

DEVELOPMENT OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN VISEGRAD GROUP COUNTRIES

Patrycja HĄBEK

Silesian University of Technology, Faculty of Organization and Management; patrycja.habek@polsl.pl,
ORCID: 0000-0002-7545-1637

Abstract: The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Visegrad Group countries (V4) is not very well developed yet, but is gradually transforming and becoming an important topic in the region. The study findings indicate that also CSR reporting practices are not widespread among companies in V4 countries. Initiatives undertaken by the governments of V4 countries basically are related with sharing of information and knowledge and the development of reporting guides. The paper presents an overview of the development of the concept of CSR in Visegrad 4 countries concentrating especially on disclosing the information on CSR performance in the region. The situation of CSR reporting practices in each of the V4 countries is outlined based on the conducted literature analysis.

Keywords: responsible business, CSR reporting, Visegrad Group countries, non-financial reporting.

1. Introduction

The studies on corporate social responsibility implementation in different EU countries indicate that the governments and businesses in Europe have different perceptions on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and in fact the European Union is characterised by a high diversity of combinations of CSR models (Iamandi, 2011; Letica, 2010; Hąbek, and Wolniak, 2013). Although there is one EU policy framework on CSR, the concept is implemented differently across EU Member States (Mullerat, 2013). As the CSR reporting is an integral part of the CSR concept, the practices of disclosure of CSR information in a particular country is the result of the development of that concept there. Analysis of the papers thematically related to CSR reporting confirm that those practices are a relatively new phenomenon in V4 countries, and CSR reporting is not widespread among companies yet.

The Visegrad Group is formed by four countries: Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. All four countries joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the European Union, and deepened cooperation among Central European states in areas such as education, culture, science, environment, fight against organised crime, regional development, civil society development, transport, etc. (Gyárfášová, and Mesežnikov, 2016). Studies that concentrate on the issue of CSR reporting have been mostly focused on countries of Western Europe, as well as the Scandinavian countries. The findings of these studies cannot refer to the situation in Central and Eastern European countries, as they have underlying legal or institutional backgrounds that differ from those applied in the old EU Member States. Moreover, transition from a centrally planned to a market economy in this region, and social and political transformations have brought about a situation wherein stakeholders requirements (i.e. civil organizations, media, consumers) in V4 countries might be lower than in old EU Member States. Therefore, it becomes important to address the topic of corporate social responsibility and its communication in this region of Europe.

The aim of the paper is to present an overview of the development of the concept of corporate social responsibility in Visegrad 4 countries, concentrating especially on disclosing the information on CSR performance in this region.

2. Development of CSR concept in V4 countries

The countries of the Visegrad Group are inhabited by 64.3 million people, which is 12.7 percent of the population of the European Union. While in terms of population, the V4 group can be compared to Germany, its GDP is almost four times smaller and export is 2.5 times smaller. The total GDP of the Visegrad Group, calculated at current prices is not much greater than that of the Netherlands, and when adjusted for purchasing power of the currency, it is roughly equal to the GDP of Spain. Although during the last 25 years the V4 countries grew faster than Western European countries, they are still among the poorest in the European Union. The Czech Republic is about 15 percentage points poorer than the average of the EU 28 countries, Slovakia 23 percentage points, Poland and Hungary by more than 30 percentage points. Poland is definitely the largest country in the V4 group and generates 55 percent of total Visegrad Four GDP (Gadomski, 2016).

During the last twenty years, the Visegrad Group countries have undergone tremendous changes in the political, environmental and social area. The CSR concept in these countries is relatively new, but is rapidly spreading, in particular, as part of their integration in the European Union, as well as under the influence of transnational corporations (TNCs) and foreign investors (Line, and Braun, 2010; Jonek-Kowalska, and Zielinski, 2017). Changes in the broader business environment have shaped the development of CSR in the Group. Government involvement in

CSR issues is diverse in V4 countries. Some CSR key topics in this area are community involvement, corporate governance, public-private partnership and welfare. Further in the paper, a brief description of the CSR concept's development in each of the V4 countries is presented.

Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, one of the most important non-governmental organizations almost entirely focused on CSR is the Business Leaders' Forum. The Business Leaders' Forum has been operating in the Czech Republic since 1992. It is the Czech affiliate of the Prince of Wales Business Leaders' Forum, which among others, acts as the National Partner of CSR Europe. This initiative started with a small handful of companies in the Czech Republic, which aimed at creating a business culture that subscribed to responsible business practices, to benefit both business and society. Since that time, the topic of CSR has been steadily becoming more and more popular, while the group of involved companies has been growing. Today many companies, particularly the large ones, present their achievements in CSR and other related documents on their websites, as well as on pages of organizations promoting CSR (Polášek, 2010). The government's efforts in promoting CSR is evident in the approval in 2014 of a strategy document entitled "National Action Plan for Corporate Social Responsibility in the Czech Republic". The aim of the document, which was prepared under the auspices of the Ministry of Industry and Trade, and in collaboration with other stakeholders, is to contribute to the development of the concept of corporate social responsibility in the Czech Republic and its positive impact on society, economic development and the competitiveness of the Czech Republic (National Action Plan..., 2014). In the Czech Republic, several CSR Awards also operate, for example: the Czech National Award for CSR, and Top Responsible Company of the Year. In 2014, the standard dedicated to the management system of social responsibility of organizations (ČSN, 2013) was published. This technical standard states the requirements of the management system of social responsibility and it can also be used by the public and private sectors. Moreover, the standard can be used for certification processes.

Hungary

Since the mid-1990s, corporations in Hungary have begun to pay more attention to the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and responsible business conduct. Foreign investors over the long term have imported their CSR policies and models, which local Hungarian corporations have also begun to adopt (Hungary – Corporate Social Responsibility, 2017). Most CSR activities are connected to donations, philanthropy and communication. Enterprises tend to think more in terms of projects, spectacular events that can be easily communicated, than of responsible operations. In Hungary, like in the entire Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) region, CSR has not yet reached the critical mass that would motivate corporations to change their way of doing their core business (Ligeti, and Oravec, 2009).

One of the most popular organizations promoting CSR is CSR Hungary. This, since 2006 has been organising an annual CSR conference. It also offers a CSR Award and constructs a CSR Index. The second organization worth mentioning is the Hungarian Business Leaders Forum, which is a non-profit association of influential CSR-oriented business executives (Visser, and Tolhurst, 2010). Outstanding companies are regularly recognised with CSR awards (CSR Market Place Awards, European CSR Award, and others such as CSR Hungary, CSR Best Practice, Responsible Donor label). The government published its first CSR Decree in March 2006, which reinforced the social responsibility of employers and provided measures to stimulate it. Furthermore, the former Economic and Social Council (GSZT) developed a number of ambitious recommendations on CSR for the government in 2007, but these have never been formally adopted and implemented (Visser, 2016).

Poland

In Poland, the subject of responsible business has been present since the early 1990s. However, the greatest progress in the development of this issue was made between 2000 and 2002, when the Responsible Business Forum was established and the Global Compact initiative led by UNDP was launched. Today, there are many more organizations in Poland that deal with CSR issues, for example: the Academy for the Development of Philanthropy in Poland, Centre for Business Ethics, the Foundation Corporate Social Responsibility Institute, and the Foundation Centre CSR.pl. In 2009, the Prime Minister appointed an inter-ministerial team for corporate social responsibility issues. In the same year, an index of socially responsible companies was established on the Warsaw Stock Exchange (WSE), the so-called Respect Index. It was the first index of this kind in the region of CEE. Its first edition listed 16 responsible companies. Currently, the Respect Index includes 23 companies. Companies in Poland also increasingly more often implement voluntary international standards, such as UN Global Compact, SA 8000, AA1000, GRI, ISO 26000, and OECD Guidelines for Multinationals. Furthermore, there are a number of codes in Poland developed by Polish business associations and industries, for example, the Best Practices of Warsaw Stock Exchange Listed Companies, the Ethical Code of Employees developed by PKKP and the 'Lewiatan' or principles of good banking practice adopted by the Polish Bank Association (Anam, 2010). For ten years now in Poland, an annual competition for the best CSR report has been organised.

