

SWOT Analysis and Key Actors in the Field of CSR

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis of the new context of CSR development in Romania. The analysis starts from the initial proposal of the Romanian government from 2011. The authors of this paper framed the most recent studies in the CSR/ SR field. The main objective of this study is to rewrite and adapt the initial SWOT analysis proposed by the Romanian government based on the actual context of CSR development. In addition, current CSR legislation is presented at the European and national levels. Furthermore, a figure with key actors and their strategies is shaped in the field of CSR. As a methodology, the authors of this article applied different queries for databases containing scientific materials: JSTOR, ProQuest, Web of Science. One of the main results emphasized in this article is that local authorities should be more involved in the Romanian economy as a primary starting point for better CSR development.

KEYWORDS: actor, CSR, SWOT.

JEL CLASSIFICATION: M14

1. INTRODUCTION

In the early stage of development for social responsibility, the concept was known only for the business environment (Romanian Government, 2011). As a consequence, the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is better known than social responsibility (SR) (Romanian Government, 2011).

In the opinion of Manne and Wallich (1972), society needs to fulfill two main objectives: middle-cost production of goods and services at the same time as protecting the environment against degradation and ensuring social equity.

Furthermore, in 1991 Wood states that the main idea of CSR is that organizations and society are not separate entities but interconnected, so society has certain expectations for suitable business behavior and results (Wood, 1991).

However, more recent studies link social responsibility with business through the expectations of society in relation to organizations at a particular time from an economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary perspective (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2003).

In 2008, after an analysis of 37 definitions of CSR, Dahlsrud concluded that there are many definitions of CSR, but each consistently refers to five dimensions: environmental, social, economic, stakeholders, and voluntary (Dahlsrud, 2008).

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Garavan and McGuire (2010) advocate that interest between different stakeholders can be realigned by creating common value, embedded in the ethical layer through CSR practices.

Moreover, Vilanova Pichot (2015) proposed a model based on five dimensions of CSR: vision (ethical codes, reputation, etc.), community relations (philanthropic actions, relations with stakeholders, etc.), workplace (labour practices, human rights, etc.), accountability (transparency, reporting, etc.), and marketplace (research and development, prices, investments, etc.).

Today, the most known definitions of CSR and most commonly used are those provided by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) and the Green Paper of the European Union on Promoting a European Framework from 2001.

According to WBCSD, CSR is the commitment of organizations to ethical behavior and participation in economic development, at the same time as improving the quality of employees and their families' lives, and of the local community and society as a whole (WBCSD, 1999).

The Green Paper defines CSR as a concept in which social and environmental issues are incorporated into business activities and in the organizations' interactions with their stakeholders, in a voluntary mood (European Commission, 2001).

In addition, in 2011, the European Commission outlined that CSR is the responsibility of organizations for their social impact (European Commission, 2011).

In 2016, Mironescu considered that organizations should take into account their adverse impact on society and manage their impact responsibly based on each stakeholder's needs. Furthermore, a higher economic performance of an organization has a direct impact on CSR activities (Mironescu, 2016).

Within this context, the aim of this paper is to investigate the way CSR is understood and applied in the Romanian business environment. For this purpose, the authors of this paper rewritten and adapted the SWOT analysis presented initially in 2011 by the Romanian Government, based on the actual stage of CSR development.

2. THE OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

The main **objectives** of this article are as follows.

- i.** Identifying studies on national methodological approaches to CSR issues and the main legislation in this field.
- ii.** Shaping the actual picture of the stage of CSR development in Romania through a SWOT analysis.

The research methodology comprises the following.

Different queries were applied for databases containing scientific materials: JSTOR, ProQuest, Web of Science, etc. Subsequently, the initial SWOT analysis created by the Romanian Government in 2011 was analyzed. Third, the actual stages of the development of CSR were collected through a literature review. Finally, the SWOT analysis was rewritten and adapted accordingly to the new context of CSR development in Romania.

3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

3.1 European countries case

In 1995, the World Business Council, a platform for business environment, was established, which has the intention to respond to sustainability challenges through a worldwide cooperation between private organizations, the government, and other organizations interested in environment and sustainable development.

However, the official position related to CSR in the European Union was in 2001, once with the publication of The Green Paper – Promoting a European Framework for Corporate Social Responsibility (European Commission, 2001).

Furthermore, in 2009, a Review of the European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development was published through a communication from the Commissioner to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. The review highlights that the EU has taken the lead internationally in the fight against climate change and has set as the next objective the reduction of carbon emissions, to promote an economy based on resource efficiency.

