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CSR and DISBALED CONSUMERS

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Abstract

Many scholars and companies are showing a growing interest in corporate social responsibility, a concept whereby companies decide voluntarily to contribute to solving socially important issues. This term is used then to describe what some researchers perceive as a company's obligation to be sensitive to the needs of all the stakeholders in its business operations. However, that concept is too often understood in means of ecology and being environmentally friendly and unfortunately merely few companies decide to consider social aspects in means of disabled consumers. A key to the success of every entrepreneurship that exists under the dynamically changing conditions of modern markets and economies lies in skillful managing contacts with other market participants – does not matter whether the participant is a supplier, a competitor, a buyer or a final consumer. That is why all groups should be treated in an equal way – including disabled consumers, as they all – taken together or separately – can influence and create the future success of the company. This theoretical paper exemplifies the situation of disabled consumers in Poland, explores corporate practices related to CSR and shows the significance of the CSR concept considering disability in building competitive and efficient company.

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1. Introduction

Constantly growing group of disabled persons is usually noticed only in categories problems and challenges in different spheres of everyday social and economic reality. The globalization of the phenomenon of disability in the society is inevitable and is bringing the number of adverse effects such as the destabilization of budget or the appreciable increase of own shares in the future social security of individuals. However proper research and understanding of the phenomenon and its consequences could facilitate designing business and social operations that

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would help disabled consumers become competent participants in the society and the market rather than marginalized and deprecated incidental users.

As Monachino and Moreira noticed (p. 53), health problems, including different types of disabilities, constitute a fundamental component of social engagement of corporate social responsibility. The acknowledgement of that fact creates new needs for international discussion on the role of different corporations in the society and the effectiveness of corporate activities.

In recent years social issues marketing has become increasingly important and so social aspect appeared in marketing. In 1971, Kotler and Zaltman introduced the concept of social marketing which related to designing, implementing and controlling programs that were created to influence the acceptableness of important social issues (p. 5). This construct has attracted vast attention and generated numerous discussions among researchers in many disciplines, including marketing, who were trying to evaluate the consequences of activities designed to influence one's voluntary behaviour in socially important issues such as environmental protection, community involvement or health (Kotler et al. 2002; Andreasen, 2004; Stead et al., 2007). Latterly, however, the concept has gained a new dimension and has been extended to a corporate context with its goal to persuade consumers to act and behave in a desired prosocial way (Kotler, Lee, 2005; Eberhard-Harribey, 2006; Godfrey, Hatch, 2007; Sherer, Palazzo, 2011). This kind of planned impact on behaviour change distinguishes corporate social marketing from other types of corporate social responsibility activities implemented by firms. Such activities as corporate philanthropy or cause-related marketing are designed to raise goodwill, money, and recognition of a discussed issue but not to influence or change one's behaviour (Kotler, Lee, 2005).

Becker (1992) notices that market participants too rarely ask themselves two basic questions: what practical results and economic profits can be brought by perceiving disabled people as reputable consumers as well as what action should be taken after collecting the respective data of the segment of consumers with dysfunctions. It should also be considered that the contemporary idea of marketing evolved and apart from generating profits the corporation must also respect values important for consumers, business partners and the local communities. CSR, being an intrinsically composite concept that depicts a wide variety of initiatives and strategies that are undertaken voluntarily by corporations and whose goal is to include environmental, social and ethical standards in business operations, seems to be a natural answer to a noticed problem as market participants should understand the need of disabled consumers and accept their presence at the market not only in the area of adapting buildings and minimizing architectural barriers, but also in the aspect of life standardization.

2. The essence and dimensions of disability

Disability is a phenomenon that until recently stayed in the sphere of interests mainly of medics and physiotherapists however, because of the range of the occurrence, such an attitude is insufficient. The terminology concerning the considered issue still remains very inconsistent and so definitions, along with the uninterrupted development of economics, social, pedagogic or medical sciences, are undergoing unceasing alterations and adaptations. The multifaceted in-depth analysis shows that it is impossible to disassociate private and professional sphere as they are interpenetrating and mutually correlating, to create the ultimate dimension of the individual's reality.

To start any discussion on disability we must first understand its essence and dimensions. Conceptual approaches to disability can be divided into two main categories:

1. individualistic approach – disability is perceived as an individual condition that causes a disadvantaged position regarding civic, economic and personal condition. Such a view of disability is dominant in bioethics
2. social approach – disability is a corollary of oppressive material arrangements in societies or a result of the predominant cultural values, ideas, attitudes and language that shape human reality (Vehmas, 2004).

