

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND SOCIAL WORK. INTERCONNECTIONS

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Abstract: *In this paper we aim to present the phenomenon of corporate social responsibility seen from the perspective of social workers. In the first part, some relevant theoretical aspects regarding corporate social responsibility and social work are presented, concepts such as social issues, economic inequality, social inequality, and the devaluation of the concept of morality is explained. The paper also contains the results of a qualitative study which present the perspective of social workers on the interdependence of corporate social responsibility and social work, a connection which can lead to desirable actions for society.*

Key words: *community development, corporate social responsibility, social work, social economy.*

1. Introduction

In everyday life we encounter manifestations of moral principles devaluation, like: the lack of collective spirit, the lack of common good, the lack of self-respect and of respect for others. In such a context, the organizations can become models of desirable behaviours for society members.

Individual social responsibility means understanding as attitudes and behavioural manifestations how a person relates to the common good developing through voluntary actions, selfless behaviour, morality, respect, integrity, but also liability for what they say and the actions they take.

On the other hand, corporate social responsibility represents the contribution that a company should make to the development of the society. This can be a pattern of balance for environment and humanity, because the activities undertaken by organizations have serious impact on community and society. Thus, a win – win situation is created, where the resulting benefits are at the level of both parts: the organization profits by a better reputation/image of the brand, but also by a growth in financial performance (Hohnen, 2007); moreover, we can aspire to normality, towards a better society, permissive and concerned about humanity problems and needs, diversity and balanced between people.

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Being responsible means assuming control of one's own actions. We believe that social responsibility can promote a new type of collective mentality, helping to change the negative perception of different social categories that are at risk, regardless of gender, religion, language, ethnicity or social status. Any person, irrespective of the features listed above may face a crisis situation, so that person needs the support of those from the family system, network of friends, community, and society.

The social worker is an important agent who promotes diversity, is tolerant in spirit and respects the rights, the social justice, the equal opportunities between humans, tolerant spirit in a society is the social worker. Professionals working in the field of social work have the role of monitoring and assisting families who are at risk, children in difficulty, single elders, and people with disabilities, valuing community needs and so on (Buzducea, 2017). They are interested in social inclusion, personal development and managing their clients' own resources. Likewise, the social worker acts as a mediator in the middle of the community, providing all resources needed to solve the crisis.

The respect for fundamental human rights is among the principles on which corporate social responsibility is based. Therefore, social responsibility can promote elimination of discrimination, prejudices and stereotypes towards different social groups who are at risk of marginalization. So, corporations can become a favourable agent for developing a more active attention of society to community development and civic activism.

2. Corporate Social Responsibility – Theoretical Aspects

The concept of corporate social responsibility is in close connection with social development, sustainable development and community development. Nowadays, corporations have the possibility to express their desire to be part of social development process through programs sustained by the financial resources they have (Banc, 2016). Sustainable development concept suggests the idea of the future generations' rights to a prosperous life, inclusive, as well as "the right to life in general (species conservation and biodiversity, the right of animals to well-being etc.)" (Mărginean, 2007, p. 9). Community development means using resources in a sustainable and progressive manner. It is about giving a community the chance to play its role to use the resources, in order to satisfy their current needs, without compromising the future socio-economic and cultural conditions of community (Roseland, 2000 *apud* Muthuri, Moon, & Idemudia, 2012, p. 15).

Sustainable development can be seen as a process of balance from the perspective of three requirements:

1. Ecological requirement refers to "living within the global biophysical transport capacity and maintaining biodiversity";
2. Social requirement has the role to ensure the development of democratic governance systems which can efficiently spread and support the values that people want, and assume;
3. Economic requirement has the role to "ensure that the basic needs are satisfied globally".

According to the United Nations, the concept of human community development defines “the process of expanding opportunities through present and future generations who can fully demonstrate their choices in the social, cultural and political field, human being themselves being at the centre of actions intended for development” (Trompea, 2009, p. 312).

Community development is, thus, a multidimensional concept to which corporate social action can contribute or it may undermine the creation and maintenance of the economic, ecological, human, political and cultural capital of communities. In other words, this concept focuses on community evolution through both institutions, NGOs, corporations etc., and direct involvement of citizens, who become more responsible, treating seriously the existing problems, but also finding their own resources (Muthuri, Moon, & Idemudia, 2012, p. 15). “Only when a company is able to exert a high needed degree of control to ensure a good corporate governance, can we expect to successfully practice corporate social responsibility, sustainable for the company and society benefit (Urip, 2010, p. 7).

