Review

Representing corporate social responsibility. A case study of Romania's Top 100 companies

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Tackling a field comparatively overlooked by sociological and marketing approaches in Romania, this article critically investigates the emerging corporate social responsibility discourse of Romania's top companies through the lens of their corporate websites. We aim at revealing the particularities of corporate social responsibility in a post-socialist business climate which is slowly being infused with Western-driven discourses of social engagement. The resulting corporate landscape is mostly populated by companies adopting a vision of corporate responsibility centered on the firm and the competitive advantages that derive from CSR activity which does little towards recognizing the embeddings of business in the very fabric of social life.

Key words: Corporate social responsibility, Romanian companies, discourse analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility (CSR), along with all the other concepts that make up the wider discourse of corporate ethics (corporate citizenship, sustainable deve-lopment, corporate governance etc) have been at the core of a normative debate around the role corporation could or should play in society for the better part of the last five decades, a debate that continues to captivate both professional and academic arenas. Moreover, analytical interest in CSR as well as the practice of social responsibility is currently making a strong comeback as a result of importance changes in both the way in which corporations define themselves and the social expec-tations that surround business. In this context, the study of CSR gains particular relevance.

Although still a long way from the urgency that defines Western debates on corporate affairs, the topic of corporate social responsibility in Romanipa has been in recent years making its way to the centre of public debate, both in business arenas, from a managerial per-spective and in the field of public relations in search for the answer of how to project the imagine of a responsible

company. Business magazines constantly showcase articles that focus on successful CSR initiatives or teach managers the best ways to build a socially responsible enterprise, whilst the number of prizes and distinctions offered to responsible companies and leaders is growing exponentially. The social responsibility of Romanian com-panies however, failed to attract the interest of academia to an equal extent. Research on CSR discourse and practice in Romanian companies that takes up a social, rather than managerial/instrumental approach are scarce and offer relatively little in terms of empirical evidence (Lambru, 2004).

It is precisely the lack of empirically grounded analysis that makes up the starting point of this piece of research that aims at putting forward a model of corporate social responsibility as practiced by Romanian companies based on rigorously collected and analyzed empirical data. Hence, starting from the general topic of CSR discourse in Romanian corporations, we aims to answer a set of questions about how the most successful Romanian companies understand and project their social role. The perspective is that of an ‚outsider' and targets both definitions of corporate responsibility put forth by companies and the ways in which social responsibility and CSR action are communicated to the various

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corporate and social stakeholders. To this effect, we have conducted content analysis of the corporate websites of "the 100 most valuable companies in Romania in 2008" (a ranking published by the business publication *Ziarul Financiar* in November 2008) in an attempt to answer three main questions: What are the social responsibilities of business in the view of Romanian corporations? How do they practice social responsibility? How do they communicate it?

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CSR

This last decade is unparalleled in publicizing instances of corporate irresponsibility. From the Enron and Arthur Anderson scandals in 2001 to the more recent and wide-reaching disclosers linked to the financial collapse, the business world has lost much of its credibility, being defined by critics as "*irresponsibility developed into a system*" (Bruner *apud* Greider, 2003:35). The recent and still open-ended financial and economic crisis raises more questions as to the extent to which a business organization should on the one hand and can on the other hand rise up to the challenge of fulfilling needs and requirements that appear to many unconnected to its chief *raison d'etre* – accumulating economic as opposed to social capital. Hence, a wide range of distinct and oftentimes conflicting positions towards corporate social responsibility emerge, that span from harsh critique on neoliberal grounds (Friedman 1062; 9170) to the "discourse of suspicion" (Ricoeur, 1970) of critical approaches (Deetz et al., 1990, 1995; Scherer and Palazzo, 2007; Banerjee, 2008). Raynard and Forstater (2002) identify three major positions towards CSR, both from academic and professional perspectives.