Slovakia

The idea of corporate social responsibility began to spread to Slovakia along with the arrival of multinational corporations in the 1990s. Slovakia has been building awareness of corporate social responsibility from the mid-1990s through several NGOs. The most important are the Centre for Philanthropy PANET, Integra Foundation, Pontis Foundation and the Institute for Economic and Social Reforms (INEKO). In 2004, the Pontis Foundation created an informal association named Business Leaders Forum, which brings together companies subscribing to

the principles of CSR in Slovakia. Its aim is to motivate and inspire companies operating in Slovakia to be socially responsible, by raising awareness and providing the necessary know-how (Bussard et al., 2005). The most important corporate social responsibility activities are those that closely relate to the internal dimension of corporate social responsibility, i.e. how businesses communicate with their employees and what is their overall behaviour in business (Čierna, 2008). Company CSR programs range from employment and education programs for marginalised groups and supporting green initiatives, to fundraising for charities and NGOs. As an official recognition of socially responsible corporations, the Pontis Foundation has for the past 15 years given annual Via Bona Awards to the country's best CSR programs (Slovak Republic, 2015). Slovakia has no unified and comprehensive national approach towards responsible business conduct at the government level (Slovakia – Corporate Social Responsibility, 2017).

3. Analysis of CSR reporting practices in V4 countries

The literature analysis can be useful for drawing up the overall landscape of CSR reporting practices in the V4 region. Corporate social responsibility reporting can be defined as the practice of providing information to external and internal stakeholders about the economic, environmental and social performance achieved by the organization over a specified period of time (Hąbek, and Brodny, 2017; Kołodziej, and Maruszewska 2015). So far, several academic analyses have been published on the current situation of CSR reporting in the Visegrad countries. Further in the paper, the results of this literature analysis are presented.

Publications linked to the theme of CSR reporting were sought for using Google search and the Mendeley search engine. The results shown in the first 10 pages were taken into account. As the most commonly used terms for such types of reports are corporate social responsibility reports and sustainability reports (KPMG, 2013), the keywords for search were as follows: "CSR reporting Czech Republic", "Sustainability reporting Czech Republic", "CSR reporting Hungary", "Sustainability reporting Hungary", "CSR reporting Poland", "Sustainability reporting Poland", "CSR reporting Slovakia", "Sustainability reporting Slovakia", "CSR reporting Visegrad countries", "Sustainability reporting Visegrad countries".

Articles published in scientific journals or conference proceedings were taken into consideration (see Table 1).

Table 1.*Scientific papers related to the topic of CSR reporting in Visegrad Group countries*