In the same year, the Lisbon Strategy was published, a legal framework for the EU where democracy, transparency, human rights, solidarity, and security are the main keywords that will define Europe.

In 2010, ISO 26000 was officially launched at Geneva, the international standard developed to help organizations assess and address social responsibility. ISO 26000 was developed by the International Organization of Standardization (ISO). ISO 26000 contains the basic ideas for introducing SR into all organizations (e.g., public organizations, SMEs, multinationals, ONGs, unions, and nongovernmental organizations) (Romanian Government, 2011). This new standard involves that corporate social responsibility (CSR) will be changed into social responsibility (SR) by including it into private and also public entities. The ISO guide for SR can help organizations to define their own policy of SR, include in their activities their own rules of SR, to identify their stakeholders and include their stakeholders in the decisions that can affect them, report their activity related to SR, and to sustainably develop an organization (Romanian Government, 2011). Thus, ISO 26000 can help organizations consider not only legal obligations, but also social and environmental responsibilities (Romanian Government, 2011).

On 25 October 2011, through a Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions, a renewed EU strategy 2011-2014 for CSR was published. The renewed strategy has as main objective the implementation of a new agenda in the CSR domain with 30 new goals. In addition, the leading role of the EU in the CSR/SR domain is highlighted.

On April 15, 2014 the European Parliament adopted the Directive 2014/95/EU for disclosure of nonfinancial and diversity information (regarding environmental protection, social responsibility, the treatment of employees, human rights, anticorruption, and bribery issues) by large public-interest companies with more than 500 employees, starting with 2018 onwards. The objective of the EU by implementing this directive is to contribute to long-term economic growth and employment through transparency on environmental and social issues.

The Directive 2014/95/EU covers around 11,700 large companies and groups across the EU (listed companies, banks, insurance companies, other companies designated by national authorities as public-interest entities) (European Commission, 2019).

3.2 Romania

In Romania, CSR legislation is mostly imported from the EU (Dornean & Rusu, 2019).

In 1992 was reviewed Law no. 57 regarding the inclusion of people with disabilities in the business environment. As a result, organizations with more than 250 employees are forced to include through their employees at least 3% of persons with disabilities.

On the other hand, the right of participation of citizens in volunteering activities organized by public or private entities is reflected in Law no. 195/2001. Also, the government decision 1317/27 October 2005 provides the right of citizens to include themselves in care services for old people. In the same category, we can include Order 439/21 May 2002 which provides the opportunity of environmental protection volunteering activities.

In Romania, the health and security, the professional development of employees, the relationship between employees and employers, the fight against corruption, and gender equality are provided by the Labor Code.

Furthermore, in Romania, we have implemented Law no. 481/8 November 2004 on social protection. The inventory in this direction is followed by Decision no. 1579/8 December 2005, where the volunteering activities into emergency services are approved. Also, Order 160/23 February 2007 makes possible the planification and organization of activities for emergency situations preventions by volunteering and private emergency services. In the same category, we can add Decision 160/14 February 2007 regarding the rules of use of protection equipment and distinctive signs for voluntary or private emergency services staff. Lastly, Order no. 718/June 2005 on the organizational framework of voluntary emergency services was adopted.

Transparency and the fight against bribery is sustained by Law no. 544/2001, which provides free access to public information, and the steps every citizen can follow for requesting public information from public institutions. Moreover, Law no. 52/2003 enforces the use of transparency in public decisions and the possibility of active participation in decision making by citizens.

On the other hand, associations or foundations can be created by public or private persons through the instructions provided in Law no. 246/18 July.

Regarding Directive 2014/95/EU, it had to be transposed by EU member states into their national legislation until December 6, 2006. In this context, Romania had to adapt or transpose the requirements of Directive 2014/95/EU into Order no. 1.938 from 17 August 2016 on the Amendment and Completion of Accounting Regulations. As a consequence, the organizations from Romania with more than 500 employees and also public interest entities: listed companies, credit institutions, insurance and reinsurance undertakings, nonbank financial institutions, payment institutions, and e-money institutions, privately managed pension funds, financial investment services organizations, national/state owned

organizations, organizations with full or majority state capital, self-managed public companies had to comply with the Directive.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to (Vuță et al., 2019), there is a positive relationship between the introduction of CSR principles into business operations and financial performance, such as an increased market value, total assets, and equity.

Through the introduction of CSR into business strategy, organizations can increase their competitiveness by maintaining an active and responsible connection with their employees, consumers, shareholders, and stakeholders (Romanian Government, 2011). Therefore, social responsibility requires dynamic communication between public administration authorities, organizations, and society (Romanian Government, 2011). The responsibility for creating the specific environment for the development of CSR returns to the state, more precisely, to competent public authorities (Romanian Government, 2011).