Corporate social responsibility has come to companies’ attention because globalization has created competition, so business stability can fluctuate or it may fall into the category of insolvency. This type of responsibility should promote the relation between three elements, the economy, the environment and the people. Whereas being interdependent, and sacrificing for one another may seem harmless in the short-term, it may prove devastating in the long term.

In the study conducted by Ganescu (2012, pp. 96-97), a careful selection of these corporate social responsibility strategies could ensure the business sustainability through getting benefits for:

1. Organization (improving the image of the organization, gaining competitive advantage, increasing financial performance);
2. Employees (increasing their motivation, reducing internal conflicts, eliminating unethical practices, developing social solidarity);
3. Society (promoting social inclusion, improving cooperation with non-governmental organizations, state institutions, customers, suppliers, competitors);
4. Environment (reducing the impact of economic activity on air, water, soil, reducing energy consumption, promoting recycling).

At present, the concept of responsibility for human well-being is found at four levels: “the state, the domain of private companies, the family and the civil society” (Mărginean, 2007, p. 10).

The goal of social work is to develop, organize and provide quality social services for all people, groups and communities with special needs, developing individual or collective intellectual capacities, increasing the quality of life and promoting the principles of cohesion and social inclusion.

Social problems are intensified by economic inequality. The gap between the poor and the rich is likely to contribute to an emphasis on social problems. Also, blending in “the private opulence with the public sector poverty creates social problems” (Orton & Rowlingson, 2006 *apud* Mărginean, 2007, p. 13).

Through unequal economy, society is permanently involved in sources of conflict and tension between the rich and the poor; cultural and religious differences always accentuate social relations that involve identity and alterity; finally, the existence of people with disabilities and in general of those who do not fit within the framework of “normality” brings to the foreground the relationship between dominant and excluded groups. Social work is a mediator agent between society and excluded people. It is crossed by tensions of inclusion and exclusion, of alterity and identity (Freynet, 1995, p. 168 *apud* Bocancea, 2003, p.71).

Society is in constant change, and the social issues become more diverse. In order to efficiently and qualitatively interfere in solving them, one of the strategies consists in interdisciplinary collaboration between social work and corporate social responsibility. There are humans facing vulnerabilities such as lack of financial, material resources, lack of family support, lack of professional and familial achievement from a psychological point of view. All of these can lead to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, frustration, helplessness, regarding the geographical environment, social status, ethnicity, gender, language and so on that people are part.

Agabrian (2001, p. 468) believes that the most common attitude towards social issues is “indifference”. People pay attention to a problem when they feel a threat to their own well-being. Another collective attitude is “passive acceptance of troubles”. A large number of human beings accept suffering and hunger in peace and firmness. They think that “the best way to deal with a difficult problem is to go through it quietly, without trying to solve the problem. Very often we encounter attitudes “which view social problems as divine punishment”.

3. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Phenomenon in Romania

Corporate social responsibility is a relatively young phenomenon in Romania. The development of corporate social responsibility around Europe has made Romanian business to adopt such programs, in order to fulfil the requirements of the European Commission on Corporate social responsibility (Ilieş & Fărcaş, 2017).

Some authors support the idea that in Romania social responsibility practices adopted in the external environment are based on a philanthropic character, and the main motivation is to create prestige and increase the visibility of companies on the market (Frecea, 2016 *apud* Tătăruşanu, 2016, p. 221). After the revolution, the first CSR activities had a humanitarian role (Pătruţ & Cmeciu, 2016), helping the disadvantaged (children, the elderly, women).

Multinational companies investing in Romania have provided the global strategies on CSR activities, but Romanian organizations have adapted these global strategies to the local context. Zaharia and Grundey (2011) consider that in Romania the projects from CSR area, are addressed to well-known issues, with a strong emotional impact on the public: education (Procter & Gamble, OMV/Petrom), environment (OMV/Petrom), health. For the most important players on the CSR market (live Vodafone, OMV/Petrom, Coca-Cola or P&G), CSR projects have become a permanent concern and a platform for future co-operation.

Despite an increase in the strategic integration of CSR/SR into the basic practices of organizations, most large or small companies seem to continue to base their CSR on sponsorships and punctual charity projects. CSR decisions and activities of SMEs also appear to be based on ad-hoc decisions, not formally integrated into business strategy (Anca, Aston, Stanciu, & Rusu, 2011). Increasing involvement in responsible business practices in Romania involves, among other things, a joint effort of all stakeholders, a better dialogue between all actors and a more solid understanding of the private environment, the impact of companies, the causes of social problems and the role of each actor in reducing boundaries and threats and strengthening opportunities and motivation regarding the development of the CSR domain.