The pro-profit, neoliberal stance has been endorsed most vocally and fervently by M. Friedman. In Friedman's view, "*the only business of business is business*". In other words, the only goal of any company is that of generating profit and maximizing return for shareholders by *acting fairly* and respecting legal frameworks. In a quote which has become something of a cliché, Friedman presents his main critique of the idea of incorporating social aspects in business activities: "*Few trends could so thoroughly undermine the very foundations of our free society as the acceptance by corporate officials of a social responsibility other than to make as much money for their stockholders as possible.*" (1962:133). For Friedman, the State is the only one entity which can and should tackle social problems, even those born out of corporate action. In this sense then, a manager who chooses to act *socially responsible* could be held morally accountable for employing shareholder's capital for developing actions that do not directly lead to profit-making.

A moderate version of the classical approach – the *business case* for CSR – can be summarized by the

following statement of a Shell executive: "*We believe that our commitment to contribute to sustainable development holds the key to our long-term business success*" (*apud* Raynard and Forstater, 2002:6). Supporters of this position believe in the positive correlation between responsible corporate actions and financial performance which, in turn, forms the basis of the company's engagement in any such actions. In other words, companies need not be socially responsibility because any such responsibility exists but they must adopt responsible corporate behavior as it may prove markedly more profitable than the reverse. The business case does not refer to a substantial change in paradigm in terms of the basic principles that underlie business activity but, instead, to the acceptance of new business strategies, based on societal feedback. From this perspective, benefits of CSR practice can be divided into two main categories (Mares, 2008). On the one hand, companies that act responsibly can thus enhance their *operational efficiency* by avoiding the obstacles caused by possible community problems or by adopting efficient *eco* technology towards reducing waste or saving raw materials. On the other hand, companies engaged in CSR benefit from a series of *reputational gains* associated to the public perception of good corporate citizenship. These benefits translate both at the level of employees (attracting young, talented and socially-involved employees) and at the level of the relationship with investors concerned with the manager's ability to manage the threats and opportunities of corporate governance, of vocal consumers and business partners (World Economic Forum, 2002).

Finally, the critical approach to corporate social responsibility has been earning a growing number of supporters over the last few decades, in the context of increasingly radical (social and academic) movements against the effects of globalization and neoliberal - flavored capitalism. The term 'CSR critique' is an improper one however. The proponents of this position do not argue against the notion of a *responsible corporation* insomuch as against the notion that such a concept can co-exist with current understandings of the free market system. Corporate social responsibility is viewed as an instrument for profit-making supporting corporate ideologies above anything else. In this sense, CSR "*represents and constructs the relationship between business and society based on corporate and not social interest*" (Banerjee, 2008: 52). Moreover, while stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1998) has successfully discussed the social role of business and has nowadays become a dominant discourse in the better part of big Western (trans)national corporations, it still fails to solve the problem of the unequal power relations that develop between various stakeholder groups (Banerjee, 2008).

At the same time, corporate social responsibility also implies the particular understanding of business and society as two distinct entities, each bearing their own set of functioning rules and ethics, all connected by a streak

of mutual responsibilities, rights and obligations. *Business ethics* designates a category divorced from *individual ethics* which functions by its own set of laws and imperatives (Banerjee, 2008). Freeman and Liedtka suggest that, instead, the business world should

> "Acknowledge its complicity in the creation of our current society - and abandon the defense of "business as usual," shielded and decoupled from the larger questions raised by the good society. The business community must, indeed, have its separate conversation, but the fundamental values that determine the nature of that conversation are irrevocably shared with the society in which business functions." (1991:95)

Finally, an equally forceful line of CSR critique emerges not from academic discourse but in the ranks of civil society. The 2006 Corporate Watch report attempts to explain why corporate social responsibility in its current form is a practice that still benefits the firm more so than any other stakeholder. On the one hand, CSR makes good business. Consumers want to buy products from companies that care and companies simply need to convince their clients of their responsibility. But between the perception of corporate social responsibility and real social engagement there is a marked difference and corporations tend to prefer the comparatively inexpensive of CSR PR instead of CSR. On the other hand, CSR practice becomes an useful instrument for *'green washing'* companies by saturating the public with positive representations of their activities. Maybe the best known such example is the American tycoon Enron which, in 2001, was an incontestable model of responsible corporate behaviour, topping for half a decade rankings of American business magazines with respect to positive public perceptions of business. However, the 2001 scandal revealing the plethora of morally and legally indefensible activities the corporation had been involved in shed some light on how CSR is oftentimes employed as an efficient PR instrument for glossing over otherwise irresponsible corporate behaviour.