However, there are organizations with high profitability but a negative impact on the community, the environment, and the employees (Romanian Government, 2011). From this point of view, public administrative authorities must open social dialogue with directors and social partners and create the necessary legal framework to promote CSR (Romanian Government, 2011). Additionally, the employees and employers' representatives have a significant role in promoting the implementation of CSR in business environment. One of the main actors in charge of implementing responsible business practices is the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. It provides the necessary logistical support to implement projects related to CSR/SR at the national and local level through its regional offices. Through the support of EU funds, these projects can be carried out successfully.

Another reason to introduce CSR into business organizations is the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (2005-2008) elaborated by the Council of the European Union. The guidelines recommend that member states encourage organizations to include CSR into their strategy (Commission of the European Communities, 2005).

Therefore, Romanian organizations started to participate in the communities where they operate once after Romania became a member of the European Union in 2007 (Romanian Government, 2011). Steps in technologies used for development can be seen, as production must be done without damaging the environment (Romanian Government, 2011). Furthermore, different responsible organizations and industries appeared after Romania joined the EU: the renewable energy and waste management industry, rural tourism/ecotourism, and the production of organic products (Anca et al., 2011).

Some authors advocate that also multinational companies had an impact in introducing CSR activities into Romanian business organization starting with 1990 (Dura & Driga, 2017; Koleva et al., 2010). On the other hand, nonprofit organizations need to find new solutions for attracting financial resources from international organizations (Mandl & Dorr, 2007).

In Romania, the CSR concept is still in the emerging stage (Romanian Government, 2011). Corporate codes of conduct, social investments, audit, and social/environmental reporting are the main CSR instruments used (Dornean & Rusu, 2019). According to Baleanu et al. (2011), almost half of the organizations in Romania are using exclusively or partially corporate

philanthropy from CSR through projects, events, or organization sponsorship. In the same category we can include the result found by Popa (2015) who emphasizes that in Romania organizations focus mainly on initiatives in the following domains: education, environment, and community support.

A study conducted by Luetkenhorst (2004) notes that countries with a high percentage of SMEs are making the income distribution in a more equitable way and promote high social stability. In Romania even large organizations and multinationals started to include CSR in their activities, CSR is less known and applied by SMEs (Romanian Government, 2011). This can be explained by the fact that public authorities at the central, local, and regional levels are not sufficiently encouraging the CSR / SR concept (Costache et al., 2021; Romanian Government, 2011). In this direction, there is one concern regarding the exclusion of Romanian organizations that do not practice CSR from the European market (Romanian Government, 2011). Another reason for short-term CSR projects in Romania is the use of the concept as a PR instrument (Dumitru et al., 2011; Grabara et al., 2016; Obrad & Gherheș, 2018; Sitniko et al., 2021).

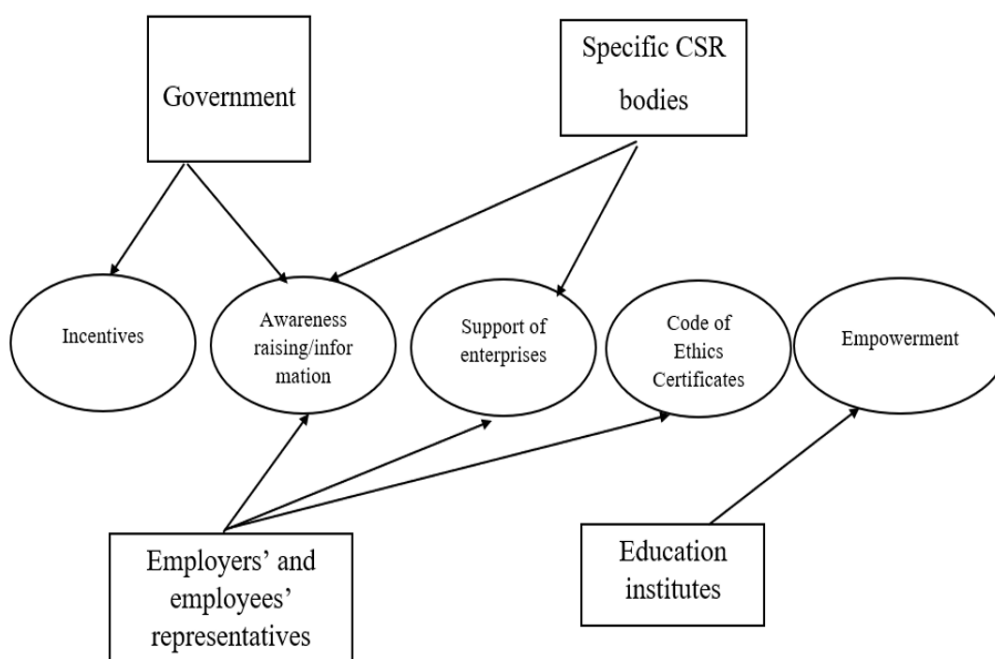


Figure 1. Key actors and their strategies in the field of CSR.

