

Scris de Jens Trummer  
Vineri, 06 August 2010 07:26

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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 businesses, governments and civil society should cooperate.

**How well do you think CSR practices in Eastern European countries manage to meet the interests of businesses, governments and civil society?**

First of all, Government has the least requirements in terms of CSR right now. I did a little bit of a review on a few countries and I found that, besides the UN Global Compact, very little has been done to promote the concept of CSR being implemented in the companies.

In terms of civil society, I know in Hungary that there are a few NGOs that are very active in this sector. For example, KÖVET, an environmental NGO, is very active. They have a large network of corporations and they are really trying to promote sustainability within the companies. I don't know the Romania situation, but I know in Slovakia and Czech Republic there are a few business networks that evolve around the concept of CSR. So, I think it depends upon the country, but NGOs are definitely a driving force.

In terms of business sector, I think the main driver there are multinational companies whose headquarters require their regional branches to implement their CSR strategies and programs. This also depends on the company, but I know, for instance, Nestle Hungary has less flexibility in terms of identifying their issues and developing a specific a country CSR strategy. I think it's much more harmonized by their headquarters in Switzerland. It's a global company that have been faced with different issues for many years and it has a very strong corporate culture now.

In terms of national companies, in Hungary I have not come across to any national company that has a CSR program and I assume it might be similar to other Eastern European countries.

Then, CSOP Bank in Czech Republic was told by the Belgium headquarters to start a CSR strategy and it has evolved very well. They come up with interesting programs that very clearly complement the business activity. So, the companies pretty much have their own flexibility. But, again, the initiative comes from their headquarters. In terms of national companies, in Hungary I have not come across to any national company that has a CSR program and I assume it might be similar to other Eastern European countries.

**Do you think the NGOs role is well defined in Eastern European countries? Are they a CSR watchdog or do they mainly strive to survive and get financing?**

The NGO sector in Central Europe suffers from a not very good reputation, in terms of being somehow linked to personal motivations and interests and sometimes even to laundry money.

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In Hungary you have an incredible amount of NGOs and I think only less than 10% of them might actually be really benefiting the larger society. And fewer are fantastic. In general, the NGO sector does have a bit of reputation issue.

I have not come across to any real watchdog among NGOs.

I know, for example The Business Leaders Forum in Slovakia and there is a similar one in Czech Republic founded by Prince Charles and his foundation and their core mission is to promote sustainability and sustainable behavior. And they are, I wouldn't say a watchdog, but more of a promoter. It's the same thing with KÖVET, the Hungarian NGO I mentioned earlier. They rely on encouraging companies to participate in their network. So, they see that they have more benefits in trying to work with companies and not trying to act as a watchdog and sort of critic the company. And they also provide rewards for companies that have reduced their environmental impacts at the end of the year. I have not come across to any real watchdog among NGOs.

The ones that I know and that I think are productive and have a good reputation are mostly those that are trying to promote the concept of CSR. There are a few of really good organizations.

The Business Leaders Forum is working with CSR Europe and they've been implementing the CSR markets where many companies can communicate about what they do in terms of CSR. This is open to the public and it's meant to educate the public. The Business Leaders Forum also has awards for different companies. The indicators that they use are not very scientific, but it is still a good initiative to promote the concept.

### **And what about Western Europe and the USA?**

In terms of Government, the main difference between Western Europe and the USA is that in the USA you have less of a legal framework and I think that's why the concept of CSR has evolved in the USA. Companies saw the opportunity to pick up that absence of social and environmental legislation.

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**Jens Trummer** is a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) focused consultant with over 12 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. Interview by Rebeca Pop, Forum for International Communications

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