Moreover, adopting CSR is also widely used as means to avoid harsher legal regulation in a given field. Companies maintain that excessive regulation makes innovation difficult, that ethics cannot truly be regulated and that, unless a company gains significant competitive advantages from CSR involvement, the cost of corporate social responsibility is simply not justified (Corporate Watch, 2006). This type of rhetoric reveals a major shortcoming of the corporate approach to social responsibility. Specifically, if a company is indeed responsible, then why would it attempt to avoid regulation against corporate practices proven as irresponsible in the first place? According to Corporate Watch, companies use the discretionary character of CSR as a smoke screen for picking and choosing the areas where they would

eliminate 'bad practice' or, on the contrary, perpetuate it as efficient means of profit-making.

CSR communication

A highly-related topic, particularly relevant for this present piece of research, relates to the ways in which companies choose to publicize their CSR involvement. For those who support corporate responsibility on the grounds of the added value it brings about, CSR commu-nication becomes a central theme since competitive advantage can only emerge through the direct or mediated interaction with stakeholders. Markets of aware and vocal consumers can only be won over and investors in search for sustainable businesses can only be attracted through the successful representation of the ways in which the company fulfils its social responsibility. On the other hand, critics view CSR communication as the main arena of corporate power where message is manipulated towards offering the illusion of responsibility (*„greenwashing"*).

Chaudhri □i Wang (2007) highlight the amount of pressure the business arena is under not just towards practicing CSR but also towards constantly and fairly informing stakeholders of its progress. To some extent, communicating corporate social responsibility has become as important as engaging in CSR activity, especially when strategic gains are sought after. Although critics oftentimes accuse companies of misinforming stakeholders, Chaudhri and Wang (2007) maintain a more favorable stance:

> "In a climate that is arguably marked by more informed publics and a critical media, false and misleading corporate communication would only be counterproductive and seriously jeopardize a company's reputation and social capital" (p. 235)

In the context of what is widely regarded as the 'digital revolution' of recent years, corporate communication in general and CSR communication particularly have relocated to a great extent in the online realm, more so in the case of big national and transnational companies. One the first studies targeting this phenomenon (Esrock and Leichty, 1998) reveals that 90% of companies that make up the *Fortune 500* ranking had (in 1998) corporate web pages whilst 82% included at least one theme related to CSR. Internet has undeniably become one of the foremost arenas for the interaction between the corporation and stakeholders. This becomes even more salient in the case of corporate social responsibility, since the receivers of corporate messages are at the same time the final beneficiaries of CSR activities and the external entities that can create added value for the corporation. In this context, online management of cor-porate social responsibility communication becomes an

essential endeavor.

The present piece of research views online CSR communication from two different perspectives. On the one hand, it represents a more or less accurate reflection of the manner in which a corporation understands and accomplishes its social roles. On the other hand, the corporate website undeniably functions as a public relations platform managed as such within the company. In other words, CSR-related information (however factually true) is manipulated towards painting a positive corporate image in terms of its social engagement. Simply put, the firm can select what and how much is presented to the public, whilst the public more often than not lacks instruments for verifying the validity of information. It is this oftentimes unequal power relation that makes a critical stance towards online CSR communication necessary.

ROMANIAN TOP COMPANIES: A CASE STUDY

One of our foremost objectives is exploring the ways in which Romanian companies understand the concept and practice of corporate social responsibility and, taking it one step further, the manner in which they project their role in Romanian society. The comparative shortage of CSR research in Romania marks out the exploratory character of the research, at the intersection between description – identifying the major features of a phenomenon and explanation – revealing *"the relation between phenomena"* (Chelcea, 2004:183). Hence, this research had two main goals. On the one hand, we aimed at revealing the extent to which the biggest 100 Romanian companies report involvement in CSR activity. On the other hand, we attempted to put forth a synthetic model of the representation of corporate social responsibilities in Romanian companies which can become the basis for future in-depth research.