Source: Adapted from Mandl and Dorr (2007)

On the other hand, Anca et al. (2011) advocates that if initially Romanian organizations are using CSR for public relations (PR), over time, the organizations start to see CSR as a way of developing society, environment protection, and strengthening the relations with their stakeholders.

For a better understanding of the actual stage of development of CSR in Romania, the authors of this paper decided to reanalyze and rewrite the SWOT analysis created by the Romanian Government in 2011 based on the actual context. This SWOT analysis presented in the next section can be a starting point for the main idea debated in future studies on CSR in Romania.

5. SWOT ANALYSIS ON CSR / SR IN ROMANIA

In Romania, the CSR concept is attracting growing attention and the authors of this study would like to shape the actual picture of the CSR domain by updating the initial SWOT analysis written in 2011, by the Romanian government, based on the actual level of development (see Table 1).

The role of introducing CSR into academic curricula is to contribute to the development of specific CSR skills and the dissemination of knowledge at national and international levels (Anca et al., 2011). In Romania, CSR appears as packs of subject at bachelor, master (Anca et al., 2011), and lately Ph.D. degree programs for academic programs such as Social Assistance, Management, Marketing, and Communication. So, among the strengths, we can see the increasing number of research at the national level in what concerns on CSR.

In the same category, we can also add modern communication platforms, networks, forums, blogs and websites towards CSR (e.g., CSRMedia - <https://www.csrmedia.ro/>, StiriONG - <https://www.stiri.org/>).

Another strong point is the growing number of published reports regarding nonfinancial and diversity information once with transposed Directive 2014/95/EU into national legislation. According to the Romania CST Index 2021 (The Azores Sustainability & CSR Services, 2021), 4.4% of more than 750 organizations with more than 500 employees from Romania are publishing sustainability reports and the trend is increasing.

The list of weaknesses covers an area of extremely heterogeneous concerns. Considered an instrument of public relations (PR) through CSR, philanthropy is the most convenient form of CSR for organizations, as it does not imply effort or employee training (Dura & Driga, 2017). Some authors are considering philanthropy as a weak approach to the CSR strategy (Dura & Driga, 2017), but the authors of this paper would say that in the emerging countries it is absolutely necessary. On the other hand, it is noted that in Romania almost 36% of organizations are developing their own projects of social responsibility (Dura & Driga, 2017). Lately more studies advocate that in recent years started a tendency for large organizations to pass from low-cost methods of action in CSR field (philanthropy, sponsorship, volunteering) to a business strategy which takes into account the environmental protection and the welfare of the society (Dura & Driga, 2017).

Another weak point found by the authors of this study is the low level of interest of public authorities in developing the Romanian economy through job creation. In this sense, the support of native people is required as a measure to stop the increasingly intense migration process to developed countries (Firoiu et al., 2019). If poverty will not be eradicated, then there are low chances that CSR will be a subject of interest for consumers, but also for organizations.

Furthermore, big organizations through externalizing specific operations from the production process exert specific pressures on SMEs to include CSR in business strategy (Anca et al., 2011). This means that CSR cost is transferred to SMEs, while big organizations benefit by good reputation (Anca et al., 2011). In these situations, the voluntary aspect of CSR is becoming a must for SMEs to resist on a specific market (Anca et al., 2011). This kind of dependency can exclude SMEs from some markets as SMEs do not have specific monitoring, measuring, and recording CSR systems and human capacity (Anca et al., 2011). Also, it

should be considered that SMEs are producing goods for more organizations, and each organization may have its own social and environmental requests (Anca et al., 2011). The cost of including CSR into SMEs business strategy can also be an impediment (Anca et al., 2011).

On the other hand, some authors emphasize that Romania is one of the weakest performers with respect to the environmental pillar of the EU (Dura & Driga, 2017). The authors of this paper advocate that weak performance in what concerns environmental protection is a consequence of the hard exploitation of Romanian natural assets by foreign organizations.

From the list of threats, the authors of this study emphasize the fact that the financial resources for CSR will be drastically limited or totally excluded from the organizations budget as a result of the economic crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic. We have already experienced the same measures in 2008, when another economic crisis started.