The dimensions concern various aspects of everyday functioning of the disabled person: social, cultural, economic, demographic, psychological and biological and are inseparably mutually correlating and shaping the individual's everyday reality. For example, the biological dimension usually refers only to a damage of organs, the social dimension of disability recognises individual's functioning in the society underlining, however, that despaired person, because of the mental or physical state, cannot fulfil responsibilities and commitments (Jackson, Irvine 2013). The cultural context is based on certain stereotypes that are present in the society and are extremely hard to

change, as for example, the first signs of pushing disabled persons back to the margin of society are dated in the 7th century BC. Only the 20th century brought real interest in the issue of disabled persons and desire for not only rehabilitating them in a medical sense but providing the full involvement in the society.

The economic dimension is interconnected with disability in quite an obvious way as the situation of disabled consumers on the labour market is difficult. The demographic dimension of disability is connected with the progressing ageing process of the society. In 1950s the number of people above 60 was estimated to 205 millions while 50 years later this number achieved 606 millions. It is also expected that in the middle of the 21st century the population of persons above 60 years of age will reach the level of 2 billion (*World Population Ageing: 1950-...*). Along with the progressing ageing of the mankind and extending the age of living, the issue of disability is also increasing (*World Population Ageing 2013*). According to the United Nations, nowadays disability is regarding about 10% of the mankind what means 650 million people (www.un.org/en/globalissues...) and so the growing number of disabled consumers raises different social and economic implications.

The psychological meaning of disability is strictly connected with feeling of the quality of life being one of the most important conditions of human happiness. In reference to numerous researchers (Kober 2010; Glatzer et al. 2004; Schrim 2009; Bowling 2007) it is possible to define the quality of life as the way into which the individual notices its practical position in the cultural context, with reference to a system of values in which he lives and with reference to expectations and standards of the environment. In other words it is possible to notice that the quality of life is a comprehensive way of assessing health, an emotional state, the self-reliance in everyday life and the degree of independence from a third party, as well as personal beliefs and convictions (Sompolska-Rzechula, 2013).

All briefly broached aspects of disability are mutually interpenetrating and modelling the reality of challenged person and only a comprehensive insight into various aspects can give an idea of nature of the discussed phenomenon.

3. Corporate Social Responsibility and the paradigm of normalization

Dynamic changes occurring in the course of last years are in obvious way determining the ultimate shape of every area of our life. The incessant progression of the globalization and the digitization is eliminating barriers associated with distances. Social and economic consecutive changes questioned assumptions of the classical economics propagating that a maximization of the profit was the sole aim of any enterprise. In the days of developing the public awareness a need for the change of the existing image of business and including groups surrounding became clear. As a result the society was assured of establishing the dialogue and respecting the laws and the business, apart from obvious ethical values, noticed that such a cooperation maximizes the chance of the optimization of profits and creates undeniable image benefits. This notion of being socially responsible and developing a good reputation as a crucial investment is well recognized. Corporate Social Responsibility includes corporate acts that satisfy social needs without regard for legal obligations and the key element of such a socially responsible activity is a full freedom of actions taken (Lii, Lee, 2011) as well as it responds to consumers' expectations and improves corporate reputation and performance while helping worthy causes (Nan, Heo, 2007). Another definition says that Corporate Social Responsibility is the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large. (*World Business Council For Sustainable Development*).

CSR is an inevitably broad concept of which we can say that includes voluntary actions by companies aimed at dealing with workers', consumers', or investors or shareholders' concerns: in short, the concerns of all citizens. And voluntarism is of a key importance.

Apart from enhanced company and brand image, other benefits of being socially responsible include increased market share, lower operating costs and facilitation of attracting investors, employees and customers (Owazuaka, Obinna, 2014).

