



Jens Trummer is a CSR consultant with over 12 years of international experience. In an interview for CSR Romania, he makes a comparison between the CSR practices in Eastern Europe and the ones from Western Europe and the USA. Furthermore, he explains how CSR and PR should be connected.

You have an international CSR experience, having worked in the USA, Europe and Asia. Which would be, in your opinion, the main differences in perceiving and implementing CSR in countries in transition from Eastern and Central Europe compared to the ones from Western countries?

I didn't deal so much with actual CSR in Asia and my experience in US was related to eco-friendly home improvement. The only experience I have related to real CSR is in Central Europe. So, I could give you more a comparison based on academic research more than on personal experience.

When I arrived here (N.B. in Hungary) two years ago, I was surprised on how advanced CSR became in Central Europe, especially in Hungary. I expected it not having evolved so much. I think one of the main drivers of CSR in Hungary and also probably in other countries in Central Europe is the influence that multinational corporations or international corporations are having on the regional branches in Hungary and other countries, that bring their culture and tradition along from their respective countries. I think that in Western Europe and in the USA, the public demands more social responsible behavior from the companies, but that is not so much a driver

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One other thought I have is regarding the GRI. I just looked at last year's total amount of publications and I was surprised that Hungary had 30 publications and Romania was relatively high for the region, with six publications. That compares to Slovakia that had 3 or 4 and to Czech Republic that had none. And looking at Hungary having so many, the feeling I had is that the consulting company played quite a role in terms of trying to getting business for itself and getting companies to actually publish the GRI reports. Vodafone was the first company that published its report in Hungary and it had an important role in educating and trying to create business for itself and then, because of the competition, other companies joined them.

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In Romania, CSR is often associated to PR, in a depreciating way, referring to CSR implemented just for image purposes. Do you think there should be a certain link between CSR and PR? And, if so, from what point of view should these two be connected?

That's a really interesting question! One of the things I try to cover with my students when I introduce the subject, it is this traditional argument that there is a tendency that companies misuse CSR for greenwashing purposes and that it's too much of a PR exercise. And if you go to Ernst&Young's site in Germany, for instance, it's the pure in risk management and reputation management. Because of that you have the critics which are much more environmentally and socially motivated. My argument is that it doesn't always have to be "either" or "or". I think CSR should, if it's well implemented, actually benefit PR. If you look at the European Union's definition of CSR, it's a business strategy and a business only exists if at the end of the day it's going to make money. So, the company should benefit, but also the community and the environment should benefit. So, if I am looking at that in terms of PR, PR should be a component.

Things get a little bit questionable if the PR budget exceeds or gets very close to the CSR budget. In the USA for example, companies like GAP, Apple, American Express and Motorola launched the Product Red Campaign for certain product items where certain percentage of the sales would be used for AIDS research. But in the first year, the money raised for research purposes was \$18 million, but they spent US\$ 100million on advertising.

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Have you noticed any difference between the fields CSR in which companies prefer to invest in Eastern Europe and the ones in which companies invest in the Western part of the world?

In this region we have more rudimentary CSR programs. It's more about donating and there is less of a clear linkage between a specific business strategy and a specific CSR program.

I don't want to say that one is better than the other, but if you go to countries where CSR has evolved over the years you find a more clear linkage between a specific CSR program and a specific business strategy. What's also complicated in Western Europe is that many CSR programs tend to often be linked to basic complaints of legislation. So, it gets a little blurred. The question is: What is CSR? Is it a legal requirement?

But, in general, in the USA, where you have a total absence of a legal framework, companies like Starbucks or GAP (because they have had a few difficult periods) have much closer lined CSR strategies to the business activity. So you see more of a strategic planning behind a CSR program, while in Central-Eastern Europe it tends to be more of a philanthropic exercise.

In Romania, there are more of more campaigns of informing people about sustainability and about what they could do concerning this issue, but there are still some disorders (for example, we are told that it is important to buy recyclable bags, but almost nobody knows that those bags are not usually recycled, because the process of doing it is very complex). Are these issues specific to the Romanian market or are they common for transition economies?

I think it's common for the region. It's less knowledge available and less concern regarding to certain matters of sustainability. I think economic factors exceed environmental concern here. And there is less effort by the government to educate the population about certain matters related to environmental sustainability. So, there are two things: a lack of knowledge and a lack of interest.

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years international and multi-stakeholder experience advising companies, government agencies and NGOs on implementing and managing socially and environmentally responsible strategies. He is lecturing CSR at various US- and UK-accredited Business Schools in Budapest, Prague and Bucharest and is writing a guide book to help Managers in CEE strategically integrate CSR.

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