Table 1. SWOT Analysis of CSR/SR in Romania

	Helpful	Harmful
Internal	<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CSR/SR is seen as an opportunity for the society and an interesting concept through its novelty. ▪ Multinationals and large Romanian organizations involved in CSR/SR practices. ▪ Continuously growing the number of CSR/SR initiatives and good practices in this field at national level. ▪ Growing interest from consumers in socially responsible products and practices. ▪ The growing number of studies, research, disseminations and evaluations in PhD programmes, regarding the applicability of CSR/SR in Romania. ▪ Modern communication platforms, networks, forums, blogs, and websites, in the CSR domain, used for dissemination of the concepts and appropriate practices. ▪ Higher transparency 	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Insufficient knowledge in the field at the society level. ▪ Poor applicability of investments and socially responsible acquisitions. ▪ Poor knowledge and insufficient applicability of human rights. ▪ Bribery with direct consequences on the business environment and the business capability of involving CSR/SR practices in its strategy. ▪ Insufficient development of business culture based on ethical principles. ▪ CSR used as a PR instrument via philanthropy – money or goods donations for projects, events, or institutions. ▪ The absence of involvement of public authorities in developing Romanian economy - jobs creations. ▪ Weak performance in issues that concern environmental protection as a consequence of hard exploitation of the Romanian natural assets by foreign organizations.

External	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Opportunities ▪ Benefits for organizations, communities, society, business environment, environment after integrating CSR/SR in organizations strategy. ▪ The European and international magnitude of CSR/SR. ▪ Achieving competitive advantages for Romanian organizations on the European and international market. ▪ Great opportunities of learning, searching, and adapting good practices and lessons learned from other countries with a higher level of development. ▪ Better reputation for organizations. ▪ Opportunities to attract European funds in financing CSR/SR initiatives. ▪ Positive image in the eyes of organizations' consumers. 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The absence of systematic public policies to promote CSR / SR. ▪ The absence of a consistent and systematic legislative framework in CSR/SR. ▪ Low applicability of existing legislation. ▪ Delays in what concerns accepted standards in fields related to CSR/SR (e.g., the environment) compared to other EU countries. ▪ Risk of exclusion of Romanian organizations from specific markets, especially SMEs, as a result of insufficient financial and human resources for addressing CSR issues. ▪ Insufficient involvement and support of public authorities in promoting and applying CSR / SR. ▪ Lack of budgetary funds to promote CSR / SR. ▪ The exclusion of CSR/SR practices from organizations or an inefficient applicability of CSR practices, once with cost reduction, as a result of economic crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic.
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Source: adapted from the Romanian Government (2011)

6. CONCLUSIONS

In general, the literature is showing that Romanian organizations are initially using CSR for public relations, but during time they are making the transitions to a way of developing society, environment protection, and strengthening the relations with their stakeholders. However, the inclusion of CSR into business strategy is strongly linked to financial gain, but also to the size of the organizations. In this direction we can take the example of SMEs which are lately under a higher pressure because of the transfer of CSR responsibility by big organizations on their shoulders. This issue is the result of externalizing specific operations from the production process of large organizations through SMEs. In this case, we can consider CSR as an obstacle for the development of SMEs.

Another strong point found by the authors of this study is the increasing number of studies regarding CSR practices in Romania at the academic level as packs of subject in bachelor, master, but mainly through Ph.D. programs.

There can also be seen improvements in what concern the growing number of published reports regarding nonfinancial and diversity information once with transposed Directive 2014/95/EU into national legislation.

Through the list of weaknesses we can see the use of philanthropy as a PR instrument in Romanian business environment.

Another point of the week and the most serious as noted by the authors of this paper is the low interest of public authorities in developing the Romanian economy through jobs creations. Without eradicating poverty, there are low chances that Romanian society will be interested in CSR practices.

Low performances are also recorded in what concern the environmental protection, and the authors of this study revealed that the root cause for this problem is the hard exploitation of Romanian natural assets by foreign organizations.

In the list of threats, the authors of this paper emphasize that the financial cost used for CSR practices will be drastically reduced or totally erased as a result of the economic crises generated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Finally, there can be seen improvements in the field of CSR in Romanian business environment, but the economic crisis generated by Covid-19 may have the same consequences as in 2008 when the CSR issues were totally excluded by the business environment.

This study aimed to bring a level of novelty in the initial SWOT analysis proposed by the Romanian Government in 2011 through the review of the most recent studies in the field and through the personal opinion of the authors of this document.

The results of this study put forward implications for theory, managers and policy makers.

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