

## **SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY STRATEGIES IN SUPPORT OF ROMANIAN EDUCATION**

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**ABSTRACT:** Corporate social responsibility is becoming an increasingly important concern for Romanian companies, both domestic and especially those from abroad. Whatever the motivation is (low or social pressures, one good marketing idea, an answer to the economic, social or environmental needs felt etc.), it can be observed the firms involvement in various files of their activity (education, health, culture, environment, human rights, sport etc.). This availability may be valued by the educational institutions, including universities, by appropriate partnerships. The reason for this present paper is to investigate the social responsibility strategies in education, by inventorying/classification/description of CSR strategies undertaken in the educational field in Romania, in order to provide best practices and recommendations for developing these strategies by various partnership proposals.

**KEYWORDS:** Corporate social responsibility, Romanian companies, education, partnerships, strategies.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Currently, corporate social responsibility is maybe the most frequently addressed theme in the literature. Following the challenges of the warning signs regarding the effects of global warming on the environment and the social problems associated with the current economic development model and globalization (social inequality, unemployment, corruption, etc.), companies are interested in finding maintaining and development models, including these concerns in how to act in markets where they operate in. In their efforts to search for new sources of competitiveness in globalized markets, large corporations that have expanded their business outside their countries of origin, but also local companies, are currently required to integrate the principles of social responsibility in their strategies (initially voluntarily). This situation is due to the intense regulatory framework in this area, outlined in the European business environment and adopted by more countries. European Commission shows that responsible companies may benefit “in terms of risk management, cost savings, access to capital, customer relationships, human resource management, and innovation capacity” [7], and can anticipate changes in terms of customer expectations, staff, conditions in the markets. They are better placed in an environment that allows innovation and growth, based on the confidence expressed by stakeholders.

### **2. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND EDUCATION – AN AMBIVALENT CONNECTION**

The concept of social responsibility of companies, known in economic literature as corporate social responsibility, corporate social responsibility or sustainability of companies / corporations, durability, sustainable development, targets the behavior of firms in markets, the philosophy, the vision and a certain way of doing business. Thus, both companies, associations and shareholders, and the community which they operate in, employees, customers, suppliers and other involved parties named stakeholders, benefit from the created value. It is a concept formulated since the 1920s, when Clark said that companies had a certain responsibility towards the environment they operate in - to return a part of profits to the community. Afterwards, it is developed and approached depending on the orientation to different schools thinking of authors and on the source-theories that underpin it [1]. A key moment in the revival of the role of the corporate social responsibility was the Brundtland

report, in 1987, entitled "Our Common Future", given the impact it has had in promoting the idea of sustainable development. It is appreciated as a development model that considers the use of resources without affecting the development needs of future generations [5].

Among the variety of terms regarding companies' obligations towards the society in which they take resources and achieve profits, the distinction between social responsibility and sustainable / durable development occurs. The first group of terms refers to actions at micro level, given the short and medium term, while the second indicates the need to undertake activities at macro level and to identify ways to use resources that companies have at their disposal, in a manner that allow the possibility of perpetuating long-term business [6]. In this paper, the term of corporate social responsibility (CSR) will be used, defined in accordance with the European Commission's approach. Companies must assume the effects their actions have on the environment, and social responsibility materializes in legislation compliance and integration of social, environmental, ethical, respect for human rights and consumer concerns into their business strategy and operations [3]. A similar approach is provided by the National Strategy to promote social responsibility developed by the General Secretariat of the Government of Romania, through which organizations are encouraged to voluntarily, "integrate the environmental and society issues in their daily activities" [4]. This requires compliance with a set of principles: responsibility, ethical behavior, transparency, respect for the co-interested parties and state, cooperation and coherence, performing management, predictability, respect for human rights and other norms and international standards. Therefore it includes issues related to the effects of companies' operations on the natural and social environment, issues that target human rights, consumers and ethical behavior.

Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), a reporting system recommended by the Commission for companies to release reports on the impact of their actions on the involved stakeholders, groups the matters covered by social responsibility in several categories [3]: **the economic environment** (economic performance, presence on market, indirect economic effects, procurement procedures), **the natural environment** (materials, energy, water, biodiversity, carbon emissions, waste, products and services, consumers), **the social environment**, with the following subcategories: *policies on employment* (number of employees, labor relations management, health and safety, education and training, diversity and equal opportunities, equal pay for men and women), *human rights* (non-discrimination, freedom of association, investment, forced labor, etc.), *society* (local community, anti-corruption, etc.), *product liability* (consumer safety, marketing communication, customer complaints, etc.).

In the stated definitions, local community is an integrant part of social environment. The concerns in this area are connected with the need for companies to contribute to its development through education's supportive actions, both of young people, unemployed, children and their own employees, to support innovation based on knowledge, to have a good image among the local population, and to help in creating a more equitable society, where the youth and other people achieve their potential. Therefore education is a component of the social / societal environment, that can be seen in the context of this paper as a system that includes a set of institutions which aim to achieve some learning objectives / improving skills and competencies of participants (pupils, students, other stakeholders), but also as a process through which stakeholders are involved in learning activities, using different methods (formal, informal and non-formal ones).

Between corporate social responsibility and education there is a relationship that can be seen as a bi-directional one (figure 1): education plays a key role in promoting the concept of CSR at individual and corporate level, in order to create the prerequisites for their sustainable development. Thus, it contributes to the objectives formulated by the Brundtland report that aims at the sustainable development of society, improvement of some indicators regarding the natural environment and those that consider inter- and intra-generational equity, as well as resource allocation. Thus, the limitation of the negative effects on future development and abatement of inequalities among countries are possible today. Education is also the foundation

where values, associated with responsibility for the natural, social and economic environment, may be developed and shared, because through education can be rethought the way in which people and companies behave towards those who are affected by their actions. Similarly, the adoption and implementation of CSR principles involve awareness actions of employees, suppliers, customers, other parties on the need for a responsible behavior towards stakeholders, both as a firm and as an individual actor on the market, or in society as a whole.