	Author	Title	Year	Journal
CZ	M. Dočekalová	Corporate Sustainability Reporting in Czech Companies – Case Studies	2012	Trendy ekonomiky a managementu / Trends Economics and Management VI/11, 2012, pp. 9-16
CZ	J. Hřebíček, M. Hájek, Z. Chvátalová, I. Ritschelová,	Current Trends in Sustainability Reporting in the Czech Republic	2009	Conference Proceedings 23 International Conference on Informatics for Environmental Protection: Concepts, Methods and Tools, pp. 253-260
CZ	V. Kunz, J. Srpová	CSR Reporting and its Use by Enterprises in the Czech Republic	2013	Management: Science and Education, Žilina, Faculty of Management Science and Informatics, EDIS, 2013, č. 1, pp. 31-34
CZ	I. Jindrichovska, I. Purcărea	CSR and Environmental Reporting in the Czech Republic and Romania: Country Comparison of Rules and Practices	2011	Accounting and Management Information Systems, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2011, pp. 202–227
CZ	P. Petera, J. Wagner, M. Boučková	An Empirical Investigation into CSR Reporting by the Largest Companies with their seat in the Czech Republic	2014	Networking Societies - Cooperation and Conflict, 22nd Interdisciplinary Information Management Talks, pp.321-329
HU	A. Karcagi-Kováts, I. Kuti	Diversity of Sustainability Performance Indicators and Corporate Reporting in Hungary	2010	Conference proceedings Corporate Responsibility Research Conference CRRC
HU	I. Piskóti, N. Hajdú	A Benchmarking Approach to the Situation and Topics in CSR Reports of Hungarian Corporations	2013	Responsibility and Sustainability. Socioeconomic, political and legal issues, Vol 2(2), 2013, pp: 1-13
PL	J. Krasodomska	CSR disclosures in the banking industry. Empirical evidence from Poland	2015	Social Responsibility Journal, Vol. 11 Iss:3, pp. 406 - 423
PL	P. Hąbek	Evaluation of sustainability reporting practices in Poland	2014	Quality & Quantity, (2014) 48: 1739, doi:10.1007/s11135-013-9871-z
PL	D. Astupan, A. Schönbohm	Sustainability Reporting Performance in Poland: Empirical Evidence from the WIG 20 and WIG 40 Companies	2012	Polish Journal of Management Studies, vol.6, 2012, pp. 68-80
PL	E.I. Szczepankiewicz, P. Mućko	CSR Reporting Practices of Polish Energy and Mining Companies	2016	Sustainability, 2016, 8, 126; doi:10.3390/su8020126
PL	J. Maj	Corporate Social Responsibility and Diversity Reporting in Polish Companies from Companies from the Basic Materials and Oil & Gas Sectors Listed on the Warsaw Stock Exchange	2016	16th International Multidisciplinary Scientific GeoConference SGEM 2016, Environmental Economics, 016, Book 5 Vol. 3, pp. 123-130

Cont. table 1.

SK	K. Moravcikova, E. Stefanikova, M. Rypakova	CSR Reporting as an Important Tool of CSR Communication	2015	Procedia Economics and Finance, 4th World Conference on Business, Economics and Management, WCBEM
SK	Z. Kubaščíková	Sustainable Development Reporting	2008	Management Information Systems, Vol. 3 (2008), No. 2, pp. 19-23

Five publications concerning the situation in the Czech Republic, two publications related to the situation in Hungary, five publications concerning Poland and two concerning Slovakia were found. No articles discussing comprehensively the topic of CSR reporting in all four Visegrad countries were found. Further in the paper, the situation of CSR reporting practices in each of the V4 countries is outlined based on the conducted literature analysis.

Dočekalova (2012) discovered that only a very small percentage of companies in the Czech Republic issue a report on corporate social responsibility. This fact is also confirmed by the study of Petera et al. (2014), as well as of the Business Leaders Forum (Business Leaders Forum, 2013). Kunz and Srpová's (2013) studies show that companies issuing their own CSR reports (report referring to the situation in the Czech Republic) fall behind companies that use reports of their multinational parent companies.

Not many companies have used standardised reporting frameworks to create their own local reports. In the study by Petera et al. (2014) only 2 of 7 standalone CSR reports were prepared according to the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Guidelines. Also, only a few companies use the Communication on Progress as part of their participation in the Global Compact initiative, or use the AA1000 Standards (Business Leaders Forum, 2013). The number of reports receiving third party assurance is still very low in the Czech Republic (Hřebíček, 2009). According to Dočekalova (2012), the causes of low interest in CSR reporting are its ignorance, personal and financial demands without short-term returns and the fact that companies do not perceive the potential benefits that corporate sustainability reporting may bring. According to Petera et al. (2014), the key imperfection of the published reports is their incompleteness, in the sense that companies tend to be selective about the indicators against which they disclose information within their CSR reports.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a relatively new phenomenon in Hungary, where external pressure from civil society, public authorities and the media has so far been fairly low. In spite of this, a number of companies have started to publish information on its environmental and social performance. In 2008 and 2009, more than a third of the 100 largest companies reported on their non-financial results (Karcagi-Kováts, and Kuti, 2010). According to the Braun & Partners Hungary, their CSR 24/7 report highlighted the fact that large Hungarian corporations were not meeting their stakeholders' expectations in terms of transparency of their operations, or were only partially doing it. Considering the CSR 24/7 rating for 2010, in Hungary only 8 of 25 companies developed a non-financial CSR report in the previous two

years by taking into consideration international guidelines and standards (Piskóti, and Hajdú, 2013).