So as to approach these questions, we conducted content analysis of the corporate websites of the 100 most valuable Romanian companies in 2008. The ranking that makes up the basis of this research was created by the business magazine Ziarul Financiar and published in November 2008. The ranking was put together by taking into account market capitalization of listed companies and recent financial results for all others, as well as debt levels, market share and, equally important, the value of transactions on their respective business segments.

We identified the websites of the one hundred companies, then accessed each of them and coded useful information. It is important to mention that we used information on websites regardless of the time of the latest update. We started off from the website map, with the aid of each we identified relevant sections. We analysed all essential aspects of virtual communication: text, layout, visual elements (photographs, movies, headings and banners), placement, the number and

content of links.

Although corporate social responsibility conceptually represents the main unit of analysis, we attempted to pursue this notion paradigmatically rather than semantically on the websites studied. In other words, we searched not just for the exact term of 'corporate social responsibility' but also parallel terminology (e.g. 'sponsorship and philanthropy'). This approach attempted to overcome a methodological limit: there are companies who do indeed engage in some forms of corporate social responsibility, without naming it as such.

Several recent pieces of research examine corporate social responsibility discourses through the lens of corporate websites. Jill Timms (2001) conducted a systematic qualitative study of corporate websites of *Fortune Top 500* transnational companies and their relevant stakeholders with the aim of developing "*a theoretical understanding of transnational practices and employment relations within the global system, by considering why corporations define themselves as good citizens*" (p.3) Hence, the research aimed at looking into the ways in which different groups define de concept of corporate citizenship, including its visual representations. From a methodological standpoint, the author identifies a number of key points examined on the websites: the existence of links to sections on corporate citizenship; the inclusion of corporate social responsibilities policies; the extent to which the specific activities related to these policies; visual representation tactics; target audience; the corporate department responsible for CSR and, finally, the emphasis placed on the given section within the website.

The first conclusions of this ongoing research include three main assertions. On the one hand, there is a significant globally-recognized trend towards constructing a model of the socially responsible corporation, more so than bound to a certain location. Moreover, transnational companies attempt through various methods to construct a social role for themselves in a globalised world, maintaining that their activity is beneficial for the whole of society as opposed to specific local communities. Thirdly, there is a visible convergence of the notion of corporate citizenship in the discourse of big transnational companies, which nonetheless appears to be less pervasive on an actional level. In other words, companies seem to have discursively defined a common social role, but failed to fill up this discourse with relevant models of corporate behaviour.

Starting off from earlier pieces of research on the one hand and the relevant theoretical aspects identified on the other, out data collection and analysis was guided by the following relevant dimensions: (1) The website section dedicated to CSR (or similar): existence/absence, placement within the website, number and content of links, dimensions, existence of structured corporate reporting of CSR (e.g. annual reports); (2) definitions of corporate social responsibility put forth on the website;

(3) The mention of CSR on the section dedicated to the company's strategy (mission/vision/values or similar); (4) The mention of relevant stakeholder groups; (5) CSR action areas; (6) Types of CSR action.

Finally, both the chosen methodology and the broader topic of this research bring about a number of limitations which must be taken into account in the process of analysing data and formulating conclusions. On the one hand, the field of corporate social responsibility is undeniably highly dynamic, especially in the current business climate. Companies are constantly reformulating their corporate social responsibility strategies, elaborate them where there are none, modify their bearing in the general strategic vision, and put forward new areas of involvement and CSR instruments. For instance, at the time of the research, Rompetrol had no mention of corporate social responsibility or any related concept on their website. However, more recently, the company set out to elaborate and implement a multi-directional CSR strategy. Hence, whereas the results of this piece of research propose a valid imagine of corporate social responsibility in Romanian firms, it only does so at given time and, hence, only defines one particular moment in the evolution of this phenomenon. A second salient limitation, already mentioned, relates to the possibility of a variable number of companies to practise some forms of corporate social responsibility and yet not communicate it in any structured manner on their websites which may end up influencing the fidelity of our analysis to an extent highly difficult to assess.

