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CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARDS SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION

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Abstract

As the future leaders of business organizations, changing the attitudes of university students on sustainability, social responsibility, and ethical issues is important for achieving the principles of sustainable development through corporate world. Although most business schools have initiated some courses on these critical issues, changing attitudes and behaviour of young generations requires much more attention than it has received up till now. The purpose of current study is to analyse whether a good combination of theory and practice on sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) education within an intensive programme can enhance the students' socially responsible consumption pattern. Following a twofold methodology with using the quantitative and qualitative analysis, a longitudinal survey was conducted on a sample of international students, who attended to Erasmus-Intensive Programme (IP) projects. The analysis on the various dimensions of socially responsible consumption indicated that there was a statistically significant change over the respondents' consumer support for socially responsible activities to internal, external, and environmental stakeholders. Moreover, the students' definition of CSR was also changed after the IP course. The result of content analysis shows their increased awareness on the importance of social stakeholders and deepened understanding on the concepts of

CSR and corporate sustainability. Despite this attitude and conceptual changes, the two-week IP programme cannot create a significant behavioural change and the respondents' level of personal involvement in socially responsible activities and traditional consumption patterns remained the same.

Keywords: social responsibility, socially responsible consumption, students, university education, Erasmus/Intensive Programme.

Introduction

Depending on the increasing number of social and environmental problems, there has been a growing attention on how our current education systems can adopt issues on ethics (Wankel and Stachowicz-Stanusch, 2012), sustainability (Huang and Wang, 2012; Wu et al., 2010), and social responsibility (Matten and Moon, 2004). Based on a 'business case' approach for sustainability (Schaltegger, 2008; Salzmann et al., 2005) and corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Carroll and Shabana, 2010; Weber, 2008), most business organizations start to recognize the strategic importance of involving in these issues to obtain long-term competitive advantage (Porter and Kramer, 2006). On the other side, students have also increasing attention to these issues particularly in the top business schools (Christensen et al., 2007). According to Aspen Institute's Student Attitudes Survey (2008), business school students "more readily make the connection between good corporate citizenship and a stronger, healthier community" and there has been a growing interest on the social responsibility of companies in the classroom from 2002 to 2007.

Today, business schools started to become the key providers of CSR skills to students, practitioners, and industries (Matten and Moon, 2004) in order to meet this twofold demand of companies and students. Many of them start to adopt courses related with sustainability, CSR, and ethics. Moreover, they are ranked based on their required and elective courses and scientific researches on social and environmental impact (The Aspen Institute, Beyond Grey Pinstripes, 2013). Despite these positive developments and the existence of some best practices, there are still some problems on our current education system. For instance, the studies showed that there is a significant variability among universities (Huang and Wang, 2012; Matten and Moon, 2004; Moon and Orlitzky, 2011), even

if they are accredited by the same body (Christensen et al. 2007; Wu et al. 2010). Therefore, while some business schools show a comprehensive attention to their CSR education, some others provide only a single course and do nothing more. For instance, in their study on CSR education in Spain, Setó-Pamies, Domingo-Vernis, and Rabassa-Figueras (2011) stated that "although at first sight our findings may seem promising, a more detailed analysis shows that few universities include stand-alone CSR subjects and that although many universities have embedded CSR subjects, the CSR content is by no means fully developed".

However, the urgency of social and environmental problems and the increasing number of frauds and unethical conducts in business community require developing a more integrated approach and providing more intensive curriculums in order to make a real change over young people. The purpose of current study is to measure the effectiveness of such intensive programmes on CSR and sustainability in terms of creating a change in the students' socially responsible consumption patterns. The study was conducted on the context of two Erasmus Intensive Projects (IPs), which provided a good combination of theory and practice on sustainability and CSR with the support of European Commission (EC). Following a longitudinal approach on a sample of 54 students from various European countries, the attitudes of students on socially responsible consumption were measured in the beginning and at the end of IPs. The findings of the survey revealed that the respondents' consumer support for CSR to internal, external, and environmental stakeholders have significantly changed over the education period, whereas their personal involvement on CSR and traditional buying behaviour remained the same. This result is important to show that changing attitudes and behaviours on CSR is a longstanding journey in which the universities should make more efforts to provide a contemporary understanding of CSR to future business leaders.