4. Social Economy

The Law 292/2011 (article 6, letter I) of Social Work defines Social Economy as follows: “a sector that contains economic activities that, in subsidiary and with the condition of maintaining economic performance, includes social goals”.

The Book of Social Economy Principles (Social Economy Europe) emphasizes the idea that: “The Organizations of Social Economy are economic and social actors which actively operate in all sectors that are characterized mainly by their specific goals and forms of entrepreneurship”. The companies are active in various areas such as: “social protection, social services, health, banks, insurances, agricultural protection, proximity services, education and training, culture, sports and recreational activities” (Arustei, Manolescu, & Neculaesei, 2014, p. 4).

Social Economy includes “solidarity references, individual and social welfare, social relations, public property or public goods, common wellness, and social cohesion” (Croitor, 2016, p. 361). The main problem faced by the social economy entities is the poor representation, including the membership of the national and international networks of social economy (The Minister of Work, Family and Social Protection, 2010, p. 92 *apud* Asiminei, 2012, p. 6).

Several aspects are defined through the concept of economy such as “goods, services, occupations, relationships supposed to achieve production, exchange, consumption or work reward, people’s preoccupation to save money by limiting spending, to efficiently manage resources for enrichment, to mediate the relationship between goals and means in the design of human behaviours, etc.”. Thus, “the Social Economy is a form of economy through which the results of the structures and activities mentioned above are valorised in the spirit of assistance” (Stan, 2014, p. 47).

The inclusion of Social Economy in the regional/county development strategies and local development plans would accelerate the efforts to develop the field. The elaboration of some local development plans of the Social Economy may be the responsibility of a local commission subordinated to the Social Economy department at central level (Asiminei, 2012, p. 19).

Croitor (2016, p. 363) says that “Social Economy creates a safer environment than regular independent work does, social economic enterprises facilitating sharing and coordination of resources and aptitudes; they recognize the skills, the capital and the

work of a large number of individuals and can, therefore, acquire dimensions that enable them to be competitive in the production of goods and service offerings". It represents a mechanism of active protection of vulnerable persons with an optimal outcome in relation to social work solutions or "passive protection that can deepen even more the existing social problems and, at the same time, can increase the feeling of social stigma."

5. Research Methodology

In this paper we aim to present the phenomenon of corporate social responsibility seen from the perspective of social workers, interpreting the significance given by them to the phenomenon. We have focused on motivations, aspirations, personal experiences of professionals in social work, and on their vision of the link between social work and corporate social responsibility.

The present study aims to identify the common elements of social work and corporate social responsibility that can lead to solving the social problems that society is confronted with; and also to describe the relationship between the two areas from the perspective of professionals.

The research is a qualitative and descriptive one, because the relationship of interdependence between social work and social responsibility has been described from the point of view of professionals in both fields.

The method of data collection we have used in the present research was the individual interview, with the semi-structured interview technique. In this sense, an interview guide was developed. The interview guide for social workers has included the following six discussion themes: the significance of the corporate social responsibility concept (what do you know about this area) and personal interaction with the domain of corporate social responsibility.

The sampling strategy is the theoretical one. In a qualitative research such as that presented in this paper, the selection of investigative units is made "according to the needs revealed by the ongoing research" (Scârneci, 2006, p. 104). Thus, for the selection of interviewees we have established the following criteria:

- Social workers;
- From the non-profit (NGO) or state sector;
- Women and men;
- From urban and rural areas;
- From 25 to 60 years of age.

During the sampling process, we also used the "snowball" method; we asked respondents to recommend people with the above-mentioned characteristics. This is specific to qualitative research and is based on the idea that people who are part of the same group or who have experienced similar experiences know each other (Scârneci, 2006, p. 104).

The universe of research represents the population to which the research refers, and in our case the population is represented by social workers.

The sample of this study is made out of ten persons, two males and eight females; five people (three females and two males) work in the non-profit sector (NGOs) in the urban area; the other five (females) work in the public sector in the urban area and one in the rural area.

We applied the case-oriented analysis strategy to the data collected and we coded the material using three procedures: open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990 *apud* Scârneci, 2006, p. 76).

6. Findings

Following the open encoding of interviews with social work specialists, the following categories regarding CSR have emerged: definitions, superficial understanding of social issues by those working in the field of CSR, methods of corporate interaction with the community, social workers' interaction with CSR, the relationship between social work and corporate social responsibility, and the vision of the social worker regarding the CSR specialist.