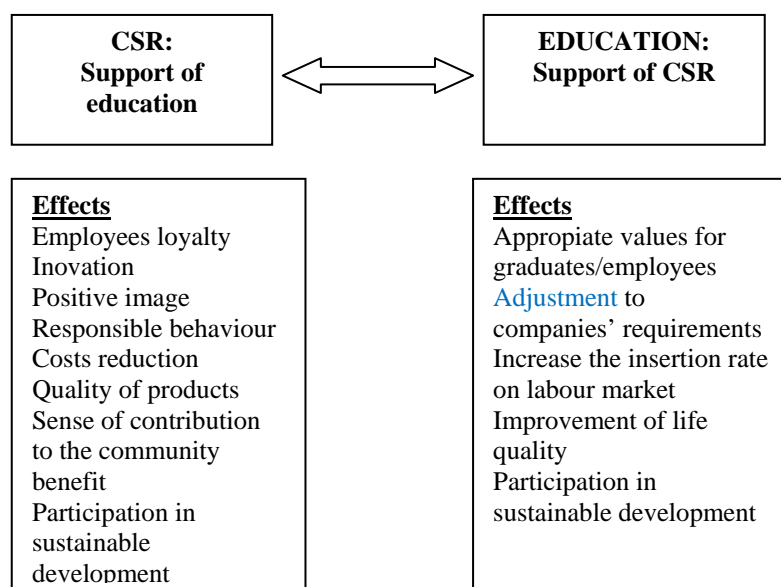


Figure 1: Relationship CSR - education

Universities, as providers of educational and research services, have a key role in the equation that models the corporate social responsibility - sustainable development relationship, acting as vectors for releasing and improving the intensity and implementation speed of CSR principles and achieving the objectives targeted by sustainability, in present and future development of society. Prospective graduates are bearers of knowledge and values that support social responsibility, on the one hand, but also employees, customers, suppliers or representatives of other companies' stakeholders, participating in choosing the behavioral way of the firms / organizations they integrate in. On the other hand, the intensity and the direction of their participation in shaping behaviors are a consequence of how universities and companies proceed in present. In a simplified manner, the positive effects of CSR - education relationship are focused on creating appropriate values among graduates, adjusting the curriculum to companies' requirements, improving graduates' insertion and life quality, and for companies increasing employees loyalty and their qualification level. Thus, there are supported innovation, cost reduction, improvement of product quality and the human sense of company's contribution to the benefit of the community.

### 3. ROMANIA: CSR STRATEGIES IN EDUCATION

In recent years, a growing interest of companies to carry out CSR programs in education can be noticed in Romania. Their content varies from covering the needs of knowledge on certain topics, to those of forming professional competencies and increasing insertion in the labor market. Projects promotion is made both on companies' websites and professional websites; these are also our documentary sources, in order to make an inventory of projects / activities (see Table 1) that can be considered as best practices and that may underlie the development of new ideas. This inventory is presented in a structured form, on different types of programs. The initiatives are generally owned or financed by international companies with branches /

offices in Romania, absolutely normal if we consider their financial capacity and experience in this field.

**Table 1.** Romania – CSR activities in education

Types of programs	Projects / Activities	Examples
<b>Programs for pupils</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improving digital skills;</li> <li>- Study of programming languages;</li> <li>- Setting up professional classes;</li> <li>- Mentoring and career guidance programs;</li> <li>- Financial education projects (how a bank works, how to spend money responsibly);</li> <li>- Environmental education projects (rational use of energy resources, environmental protection);</li> <li>- Projects to develop critical thinking, creativity and citizenship;</li> <li>- Financial assistance and counseling of gifted children;</li> <li>- Musical educational projects;</li> <li>- Supporting the Olympics and their participants;</li> <li>- Supporting national competitions in various fields, quizzes, art competitions, eco-civic contests etc .;</li> <li>- Buying books for school libraries;</li> <li>- Support for children from disadvantaged groups;</li> <li>- Projects for the reintegration of dropout children in the school system;</li> <li>- Support for completion of high school studies;</li> <li>- Educate against violence in schools;</li> <li>- Education in personal and home hygiene;</li> </ul>	<p><i>Preparing today for the Jobs of Tomorrow</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Samsung Electronics;</li> <li><i>SuperCoders</i> – Orange &amp; Golin;</li> <li><i>Clase de mecanica / Mechanics Classes–Dacia</i>;</li> <li><i>Trends of Tomorrow</i> - Samsung Electronics;</li> <li><i>Junior Orange First Step</i> – Orange;</li> <li><i>Summer Job</i> – BCR;</li> <li><i>One World Romania la scoala / One World Romania at School</i> - Asociatia One World &amp; CEZ;</li> <li><i>Banca Copiilor Responsabili / Bank of Responsible Children</i> – BCR;</li> <li><i>Bani de buzunar 2.0 / Pocket Money 2.0</i> - Scoala de Valori &amp; ING Bank;</li> <li><i>Întalnire cu energia / Meet the Energy</i> - GDF SUEZ Energy Romania</li> <li><i>Harta scolilor verzi / Map of Green Schools</i> – Henkel;</li> <li><i>Spatii verzi / Green Spaces</i> – MOL;</li> <li><i>BCR Speranțe / BCR Hopes</i>– BCR;</li> <li><i>Pot ajuta? / Can I help?</i> – MOL;</li> <li><i>Scoala lui Andrei / Andrew’s School</i>– OMV Petrom;</li> <li><i>Clubul Sportiv / Sports Club</i> - Dim Soft;</li> <li><i>A doua șansă / Second Chance</i> – BCR;</li> <li><i>Clasic e fantastic! / Classic is Fantastic</i> – Filarmonica George Enescu, Teatrul Odeon, Asociatia Clasic e Fantastic;</li> <li><i>Hai la Olimpiada! / Come to the Olympics!</i> – eMAG &amp; BCR;</li> <li><i>The Best – Federal</i> - Mogul Motorparts;</li> <li><i>Hai la Scoala! / Come to School!</i> - UNICEF &amp; ING</li> <li><i>Cărțile copilăriei / Childhood Books</i> – Curtea Veche &amp; ING</li> <li><i>Ai Parte De Carte / Access to Education</i>– Dim Soft;</li> <li><i>METRO Kid – Investim in educatie! / METRO Kid – We Invest in Education!</i> - METRO Cash&amp;Carry;</li> <li><i>Vreau în clasa a noua / I in Ninth Grade</i> - KFC &amp; Pizza Hut;</li> <li><i>Campania Respectului / Respect Campaign</i> – Avon;</li> <li><i>Henkel in Scolii / Henkel in Schools</i>– Henkel;</li> </ul>
<b>Programs for students – development of practical skills for integration into the labor market</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Specialized courses;</li> <li>- Scholarships;</li> <li>- Training centers;</li> <li>- Professional integration projects;</li> <li>- Business simulators (e-learning platforms);</li> <li>- Courses for students with disabilities;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Orange Educational Project</i>;</li> <li><i>Bursele cofinanțate / Orange Educational Project</i>; <i>Co-financed scholarships</i> – Renault;</li> <li><i>Summer Job</i> – BCR;</li> <li><i>IT is Business</i> – Maguay;</li> <li><i>Cursuri accesibile pentru studenții nevăzători / Courses accessible to blind students</i> – Fundatia Cartea Calatoare si</li> </ul>