Integrating Social Responsibility into Current Education System

As one of the most popular concepts of business literature, CSR can be defined in many ways (Dahlsrud, 2006). According to a well-known definition, "the social responsibility of business encompasses the economic,

legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time" (Carroll, 1979: 500). In a broader sense, CSR can be placed in the context of sustainable development. For instance, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) defined it as "…the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large" (WBCSD, 1999). Similarly, EC defines CSR as "the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society" and business organizations "should have in place a process to integrate social, environmental, ethical human rights and consumer concerns into their business operations and core strategy in close collaboration with their stakeholders" in order to meet their responsibilities to various stakeholders (CEC, 2011).

Although CSR and sustainability have been among the most important issues, there are significant variances among the curriculum of universities around the world. For instance, the study of Matten and Moon (2004), which was conducted to explore CSR education on a sample of 65 European Universities, suggested that "there is a highly diverse understanding, contextualisation and packaging of CSR teaching" around Europe. In a more recent study, which was conducted a web-based content analysis on the accredited universities around Europe and America, it was found that while European curricula has an elective-oriented approach and focused more on graduate level, American business schools provide compulsory sustainability related courses on undergraduate level (Wu et al., 2010). On the other hand, the study of Huang and Wang (2012) tried to investigate the differences of education approaches on sustainability between top-ranked Chinese and American business schools. Based on an elaborate analysis of curriculum, the authors found that there is a significant difference in their curriculum designs depending on the differences in local institutional settings and the interpretations of sustainability.

Although this diversity on the field can provoke different approaches on CSR education, it might inhibit to achieve a common understanding on the overarching principles of sustainable development and CSR. It is clear that the current education system in most universities starts to increase the level of awareness and support to sustainability and CSR activities, however, it might short fall in transforming the obtained infor-

mation into a more durable attitude change. In order to create a positive attitude change, there is a need to design better curriculum of CSR education, which can combine different dimensions of the issue with integrating different teaching methods. It can be noticed that depending on the growing body of literature, CSR has become a subfield of business education and expanded with many theoretical approaches and perspectives (Garriga and Mele, 2004). Therefore, a usual way of teaching CSR can be providing this theoretical background to the students. However, in addition to the class-based theoretical knowledge, sustainability and CSR can be taught with more innovative ways like following a model for transformative learning (Moore, 2005), deep learning (Warburton, 2003), simulation-based learning (Moratis, Hoff, and Reul, 2006) etc. In addition to these creative methods, the universities can integrate the practice of CSR into their curriculum. For instance, the study of Matten and Moon (2004), which was conducted to explore CSR education on a sample of 65 European Universities, revealed that "the CSR teaching curricula are heavily influenced by practice" through inviting practitioner speakers from business or non-governmental sectors.

About the impact of sustainability, CSR, and ethical oriented education programmes, there are relatively few studies. For instance, in their study, Cetindamar and Hopkins (2008) mentioned the positive impacts of civic involvement projects (CIPs), as a good example of learning by doing system, to make students more 'responsible for the society and the world in which they are living'. On the other hand, the study of Balotsky and Steingard (2005) on a sample of 195 students also indicated that business ethics education can increase students' ethical awareness, shift attitudes about ethics, and foster positive ethical behaviour at general. The exploratory study of Sobczak, Debucquet, and Havard (2006) on the impact of CSR education on students and young managers showed that the academic institution and its culture can also affect the respondents' attitudes towards CSR conceptions and tools.