Most of the interviewed specialists in social work were familiar with the concept of corporate social responsibility. Among the definitions of this concept, the following can be exemplified: "CSR is a way of interacting and returning some of their welfare to society" (male, 38, NGO, urban); "Involves improving the socio-economic conditions of the community" (woman, 37, public institution, rural); "Transforms economic agents into factors of social change" (woman, 43, public institution, urban).

At the same time, one of the social workers interviewed states that most of the people who work in the Corporate Social Responsibility department emphasize profit and the shaping of a positive image of the corporation in front of their clients. This social worker also claims that the CSR specialists have a low interest in the problems that occur in the community where the corporation operates, demonstrating a superficial understanding of social issues.

How CSR specialists interact with the community depends on each corporation and on the policies it promotes. Examples of activities mentioned by the respondents were: greening a protected area, setting up a playground for children from a poor community, organizing information events, and voluntary involvement of employees in associations. One of the respondents said that such projects take place over a short period of time. Thus, in order for a project to have realistic and qualitative results, the interviewee considers that the project period should be carried out in the medium or long term.

Although most of the social workers interviewed were familiar with the concept of corporate social responsibility, many of them did not interact with the field. Those who had previous interactions have expressed their enthusiasm and gratitude for CSR initiatives because without the involvement of corporations their projects would not have been achieved: "the project would not have taken place without their financial involvement" (woman, 28 years old, NGO, urban); "It increased the visibility of my project" (male, 42 years old, NGO, urban).

The social workers interviewed believe that the link between social work and corporate social responsibility is a fundamental element in solving social problems

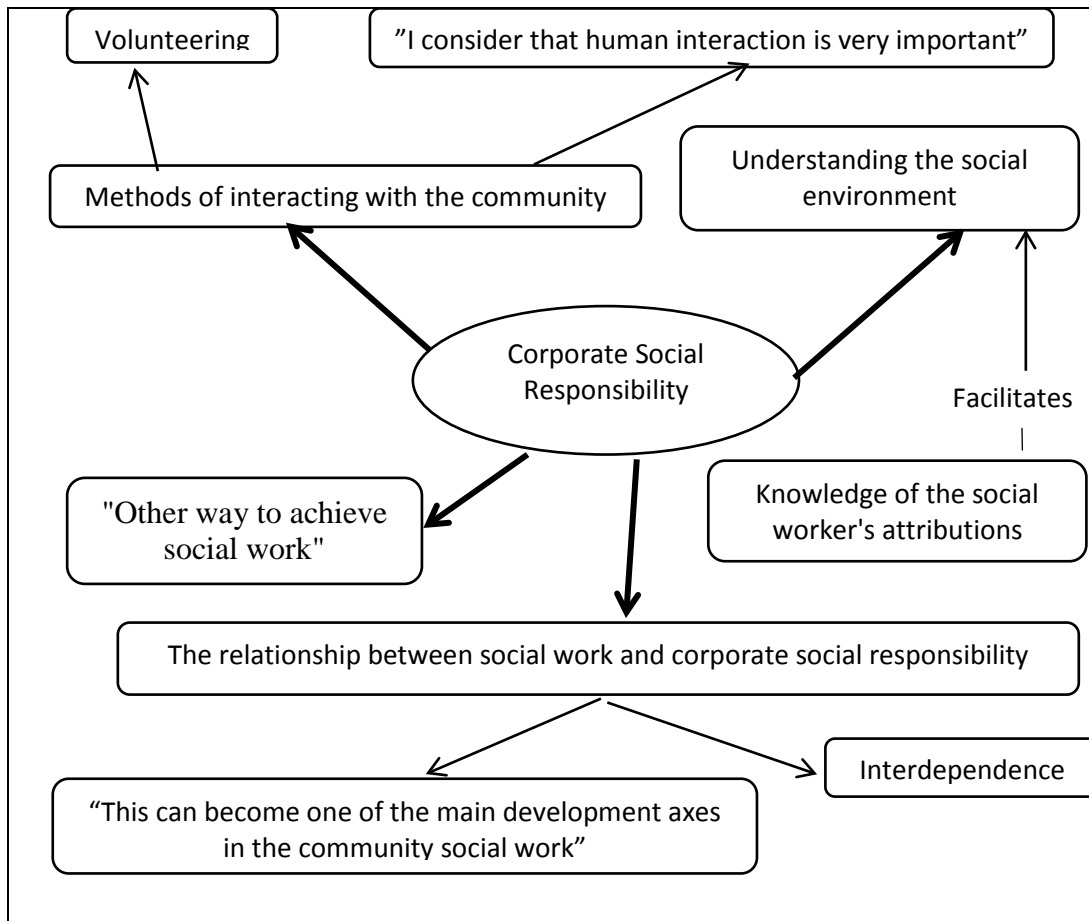
because combining information leads to qualitative intervention but also to a normal society in which people's rights, such as: the right to education, the right to health, the right to housing, the right to be respected, and so on are respected.