		Fundatia Orange;
<b>Vocational training / professional development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Education in IT;</li> <li>- Promotion of vocational education;</li> <li>- Providing qualifications / certifications for certain professions;</li> <li>- Financial Education (directly);</li> <li>- Training of Trainers: financial education - training workshops for teachers; classroom management for developing high-level cognitive skills;</li> <li>- Develop and strengthen professional skills;</li> <li>- Internship programs;</li> <li>- Distance learning activities (e-learning);</li> </ul>	<i>Geeks Together</i> - Maguay; <i>Academia profesionistilor in finisaje / Academy of Professionals in Finishing</i> - Henkel; <i>Scoala Zidarilor / School of Builders</i> - Holcim; <i>Educație Financiară pentru ONG-uri / Financial Education for NGOs</i> - TechSoup & ING Bank; <i>Zone de educatie prioritara / Priority Education Areas</i> - UNICEF Romania, Institutul de Stiinte ale Educatiei, ING; <i>Teachers in action</i> – HP; <i>International Baccalaureate</i> – ArcelorMittal; <i>Nestlé needs YOUth</i> – Nestlé; <i>Maguay</i> - Maguay;
<b>Entrepreneurial education programs / Support entrepreneurship programs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Banking-financial education;</li> <li>- Education and social entrepreneurship;</li> <li>- Personal development programs (for acquiring leadership, communicational, financial management skills, etc.);</li> <li>- Grants for the development of business ideas;</li> </ul>	<i>YouthBank</i> - Asociația pentru Relații Comunitare; <i>START! Business</i> – BCR & Junior Achievement; <i>Incubatorul de afaceri / Business Incubator</i> – ING & CROS; <i>JA Compania</i> - Junior Achievement, Ministerul Educatiei Nationale, Amway; <i>Cred in Romania / I Believe in Romania</i> - Star Storage;
<b>Other programs of education / awareness on key issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support for the development of large-scale journalistic projects on domestic violence;</li> <li>- Education in health domain;</li> <li>- Promoting responsible behavior in terms of alcohol consumption;</li> <li>- Education to prevent trafficking;</li> <li>- Use of new technologies by people with disabilities;</li> </ul>	<i>Bursele Superscrieri / Superscrieri Scholarships</i> - Fundatia Friends For Friends & Avon Cosmetics; <i>Zâmbeste România / Smile Romania</i> - GSK Consumer Healthcare ; <i>Impreuna crestem copii puternici / We Grow Powerful Children Together</i> – Nestlé; <i>Si eu traiesc sanatos! / I also Live in Good Health!</i> – Prais & Nestlé; <i>Afla-ti echilibrul / Find your Balance</i> - Ursus Breweries; <i>FreedomTour</i> - ADPARE, eLiberare, MATTOO, Ambasada Statelor Unite la Bucuresti, Agentia Nationala Impotriva Traficului de Persoane, Bancpost, AVIS; <i>Biblioteca de energie / Power Library</i> – CEZ;