Disability is one of the features that differentiate individuals and groups in contemporary world. People with reduced cognitive, psychological or physical efficiency are distinctively exposed to social, economic and political exclusion and further to discrimination (Klimczuk, 2013). The normalization principle means making available to all people facing disabilities patterns of life and conditions of living which are as close as possible to the standard conditions and ways of life. This paradigm involves the unconditional acceptance of people with disabilities, noticing but not emphasizing their disabilities, offering them the same conditions as are offered to other members of the society. It involves an awareness of the typical rhythm of life – together with the normal rhythm of a day, a

week, a year, and the life-cycle itself. It involves the normal conditions of life – housing, schooling, employment, exercise, recreation, and access to goods and services with a freedom of choice. This includes risk-taking, activation and stimulation via the enhancement of people's social images and personal competencies rather than protection and helping out (Wofensberger, 2011). Additionally, advocates of the principle emphasize that the environment and not a person is what is normalized.

In the assumptions, then, both the CSR concept and the holistic paradigm of normalization are emphasising the improvement of the quality of functioning of challenged individuals in different aspects.

4. Corporate Social Responsibility and managing diversity

According to the United Nations around 15 per cent of the world's population, or estimated 1 billion people, live with disabilities and International Labour Organization estimated that 386 million of the world's working-age people have some kind of disability (<http://www.un.org/...>). The occupational activity among these persons in Europe reaches the level of approximately 40%, in the USA it is almost 50% (Transforming..., 2003), in Poland however it is slightly over 27% and it is one of the lowest indicators amongst members of the European Union. Employing people with disability is a part of the concept of managing diversity.

By diversity we mean all dissimilarities and differences among people in age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, and capabilities/disabilities. In other words, diversity is the sum total of the differences which make individuals who they are, and their collective ability to contribute to the goals of an organization.

It can be understood as the strategy of the human resource management being based on a belief that diversity of the staff (all noticed, accepted and respected aspects that diversify people) (Brdulak, 2009; Durska, 2009; Kirton, Greene, 2010) is one of crucial resources of organization. Managing diversity is simply noticing differences between people in the organization as well as beyond it, creating strategies and atmosphere of respect and using these differences for the realization of organisational goals and objectives of the (Morawska – Witkowska et al., 2009).

Following the assumptions of managing diversity concept it can become a basis of considerable advantages (Kirton, Greene, 2010). After all knowledge, different experience, particular sensitivity, exceptional skills and capabilities of disabled workers could become a source of invaluable goods and services inspirations and innovations that could fulfil specific demand of challenged consumers and would bring noticeable profits. Challenged employees could help in making suggestions related to product or service improvement and recommendations to other members of that specific market segment. Additionally, engaging a positive word of mouth (WOM) about the product or a company would be a source of many new consumers.

Although diversity of employees can be an added value for the corporation, in Poland it is much more possible to talk about the elaborated equal opportunities policies, on which managing diversity could arise (Wright, 2001).

In Poland, EQUAL Community Initiative, being a part of the European Union's strategy for more and better jobs and their wide accessibility together with a social campaign "Disabled people - fully operable in work" considerably contributed to the change of the social awareness, breaking stereotypes and popularizing best practices of equal opportunities and managing diversity in regard to challenged individuals.

5. Summary

Sustainable development, being understood as “the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Report of the..., 1987) contests the relentless rush to the constant dynamic development at the expense of irreparable consumption of natural resources. To hardly-renewable sources undergoing the constant decline, apart from obvious economic and environmental factors, we should also include social factors, i.e. the human capital. One of the barriers of long-lasting sustainable development is socially unacceptable tension being a result of irregularities in satisfying individuals' needs or even an impossibility of meeting the needs of the higher level in the constant process of economic development (social exclusion or alienation).

Sustainable development, managing diversity, CSR initiatives, normalization of life of disabled people – all those concepts have a common denominator - good of people. The increasing resentment of employees and customers results from divergences in reality and propagated values. Both internal as well as external CSR initiatives of every organization should become crucial dimensions, respecting principles of equality of rights of employees, education

in health and safety, human rights and creating equal opportunities.

Voluntary efforts to incorporate a diversity commitment and Corporate Social Responsibility activities in operating plans are beneficiary both for companies and environment. In response to labor market it can lead to sustained culture change and long-term success of the corporation. Described principles enable the organization to move into emerging markets by increasing market awareness, especially in globally competitive industries. They improve clients relations and maximize brand identity, help increase creativity from diverse experiences and perspectives and bring new problem solutions because of increased expression of ideas and larger volume of ideas. Being implemented, they improve corporate culture and employee morale.

Human resource is the source of the value of the organization and its competitiveness. Let us remember about disabled people - their dissimilarity isn't the source of problems but influences the innovativeness and, in consequence, competitiveness on the market.

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