In sum, the literature suggests that a good combination of theory and practice through following innovative ways can also enhance students' level of CSR commitment. Based on the overall discussion on the impact of CSR education and depending on the success of a well-designed curriculum on sustainability and CSR, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

Hypothesis: An intensive CSR and sustainability education programme can positively affect a university student's (1) consumer support for CSR to internal stakeholders, (2) consumer support for CSR to external stakeholders, (3) consumer support for CSR to natural environment, (4) personal social responsibility involvement, and (5) traditional buying behaviour.

Methodology

Survey Background and Sample

In order to develop a common curriculum among European Universities, two Erasmus-Intensive Programme (IP) Projects were organized in Turkey, with the support of European Commission. An IP is "a short programme of study which brings together students and teaching staff from higher education institutions of at least three participating countries" to the aims of 'encouraging efficient and multinational teaching of specialist topics', 'enabling students and teachers to work together in multinational groups and so benefit from special learning and teaching conditions not available in a single institution', and to gain new perspectives on the topic being studied', and 'allowing members of the teaching staff to exchange views on teaching content and new curricula approaches and to test teaching methods in an international classroom environment' (Erasmus Intensive Programmes, 2013).

Depending on this overall purpose, the IPs projects mentioned in the current study aim to create a common curriculum among partner universities around Europe. The main theme in the first IP was social responsibility and 24 students from 12 European Universities were attended to programme (Socresedu, 2013). The second IP focused on green management applications particularly on logistics sector and 30 students from 6 partner universities participated (Greenlog, 2013). According to the IP schedule within two weeks, 54 students took various courses regarding sustainability, social responsibility, and ethics etc. During this period of time, both groups of students attended to both class-based learning activities with following different learning methods and real-life business applications. In almost each course, each student team was assigned an innovative project on what they theoretically learned during the session and then they presented their outcomes to others for discussion.

Besides these, best practices among Turkish companies, including Turkcell and Pınar, were shared with students through the invited speakers and some field trips were organized to show them what actually a business organization do about sustainability. Therefore, as the name implies itself, these IPs tried to provide a very 'intensive' programme on sustainability, CSR, and related topics with following innovative ways. The quality of both IPs was measured through a brief questionnaire and all participants provided very satisfactorily results on overall programmes.

Scales

The scales used in the survey were adapted from the Socially Responsible Purchase and Disposal (SRPD) scale of Webb, Mohr, and Harris (2008). Although in the original study, the scale was emerged in three dimensions as 'purchasing based on firms' corporate social responsibility performance', 'recycling', and 'avoidance and use reduction of products based on their environmental impact', we took the related items for each dimension of current study. In doing so, five separate scales were obtained to measure the consumer support for CSR to internal stakeholders (SCSRI), consumer support for CSR to external stakeholders (SCSRE), consumer support for CSR to natural environment (SCSRN), traditional buying behaviour (TBB), and personal social responsibility involvement (PSRI) (Appendix). It can be noticed that first three scales were used to measure whether the respondents support a company's involvement into socially responsible activities to internal, external, and environmental stakeholders as a consumer. However, the last two scales were used to measure whether they are actually involved into social responsibility activities and follow a traditional consumption pattern when making a buying decision. Therefore, despite first three scales measured their attitudes to socially responsible consumption, the latter two focused on the tendency to a behavioural change to become a socially responsible consumer.

Analysis

The collected data were analysed through SPSS 20. According to the re-

sults, more than the half of respondents were female (51.9 percent) and mean value of age was 22.55. The students were enrolled in different majors from social and natural sciences. They were all undergraduate students; 13 percent of them were freshman, 18.5 percent of them were sophomore, 33.5 percent of them were junior, and 35.2% of them were senior students.

In order to compare the results at the beginning and end of IP project, paired sample t test was performed to the collected data. Table 1 shows the mean values and correlations of each pair. It can be noticed that mean values of SCSRI, SCSRE, and SCSRN have changed after IP project, whereas there are very slight changes in the last two pairs. All correlation values in each pair are significant at 0.01 level.