The results of the study describe a corporate climate that practices and communicates CSR to a relatively high extent (49% of the companies studied). The wider community is represented as the primary stakeholder and beneficiary of its CSR activity (mentioned by 65% of firms), closely followed by the environment (53%) whilst those stakeholders that are thought to influence to a lesser extent the profit-making goals or elicit less legal regulation are more often than not overlooked. Finally, Romanian companies prefer inexpensive intervention instruments (such as philanthropy) and showcase weak coordination with others social and political actors (NGOs, governmental organizations.) Going beyond quantitative description, this article proposes an in-depth, qualitative analysis focused on such questions as: How do business organizations understand their role and how do they communicate it? What are the particularities of Romanian CSR discourse?

Particularly notable here is the analytical difference between the ways in which a company (re)presents their social role and the real impact corporate CSR action bears on the societal environment. This difference is articulated on a continuum that spans from social involvement without any explicit mention to over-sizing the responsible nature of companies with PR instruments. In other words, there are companies that practice some form or another of corporate social responsibility without ever naming at such and, hence, without including it in their organizational strategies just as there are corporations that hide between CSR activities and rhetoric otherwise irresponsible business goals (e.g. avoiding harsher legal regulation). In this context, the aim of this analysis is not to test the 'real' social engagement of Romanian companies but, instead, to look into the ways in which they perceive and communicate their social role – taking up social responsibilities and communicating them to various internal or external stakeholders.

Within this analytical context, the analysis of CSR discourses put forth by companies reveals a very wide spectrum of understanding corporate social responsibility. On the one hand, we can talk of a number of companies that view corporate responsibility strategically and integrated, offering it a central role in the company's strategy and vision. Generally, this is the case of big, listed, oftentimes transnational corporations which engage in wide-reaching CSR activities in several fields of action and employing various instruments for social involvement.

"As one of the biggest companies in Romania, we are aware of the impact our activities bear on Romanian society and we assume this important role through the application of high business standards, healthy and safety measure, both internally and externally (…) Corporate social responsibility is an integrated part of Petrom strategy. Thus, we make sure we can rise up to our social responsibility to society, through programmes that generate not just long term results but also an attitude" (website Petrom, March 2009)

"We firmly believe that a successful business is a responsible business, and long-term growth for shareholders goes hand-in-hand with our wider commitment to our communities, our employees, and the environment." (website Arcelor Mittal, April 2009)

"At Orange, we believe that the development of our company needs to be carried out responsibly, respecting the natural environment, the community in which we function, the employees, our partners and shareholder, to be based on a sustainable development strategy. We believe that we can have a significant positive impact on community development and hence Orange has taken this responsibility seriously". (website Orange Romania, March, 2009)

The three companies exemplified construct their corporate responsibility discourse starting off from an understanding of responsible business whose success does not only depend on fulfilling business obligations but also actively engaging with the community and other stakeholders. Corporate social responsibility is beneficial for the company on 'good business' grounds (Arcelor

Mittal) and, at the same time, it is advantageous for the wider community (Orange).

What is interesting is that, generally speaking, companies fail to make transparent the ways in which corporate responsibility creates added value for the company. A distinct case is that of OMV, the only firm that mentions punctually and explicitly the reasons behind their corporate responsibility activities:

"Through CSR we aim: to gain competitive advantages; to promote innovation; to enhance our reputation and minimize risk; to strengthen corporate identity and culture; and to mitigate the company's impact." (website OMV, March 2009).

The five objectives put forth reflect the boundary between two different versions of CSR, what Zadek (2001) names *"compliance and risk management"* and *"strategy and innovation"*, describing two different generations of corporate social responsibility discourse and practice. The former centers on two main reasons for corporate adoption of CSR: maximizing competitive advantage by developing a reputation of social responsibility and mini-mizing risks by proactively addressing potential criticism. The second vision goes beyond mere compliance and positions CSR at the heart of business strategy. The mention of 'innovation' and 'corporate identity' indicates an integrative trend – making social responsibility a principle guiding all business processes as opposed to just those visible to external observers. What is more, employing corporate identity and culture as motives for responsible business points to the increased significance placed by professionals on corporate social engagement as criteria for selecting employers. The trend towards an integrated vision CSR is further supported by the OMV vision statement which relates sustainability of the business process to developing trust of all stakeholders attached to the company:

