terminology and definitions	ISO 14050
Ecological aspects in production standards	ISO 14061

Source: Matuszak-Flejszman, A. *Jak skutecznie wdrożyć system zarządzania środowiskowego według normy ISO 14001*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo PZiTS.

The ISO standard refers to the corporate social responsibility of business and was approved on 1 November 2010. Accordingly, “the purpose of the [CSR] strategy is to ensure the responsible impact of decisions and activities (products, service, processes) on the society and the environment by employing transparent and ethical behaviors contributing to the development of sustainable well-being and health of a society, considering the expectations of all stakeholders, applicable laws and cohesion with the organization (Kapitał społeczny dla gospodarki. O CSR, ISO 26000, www.odpowiedzialnafirma/o-csr/iso-26000). This standard defined corporate social responsibility as an obligation “of an organization to include social and environmental aspects in the decision-making process, and to take responsibility for the impact of decisions made and activities performed on the society and the environment. This stands for

a behavior that is both transparent and ethical, contributing to sustainable development, employed in full observance of the law and in cohesion with international standards. This also means that corporate social responsibility is embedded in the structure of the organization, practiced in its operations and considers the expectations of all stakeholders” (CSR społeczna odpowiedzialność biznesu w Polsce, 2014). One of the outcomes of this behavior is contributing to sustainable development, including health and common well-being.

The basic areas of social responsibility, as specified in the 26000 standard, include the natural environment. The standard indicates that, regardless of its type of activity, a company should minimize its impact on the environment, rationally manage its resources and waste and take measures to benefit the environment (Społeczna odpowiedzialność biznesu: fakty a opinie, 2014). In this sense, it is possible to take measures which are oriented at care for the environment and reducing the consumption of natural resources as a result of its activities. According to ISO 26000, the most important CSR areas in environment protection are:

- rational use of raw materials and energy,
- raising awareness in environment protection,
- consideration of environmental assumptions in company management.

ISO 26000 is not a social responsibility system, but serves as a guide for CSR implementation. Other factors assessed thereunder are: impact on the environment, which includes such areas as: consumption of water and access to water, effectiveness of use of raw materials, extension of time of use a finished product (product life cycle) and the impact of company operations on climate changes. Other analyzed aspects include the conservation of ecosystem biodiversity and the basic functions of ecosystems by supplying nutrients, water, controlling soil quality and preserving the organisms which take part in pollinating plants, regenerating pollutions and waste, improving the pro-environmental use of urbanized and farming areas, the use of soil and natural resources in a sustainable manner (ISO 26000 Social responsibility, Rabiański, 2013, Koneczna, 2014).

The eco-management and audit scheme (EMAS) has been developed by the European Union. Companies joining the scheme undertake to assess their impact on the environment, which is verified by an accredited environmental auditor and renewed periodically. EMAS was established in 1993 and complies with ISO 14001. Its purpose is to facilitate companies in their improvement of pro-environmental activity by establishing and implementing environmental management standards. EMAS identifies direct and indirect environmental aspects (http://emas-register.eu/statistic.php?view=all_sites). Direct aspects are related to the activity, products and services of the organization, ones that the company directly supervises, and apply to:

- legal requirements and limitations included in permits,
- emissions to air,
- release to waters,

- production, recycling, reuse, transport and disposal of solid and other waste, hazardous waste,
- use of land and soil contamination,
- use of natural and other resources (including energy),
- use of additives and auxiliaries, including intermediate products,
- local problems (noise, vibrations, unpleasant odors, dust, visual effects, etc.)
- threats related to transport,
- threats related to environmental accidents and the impacts of incidents, accidents and potentially extraordinary situations on the environment,
- impact on biodiversity.

Indirect environmental dimensions include, among others:

- issues related to product life cycle,
- capital investments, granting loans and insurance activity,
- new markets,
- selection and structure of services (e.g. transport or catering),
- administrative and planning decisions,
- product offer structure,
- effects of environmental activity and contractor, subcontractor and supplier practices.