Tab. 1. Paired Samples Statistics and Correlations

Pairs		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Cor.	Sig.
Pair 1	1.SCSRI	3.4583	.63131	.08755	.417	.002
	2.SCSRI	3.6865	.63891	.08860		
Pair 2	1.SCSRE	3.4327	.58259	.08079	.471	.000
	2.SCSRE	3.7681	.56656	.07857		
Pair 3	1.SCSRN	3.8183	.82860	.11491	.527	.000
	2.SCSRN	4.0365	.72627	.10071		
Pair 4	1.TBB	2.8333	.72197	.10012	.619	.000
	2.TBB	2.8381	.70041	.09713		
Pair 5	1.PSRI	3.9359	.78115	.10833	.635	.000
	2.PSRI	4.0833	.69192	.09595		

Note. SCSRI = the consumer support for CSR to internal stakeholders; SCSRE = consumer support for CSR to external stakeholders; SCSRN =consumer support for CSR to natural environment; TBB=traditional buying behaviour; PSRI=personal social responsibility involvement.

Table 2 presents the result for hypothesis testing. It can be seen that the first three pairs are statistically significant at 0.05 level and this result support the hypotheses regarding with (1) consumer support for CSR to internal stakeholders, (2) consumer support for CSR to external stakeholders, (3) consumer support for CSR to natural environment. However, there are no statistically significant changes over the last two pairs. Therefore, the results support the hypothesis that an intensive CSR and sustainabili-

ty education programme can positively affect a students' support for CSR to internal, external, and natural environment; however, does not support the positive affect on their (4) personal social responsibility involvement and (5) traditional buying behaviour.

Tab. 2. Paired Samples T-Test

Pairs		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	Sig.
Pair 1	1.SCSRI – 2.SCSRI	-.22821	.68556	.09507	-2.400	.020
Pair 2	1.SCSRE – 2.SCSRE	-.33539	.59140	.08201	-4.090	.000
Pair 3	1.SCSRN – 2.SCSRN	-.21827	.76139	.10559	-2.067	.044
Pair 4	1.TBB – 2.TBB	-.00481	.62086	.08610	-.056	.956
Pair 5	1.PCSRI – 2.PCSRI	-.14744	.63457	.08800	-1.675	.100

Note. SCSRI = the consumer support for CSR to internal stakeholders; SCSRE = consumer support for CSR to external stakeholders; SCSRN =consumer support for CSR to natural environment; TBB=traditional buying behaviour; PSRI=personal social responsibility involvement.

Content Analysis

In the study, a content analysis was conducted to reveal the common characteristics of respondents' CSR perceptions and compare the definitions before and after the IP programme. According to Berelson (1952: 13), "content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content". Kaplan (1943:1) also stated that "the content analyst aims at a quantitative classification of a given body of content, in terms of a system of categories devised to yield data relevant to specific hypotheses concerning that content". Following this methodology, a single set of categories was identified from the respondents' CSR definitions to find some repeated pattern and terminology. In the current study, the content analysis is conducted based on the requirement of what is presented as a matter of surface meaning. Although this method is characterised by its mechanistic approach and

insensitive structure to the context or nuances of meaning, it can ensure the objectivity of results. According to Holsti (1969), objectivity stipulates that each step in the research process must be carried out on the basis of explicitly formulated rules and procedures. With objectivity, decisions are guided by an "explicit set of rules that minimize the possibility that the findings reflect the analyst's subjective predispositions rather than the content of the documents under analysis" (Holsti, 1969: 3-4).

Table 3 presents the results of analysis. The definitions of 54 students were categorised into 4 dimensions as social contribution oriented definitions, company responsibilities oriented definitions, social projects and activities oriented definitions, other definitions.