"Cooperation, co-dependence, symbiosis" (woman, 37, public institution, rural); "Benefits of time and even money" (male, 42 years old, NGO, urban); "Very important" (woman, 43 years, public institution, urban) were mentioned among the characteristics of this relationship. A good relationship of collaboration between the two areas of expertise can bring benefits to society as a whole, were mentioned among the characteristics of this relationship. Also, social issues would diminish if we were not only interested in our own wishes, needs, the respondents sustain. The mixture of theoretical information and good practice guides in social work and corporate social responsibility can help CSR specialists understand why social workers need corporations to be able to implement community development projects where state institutions do not have the capability to support them. People in the Corporate Social Responsibility department can present to their manager and employees the importance they have in implementing community development programs.

In addition, some respondents believe that employees who are volunteering in NGOs or occasionally participate in projects and events in partnership with NGOs will benefit from the development of moral sense, civic spirit, tolerance, willingness to support vulnerable groups: "A greater empathy and a sense of unity is created" (woman, 28, NGO, urban) At the same time, they develop the motivation to come to work with pleasure, as the result of their work will be seen in the diminished social problems in the community.

According to the interviewees, a good specialist in corporate social responsibility should have general marketing, social marketing and social work knowledge, in order to be able to generate and manage better social projects, both for the image of the company and for diminishing social problems existing in the community where the corporation operates: "there is a need for specialized personnel in the social field" (male, 38, NGO, urban); "I think that a social worker is needed in a CSR department to select beneficiaries, identify needs and establish intervention" (woman, 43, public institution, urban).

The benefits that a CSR specialist with a specialization in the field of Social Sciences, mentioned by the respondents, would be: "the cases will be better managed; more humanitarian initiatives are likely to be developed for vulnerable groups; a better understanding of the needs of the beneficiaries" (woman, 30, NGO, urban); "Would greatly facilitate the prospect of proper fundraising" (woman, 28, NGO, urban).

Fig. 1. *Selective coding*

7. Discussion and Conclusions

From the data we have collected and analysed, it emerges that social work and corporate social responsibility are interdependent. Respondents said that in order to practice this kind of responsibility effectively, social workers are needed. The link between social work and CSR is little addressed in the literature on these two professional areas. Ross (2009) sustains that social work is a profession that stands for social justice and protection of human rights for individuals, communities and societies. As such, it has an invaluable knowledge and skills set that can inform debates and practice in the area of CSR. This author also underlines the importance of learning about environmental issues in social work (Ross, 2012). Environmental Social Work provides an integrated theoretical and practical overview of why and how social work might respond to environmental factors affecting the societies and people they work with at international, national, local and individual levels. The social work profession and corporations that have CSR goals believe in the same principle – it is everyone’s responsibility, both individuals and groups alike, to support and help society. Because of

this shared value, it is important for social workers to become active participants in the corporate CSR decision-making process.

We believe that in the field of corporate social responsibility it is beneficial to hire specialists trained in the field of Social Sciences, because these professionals have the skills to diagnose community needs and find viable solutions for qualitative intervention to successfully implement the project that the corporation proposes. On the other hand, those who have been trained in the field of Social Sciences can be an important support for the company's leadership in shaping corporate policies that are based on the idea of respecting human rights in relation to employees. This leads to the exercise of professional attributions in a desirable way both towards the company and the community.

In the case of Corporate Social Responsibility departments that have specialists with initial training in professional fields other than Social Sciences, the following alternative options can be implemented: CSR specialists can follow in-service training courses in the social field or Corporate Social Responsibility Department can sign a collaboration contract with a social worker who holds a certificate of free practice.

Lorenz (2015) underlines the same ideas that we support in this paper that it is important for social workers to think about CSR, the impact that they make on non-profit or social service agencies and how to stay involved. Corporations are becoming more involved in areas that social workers are traditionally responsible for. Social workers are already involved with distressed populations and have the experience and understanding of what the needs in a community are and how best to deliver the services to meet those needs. Therefore, corporations could benefit from having social workers involved in their organization and as a part of their corporate structure. The social work profession shares the values that CSR attempts to address, and therefore the relationship between the two disciplines is worth exploring.

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