The study of Hąbek (2014) indicates that CSR reporting is not widespread among companies in Poland. On the other hand, increasing demands/expectations from stakeholders in this direction are not observed, especially Polish consumers (The World Bank, 2005). This belief is also confirmed by the study of Astupan and Schönbohm (2012). In Poland in 2011, 32 reports were published, 6 of them were audited by independent organizations and 19 were developed in accordance with the GRI Guidelines. The results of the study indicate that CSR reporting practices in Poland, despite a few good examples and valuable disclosures, are at their early stage of development. Szczepankiewicz and Mućko (2016) use a content analysis of selected CSR reports to describe and assess patterns and the structure of information disclosed by Polish companies in the energy and mining sectors. The study revealed that CSR reports of Polish companies have similar structures at a very high level of analysis, but a more detailed study reveals considerable diversity in approaches to the report's content. According to Krasodomska (2015), banks in Poland tend to include CSR disclosures in the management commentary. They present CSR information in a diverse manner, focusing mainly on community involvement. According to Hąbek (2014), the fundamental issue for the development of non-financial disclosure in Poland seems to be the ongoing increase of awareness and providing knowledge on the topic of business responsibility among companies, as well as the consumers, customers and greater society.

Slovak companies to a small degree inform their stakeholders through CSR reports (Moravcikova et al., 2015). Kubaščíková (2008) states that there are several companies in Slovakia that integrate not only environmental goals, but also a whole range of sustainable development challenges into their strategy and policies, and this action contributes to improving their overall performance by supporting the creation of value in the long term. These companies understand that monitoring economic, social and environmental performance is a key part of the efforts to continuously improve the corporate responsibility program and by respecting the GRI principles, they publish mined data in their annual reports. The first company to prepare GRI reports was Slovnaft. The first annual sustainable development report was issued by Slovnaft in 2001.

In Visegrad Group countries there is no national extra (mandatory) standards in place, besides those transposing the UE Directive. The analysis of government websites of V4 countries has helped to identify the initiatives taken by respective governments to develop CSR reporting. The results of the study indicate that the information on CSR/CSR reporting is published on the websites of Czech, Polish and Slovak governments. The most information can be found at the Polish website of the Ministry of Economic Development.

If we assume that the number of publications indicates the commitment to a particular subject and the level of its maturity, the topic of CSR reporting is the most popular in the Czech Republic and in Poland. First of all, the largest number of scientific papers on CSR reporting

was published in these two countries. Secondly, these articles present bona fide material analyses of this phenomenon. However, in all four Visegrad countries there is a need for further education and an increase of awareness among both companies and greater society for the development of such practices.

4. Conclusions

In summary, the corporate social responsibility concept in V4 countries is not very well developed yet, due to the recent social and political transformations and privatisation, but there is evidence of a willingness and commitment to the idea. Therefore, it appears to be necessary on the one hand to increase the knowledge of society and awareness of responsible business and, on the other hand, to encourage enterprises to apply the principles of the CSR concept in their practice. It seems that many companies in V4 countries still do not perceive CSR as a way of risk management, as well as a way of building stakeholder relationships and they rather connect the concept with philanthropy activities and sponsorship programmes. It is, hence, more often foreign, multinational companies that drive the CSR practices in the CEE countries rather than domestic companies. Hopefully, the CSR concept is gradually transforming in V4 countries and is becoming a more and more important topic in the region. However, there is still a need to build a dynamic civil society that encourages responsible business conduct in the Visegrad Group countries.

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