It can be seen in Table 3 that while majority of respondents explained CSR as a company responsibility in the beginning, the composition has changed after the education. The company responsibilities oriented definitions were decreased slightly from 19 to 16, but the way they expose the company involvement clearly shows the stakeholder perspective which emphasized by students. On the other hand, there is an increase in the social contribution oriented definitions, which mostly indicate the contribution of a company to its external stakeholders and society at large. This finding is in line with H2, which suggests the consumer support for CSR to external stakeholders; during the education process, the respondents adopted the importance of CSR for society and in the solutions of social problems.

Although the third dimension of definitions, which explains CSR as social project, decreased from 18 to 11, it has been sophisticated after the IP course. After the intensive programme, the students adopted a holistic perspective of CSR and did not degrade it solely environmental and educational projects of the company. Another important finding reveals the fact that after the IP course students start to define CSR more concrete way. The last category reflected these varied, individual and sophisticated definitions and it also increased from 5 to 9. In sum, the content analysis support the previous findings with showing the increased awareness and broadening perspective of students after the IP programme.

Tab. 3. Analysis of CSR Definitions

Dimensions of CSR Definition	Before the IP			After the IP		
	N	%	Example Statements	N	%	Example Statements
Social contribution oriented definitions	12	22	Serve community, help people, care people, contribute others, solve problems, social help, mission to help people, help people with their needs, taking into consideration of social problems etc.	18	33	Strategy of company contribution, people and communities for helping, social engagement of companies, company politics for supporting society, form of projects implemented by companies to help community and world, companies working with stakeholders for help, care about main societal problems by companies, all activities to help people, work together for the benefit of the society, etc.
Company responsibilities oriented definitions	19	35	Company responsibilities, company contributions, sensitivity of companies, collaborate for common social goals, operate and manufacture in a mutual beneficial way, approach of company care about the operating field, active operations and corporate policy, etc.	16	29	Company approach, investment and involvement efforts in community, embrace responsibility for company actions, company help for development of the country, social business priorities, a responsibility of company to take into account social, environmental and ethical aspects of life, duty of individual and organisation, ethical ideology and theory, corporate self-regulation mechanism in business, etc.
Social projects, activities oriented definitions	18	33	Project and campaigns, social activities of big companies, environment protection actions, concern and active dealing of environmental problems caused by companies, firms communicate with each other to the protection of the environment, aware of environmental problems and solve them, care about environment, institutional or singular persons involved ideas and practices to change some social problems etc.	11	20	Engagement of social projects, company projects, company actions to support people and environment, sensitivity of companies on environment, employees, make donations, CSR projects for 3Ps, everything which connected companies and environment, to take care of everything (environment, employee, consumer), sensitivity of company to society and environment, etc.
Other definitions	5	9	Care about employee issues, different form of marketing, 3P, being good corporate citizen, sustainable way of doing business, do for workers and society, Being good corporate citizen in the society as a company, university, a good thing, important, corporate self-regulation integrated into a business model etc.	9	16	Programme to spread out of knowledge, many definitions exist, take care the humanity, develop employee conditions, 3P, maintain a balance between economy and ecosystem, activity to develop employees, many definitions exist, it is a law to be fair to every group and meet the needs of them, wellbeing of society, do not exist exact definition common is CSR is for 3Ps idea, etc.
Total	**54**	**100**		**54**	**100**	

Conclusion

The result of current study indicated that the respondents' support to CSR to internal, external, and environmental stakeholders significantly changed after they were enrolled in IP projects. As the indicators of supporting socially responsible activities in business organization, these variables can pave the way to create more socially responsible managers in the future. However, there were no significant changes over their personal social responsibility involvement and traditional buying behaviour, which can be seen as the indicators of tendency to become more responsible consumers. It means that, after the education programmes, although the respondents' attitudes on socially responsible consumption were changed, their behavioural involvement remained the same. Although the IPs provided a good combination of theory and practice with following innovative ways, the results showed that it can take more than two weeks to create a tendency of behavioural change to become a more socially responsible consumer.