"Corporate social responsibility is therefore not a matter of short-term optimization versus long-term value-orientation. We believe that sustained business success is ultimately closely linked to the trust of all our stakeholder groups" (OMV, March 2009)

A rather extreme case in terms of positioning CSR within wider corporate strategic frameworks is that of tobacco companies (Phillip Morris International, JTI, British American Tobacco). Due to the high risk associated with their products and the dominantly negative discourse shaped around them, tobacco companies seem to have ceased to sell cigarettes, substituting them with corporate responsibility as the main marketed 'service'. For instance, Phillip Morris International did not dedicate at the time we conducted the research, any link on the Homepage of their international website to their tobacco

products, the seven available links being: "About us, Relations with investors, Smoking and Health, Business environment, Responsibility, Careers, Media". The only mention of tobacco can be found in the 'About us' section, under the heading *"Our Brand"*. The Romanian website of the group goes one step further by stating:

"What you will not find on this website is any type of publicity for the Philip Morris International cigarette brands. This website aims at offering information about our company and its employees, about our activities and position with respect to issues such as corporate social responsibility, smoking prevention amongst youth and health concerns with smoking" (website Phillip Morris Romania, March 2009)

Both Phillip Morris and the two other tobacco companies included in the Top 100 ranking develop extended corporate social responsibility programmes, in a variety of different areas: environmental protection, smoking pre-vention, arts sponsorship, hunger or domestic violence. What is more, the company attempts to proactively counteract any potential critiques of greenwashing:

"Through this engagement to become a responsible corporate citizen, we do not aim to distract attention from the fact that we are a tobacco company. In fact, this is precisely what employees, shareholders and client expect of us, along with the law and society at large" (website Phillip Morris Romania, March 2009).

However, the more vocal critics of corporate social responsibility would argue that it is precisely the positive discourse surrounding the practice of CSR that allows companies commercializing products/services bearing high social risks to continue their activity with the consent of all stakeholders involved. From this perspective, the above quoted assertion is indicative of the capitalist logic of re-appropriating and re-configuration criticism towards consolidating the system (Deetz □i Kuhn, 2008).

At another end of the spectrum lie companies that straight-forwardly employ CSR as a (more or less successful) public relations instrument. This approach to corporate responsibility is materialized, on the one hand, in the positioning of the dedicated CSR section on the website (under the heading Press Centre or Public Relations) and, on the other hand, in the ways in which companies build their corporate responsibility discourse.

This type of CSR communication emerges as specific to state-owned companies (although there are a few private entities which fall in the same category) and stand proof of an undifferentiated and unstructured adoption of increasingly dominant Western corporate discourses rela-ted to the role of business in society. One such example is Carpatica Bank that dedicates a sole page to their CSR activity, in the Media Centre section, including a list of CSR-related distinctions earned by the company from

various external entities. There are no mentions of specific CSR activities, of areas of intervention or instruments for action.

Another example of this trend is the state-owned energy company Nuclear electrica, which mentions, amongst its corporate values, social responsibility:

"Corporate social responsibility – Nuclearelectrica answers to the needs of the Cernavoda local community through its CSR policy" (website Nuclearelectrica, April 2009).

At the time of the study, the said policy was nowhere to be found on the website, and there was no other specific mention of the ways in which Nuclearelectrica engages with the needs of the local community. There could potentially be two explanations for this: on the one hand, we could be talking about a deficiency of corporate communication – the website contains no information about the existing CSR activities of the company due to weak communication management. On the other hand, introducing CSR amongst corporate values may be an attempt for the company to align itself to a global trend which has yet to become integrated in the hands-on organizational strategy.