Source: systematization *apud* other web sources from [1] to [54]

Analyzing the systematized information we notice the abundance of ideas and ways of implementation, but also the intimation of some real needs in education, especially on the practical aspects. It is important that these programs support various categories of public, targeting both individuals attending a cycle of formal education and jobless people or who face different problems in their daily day. Especially the programs addressed to students and alumni are of interest to us because we think that universities may play a more active role and a substantial involvement in these projects, through various forms of partnership. Activities such as those inventoried within special programs for students, but also the entrepreneurial education and support programs through grants for best business ideas can be solutions to "social responsibility" for higher education.

The collected data allow us to extract, by deductive reasoning, the strategic meaning of programs and actions, based on the fact that "a strategy is something more *intuitive*, being visible often only *post factum*, as a pattern noticed behind events" (Armstrong, 2009). Therefore, we can classify the *CSR strategies in education*, according to several criteria, as follows:

*a. According to the targeted temporary horizon:* strategies on short, medium and long term

The analyzed CSR educational programs had either a precise aspect, targeting certain needs considered at one time, either a repetitive character on medium term (2 – 3 - 4 years), or they have become a tradition.

*b. According to addressability:* pupils, students, unemployed people wanting to change their jobs, employees interested in personal / professional development, disabled / disadvantaged groups etc.

CSR programs in education cover all categories of people, demonstrating in this way their importance.

*c. According to the content:* raising awareness strategies, strategies for the development of knowledge, strategies for training / development of skills / competencies, resourcing strategies, strategies for career guidance etc.

The analyzed programs target, by their content, both raising awareness on society's problems and its education for a better adaptation to the market needs and a better life, but also a more responsible one (by considering the needs of others - from the present and future generations).

*d. According to the educational phase:* pupils, students, people who have completed the formal educational cycle

It can intervene in any phase of education. Companies feel better the labor market pulse, know best the training needs, therefore their programs are highly focused on these needs. They also appreciate the level of adequate training to "delivery" the educational support.

*e. According to the educational sub-domain:* IT, health, management, entrepreneurship, sport, art, teaching, finance, environment, etc.

A special interest to IT can be observed, absolutely normal in terms of technological progress. In present, there are also of interest other topical fields or areas that require high performance.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

Corporate Social Responsibility involves the strategic integration of concerns in this field, to ensure coherence of activities and specific activities, to meet the objectives for company's performance improvement, along with its contribution to the community development where it operates in. In this context, education, that involves participation of employees, of future graduates of schools and universities or other community members in programs that aim to improve skills, personal and professional competencies, is a source of increasing companies' competitiveness on long term. Similarly, education is the primary way for raising living standards and improving some indicators regarding the quality of community life, as main objectives of the economic development.

In Romania, CSR projects in education were developed and are developing, some of them with institutional support. Various projects offer a wide addressability, many of them being designed to youth / graduates and meeting their needs of insertion in the labor market. Public-private partnerships succeed to solve problems regarding a better adaptation to the labor market, by developing the required competencies / skills and funding problems. In this context we consider that universities may involve more by generating CSR projects and developing partnerships with a real impact on the community, providing appropriate training programs, career guidance and involvement in finding concrete solutions related to employment.

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