On the other hand, the content analysis of definitions shows that before the IP course the definitions are based on simple wording and ill-informed structure. After the IP programme, the students managed to construct more detailed and jargon laden definition with examples, students became aware the importance of all stakeholder in the CSR process and they develop well-informed and balanced knowledge about CSR. However, although the information that was obtained throughout the education process develops their perception regarding with the CSR, but it cannot easily change their judgements in a short term.

Based on these results, it can be recommended that both the educators and university leaders should devote more time and effort to make a real change with finding more creative ways of conveying their ideas to young generations. It can be done with following more practice-oriented and learning-when-doing activities, rather than providing solely the theoretical framework. More importantly, it might be needed to increase the pervasiveness of socially responsible consumption pattern over the whole curriculum, instead of giving this notion within the boundaries of a single course.

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Appendix: The scales used in the survey [Adapted from the Socially Responsible Purchase and Disposal (SRPD) scale of Webb, Mohr, and Harris (2008).

Consumer support for CSR to internal stakeholders
I try to buy from companies that help the needy.
I try to buy from companies that hire people with disabilities.
I avoid buying products or services from companies that discriminate against minorities.
I avoid buying products made using child labour.
I avoid buying products or services from companies that discriminate against women.
When I am shopping, I try to buy from companies that are working to improve conditions for employees in their factories.
I make an effort to buy products and services from companies that pay all of their employees a living wage.
Consumer support for CSR to external stakeholders
When given a chance to switch to a retailer that supports local schools, I take it.
I try to buy from companies that make donations to medical research.
I make an effort to buy from companies that sponsor food drives.
When given a chance to switch to a brand that gives back to the community, I take it.
When given a chance, I switch to brands where a portion of the price is donated to charity.
I try to buy from companies that support victims of natural disasters.
Consumer support for CSR to environmental stakeholders
I avoid buying from companies that harm endangered plants or animals.

I avoid using products that pollute the air.
I avoid buying products that pollute the water.
I make an effort to avoid products or services that cause environmental damage.
I avoid buying products that are made from endangered animals.
Personal Social Responsibility Involvement
I try to recycle all materials that I consumed (like plastic containers, magazines, aluminium cans, etc.)
Whenever possible, I walk, ride a bike, car pool, or use public transportation to help reduce air pollution.
I limit my use of energy such as electricity or natural gas to reduce my impact on the environment.
Traditional Buying Behaviour
When I am shopping, I buy the lowest priced product regardless of the working conditions in the factory.
I buy the highest quality product, regardless of its impact on the environment.
When I am shopping, I buy the highest quality product regardless of the working conditions in the factory.
I buy the lowest priced product, regardless of its impact on the environment.

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CONTENT

Introduction **5**

Corporate Social Responsibility in Poland: is there a place for value creation? – Adriana Paliwoda-Matiolańska **7**

The Role of CSR Guidelines in Labour Conditions of Subcontracting Processes within the Context of a New Institutional Perspective – Hedda Ofoole Mensah **29**

Educating for ethical decision making: the contributions of Neuroethics – Jose-Félix Lozano **49**

CSR, trust and the employer brand – Silke Bustamante **71**

Changing Attitudes towards Socially Responsible Consumption – Duygu Turker, Huriye Toker and Ceren Altuntas **91**

Is it worth to invest in CSR? The relationship between CSR and store image in retailing – Magdalena Stefańska and Tomasz Wanat **109**

Revisiting *Gasland*: Fracking The Earth, Fracking Communities – Emmanuelle Jobidon and Emmanuel Raufflet **127**

The Strategic Approach of CSR for The Banking System in Romania – Diana Corina Gligor-Cimpoieru and Valentin Partenie Munteanu **151**

Inclusion a company to responsible index in Poland – market reaction – Janusz Reichel, Agata Rudnicka, Błażej Socha, Dariusz Urban and Łukasz Florczak **169**

Social media and CSR development in sport organisations – Paweł Kuźbik **191**

Authors of the chapters **215**

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