EMAS is not as popular as ISO 1440, as proven by the mere number of registered organizations (below 4 thousand), the majority of which are based in Germany, Spain and Italy (with 63 organizations in Poland) (http://emas-register.eu/statistic.php?view=all_sites).

The Clean Production Program was created at the end of the 1980s in the United States. It is coordinated by UNEP and assumes the implementation of an integrated strategy for preventing the degradation of the environment with processes, products and services offered by companies. The purpose of the program is to increase the effectiveness and risk reduction for humans and the natural environment. These programs can be used in each branch of industry, for each product and service. In production, they serve to reduce the consumption of raw materials, water and energy, as well as to reduce the contaminants released. Their purpose is to reduce the negative impact of the organization's activities on the environment and on human health during the product's complete life cycle. The International Clean Production Declaration announced in 1998 was signed by 67 signatories. Once every two years, the signatories undergo verification to check their observance of their obligations. Clean Production Programs are recognized as the first stage in the construction of an environmental management system. There are currently 22 Polish institutions and 35 Polish organizations listed in the register.

By joining the program, an organization undertakes to implement measures in all areas, such as:

1. “management – by encouraging the participants of the production process to adopt sustainable production and consumption practices,
2. awareness, organization and trainings – developing awareness, education and trainings inside the organization,
3. integration – activities aiming at the integration of preventive strategies by performing assessments of ecological measures, ecological accounting, ecological impact, life cycle and assessment of Clean Production,
4. research and development – works devoted to the development of innovative solutions promoting ecological and effective products and services,
5. social communication – obligation to share experiences in implementing preventive strategies and information on their benefits to external process participants,
6. implementation – taking measures to implement Clean Production, including preparation of reports on the progress of works as part of a management system, investing in new, environmentally-friendly technologies, cooperation with UNPEP and other partners in supporting the declaration and reviewing the effects of its implementation (Nakoneczna, 2008).

5. Summary

In this day and age, each respectable organization must take measures that contribute to the corporate social responsibility of its business. Measures related to the natural environment and its protection are an important group of enterprises. Consumers are paying growing attention to the socially and environmentally responsible aspects of business activities. The public opinion, non-government organizations and civic initiatives have forced the business world to respect the principles of sustainable development (Bokszajska, 2011). Therefore, at this point, questioning corporate social responsibility seems impossible. Interest in CSR is “trendy”, particularly in the United States or in Western Europe. However, the trend has also surfaced in Poland.

Poland has taken active part in the completion of corporate social responsibility objectives, as expressed by the development of Global Compact and Caux Round Table agendas and in the creation of industrial ethical codes. The first initiative related to the promotion of corporate social responsibility strategies was established in 2001 when the first Global Compact meeting took place. The Responsible Business Forum was created at that time. The RBF is currently the largest non-government organization dealing with CSR issues and their promotion. CSE

development has become particularly apparent after 2009, when the RESPECT¹ index was first quoted on the Stock Exchange. At that time, a corporate social responsibility team was appointed as an auxiliary body to the Council of Ministers. The goal of the team was to promote CSR, establish better communication and promoting the best solutions in corporate social responsibility and developing a vision of sustainable development for Polish companies by 2050 (Koneczna, 2013).

Wide-scale implementation of corporate social responsibility occurred with the establishment of international corporation branches in Poland. Establishing new offices, these companies transferred their agendas. Today, they have become the elements of strategies in companies with foreign capital and companies with national capital alike. Of course, this does not mean that these companies have never supported their local communities or implemented any projects contributing to the environment (e.g. limitation of emissions or tree planting initiatives). However, these were usually project-limited, often single-time, not contributing to a holistic approach. To treat these useful measures like corporate social responsibility, they should form an organizational strategy and should be included in an annual CSR report.

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¹ RESPECT INDEX was created in 2009 on the Stock Exchange. It is one of few socially responsible indexes in the world. The purpose of the index was to raise interest of companies quoted on the stock exchange in CSR involvement. Companies belonging to the index are examined according to social responsibility definition. The index is more stable, compared to other indexes quoted on the stock exchange.

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