In terms of a complete lack of CSR discourse, a striking case is that of big, transnational retail companies (Cora, Carrefour, Billa, Selgros, Real, Metro Cash&Carry) which seem to define their activity altogether outside the discourse of corporate responsibility. If some of the international, group websites mention CSR in some form or another, none of the Romanian websites of these retail giants (with the exception of Selgros which dedicated a paragraph without headline in the *About us* section to corporate responsibility) does not project any other social responsibility apart from offering lowest possible prices to customers. We can talk of retail business as perceived as not just socially innocuous but borderline beneficial for surrounding communities. Big hypermarket chains present themselves as bringing benefits to stakeholders through the very nature of their activity and see no use in reaffirming some type or another of corporate social responsibility. Selling high quality products at a low price hence becomes the main 'social' responsibility of big retailers and the only type of engagement with the needs of relevant (yet not necessarily acknowledged) stakeholders.

Mission statements of organizations in this sector (where they are made available) focus on economic goals, glossing over any direct mention of social factors. For instance, Metro Cash&Carry, ranked eleventh on the Top 100 ranking, puts forth the following corporate mission statement:

"Our mission: our mission is to be the best retail company in the entire world. So as to fulfill this aim as a group, like molecules, we must unite our

energy, focus and make this mission our common cause […]
METRO Vision: We pledge to offer valuable services to our clients; we want to be known as the first in retail; we constantly follow the needs and satisfaction of our customer; we have a well defined format, adapted to the requirements of the local market; employees are the most important resource of our company; we are open to transparent communication; […] we build a mutually-beneficial relationship with our suppliers; we constantly increase the value of money invested in our company (website Metro Cash&Carry Romania, March 2009)"

Although several stakeholder groups are mentioned (employees, clients, suppliers, investors), it is only those interested parties whose activity and satisfaction with the firm is organically linked to the profit-making goals of the company (Clarkson, 1995). In this case, we can talk of an approach to business mainly guided by profit and with little concern for wider social implications of business activity.

Finally, a trend that is slowly starting to emerge in the global discourse on corporate social responsibility, *"third generation CSR"* (Zadek, 2001), involves supporting wide networks of organizations (economic and non-governmental) towards an integrated strategy for solving those social problems that cannot be tackled to any satisfactory end by disparate social actors: poverty reduction, global warming, systemic social exclusion etc. This type of CSR transcends the boundaries of the corporation as a self-standing entity and implies high level coordination with a series of actors which can oftentimes have conflicting long-terms interests. Although weak attempts to engage different public sectors in CSR activity have been made by some companies, this structurally-challenging vision of corporate responsibility has yet to find its way to strategies of Romanian firms. Based on a radical remodeling of corporate objectives and markets, third generation CSR is an intensive endeavor that Romanian companies do not seem to take up as of yet, either discursively or in action.

CONCLUSIONS

Corporate social responsibility in Romania emerges as a corporate effort at the boundary between compliance to the explicit requirements of society and proactive engagement in solving problems of the community and other stakeholders. Generally speaking, we can highlight the following features of CSR discourse and practice in Romania: (1) The willingness to obey the law and treat fairly acknowledged stakeholders; (2) The adoption of the business case of corporate social responsibility which position CSR as a competitive advantage: (3) The

representation of community as the main stakeholder and CSR beneficiary and ignoring those stakeholders that are deemed secondary to the business activities; (3) The weak integration of corporate responsibility in the broader strategic vision of the firm; (4) The weak coordination with other social actors – civil society, governmental institutions; (5)The use of organizationally inexpensive CSR instruments (such as philanthropy).

Undeniably, corporate social responsibility names a concept and a set of practices with a special dynamics which is rapidly taking up a central part in the global debate around corporate activity generally and the positioning of companies within the social mechanism particularly. In this context, this article is one of the first attempts to clarify the position of Romanian firms in this debate. At this time, corporate social responsibility discourse in Romania is at a crossroads, shifting between first generation CSR – punctual, relatively disparate activities with reputational aims - and second generation corporate responsibility – strategic, integrated and targeting not just financial gain but the needs of stakeholders (Zadek, 2001). In the future, tracking and analyzing CSR discourse, from different perspectives and employing various methodologies, becomes an essential endeavor towards improving the relationship between business and the many groups influenced by its activities.

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