GENERAL ASPECTS ON THE EMERGENCE OF CSR PRACTICE AROUND THE WORLD

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ABSTRACT: On every continent, corporate social responsibility (CSR) is being practiced in a historical manner for several decades. While in some regions philanthropic activities have been taking place even before using the concept of CSR, in other areas this concept has become familiar at a later date as it has appeared and developed while being brought mostly by multinational operating in the area. The aim of this paper is to briefly draw some elements related to the emergence of CSR practices on different continents.

KEY WORDS: corporate social responsibility, emergence, socially responsible company

1. INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices have been adopted in a different way in different corners of the world. On every continent, CSR is being practiced in a historical manner for several decades. While in some regions philanthropic activities have been taking place even before using the concept of CSR, in other areas this concept has become familiar later as it has appeared and developed while being brought mostly by multinational operating in the area. In the following sections, I will briefly draw some lines on the emergence of CSR practice in different corners of the world.

2. EUROPE

The European Union countries are famous for the dramatic consequences for the profits race within the context of globalisation: mad cow crisis, financial scandals, and de-localisation. These events have generated discussions on the need of an acceptable framework for this race.

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Several actors grouped their responses in a new domain of the business world: corporate social responsibility. This new dynamic emerged beyond the fundamental economic bases: legal framework and agreements between social partners.

As conceptual and practical framework in Europe, CSR emerged from two streams: the historic paternalist view of large enterprises from the 19th century and the influence of the Anglo-Saxon view on companies in the 80s.

On every continent, CSR is being practiced in a historical manner for several decades. In its new forms, CSR appeared in the USA thirty years ago. Then it spread out in Europe where it has been improved. The large corporations have incorporated CSR into their production units in different corners of the world.

The new forms of CSR are characterized by the vision the company has about itself. Firstly, it is about the negative effects of this process on society; secondly, it is about how it can actively contribute to societal welfare and not necessarily only to its personnel. In its later stage, CSR develops creativity which goes beyond the traditional charitable actions.

3. ASIA

Even though the concept is relatively new in Asia, the relationship between companies and society has always been an important facet of the social structures. In some regions, the Asian countries have always had companies whose activities towards society were based on religion. The CSR stake and concept as it is understood now has appeared in the 90s.

In Asia, this process has emerged along with the new companies coming from the west and establishing production units on the continent. The CSR movement has also been accompanied by the civil society actions encouraging an increase in demand and hope for social responsibility from companies. This has proved to act as a stimulus also for the Asian companies – especially those willing to do trade with the west – in order to build an image of a socially responsible company.

It is also important to understand the industrial model in Asia. Contrary to the western companies where these play an important role in the industry, in Asia, the major players have an important stake in economy.

4. AFRICA

When the role of the large multinationals increased in the 60s, norms and quality became non-imperative differential criteria and very useful ones for the internal dynamics of companies. Several initiatives have been taken to an international level in order to introduce an adequate institutional framework with the aim to facilitate the standardization and certification process. Even though the veritable endogenous initiatives are rare in Africa, it is important to acknowledge that, in favour of globalization and different international cooperation agreements, the operational judicial dispositions have been translated into the promotion of certain norms and their harmonization within the process of regional integration.
Therefore, the ISO 9000 norms on quality, ISO 14000 on environment, HACCP on hygiene and the norms on social responsibility are part of the new generation for the economic actors (SA 8000).

All the functions of a company are taken into consideration and contribute at their level to the global policy on social responsibility. Besides the importance of this issue, these are not enough approached on the African continent compared to the Nordic countries. One of the main reasons would be that Africa is practically absent from the international trade and it has very few large companies operating.

5. LATIN AMERICA

The evolution of the concept from the enterprise philanthropy to social responsibility is worth looking at. If at the beginning it was focused on ethical investment, it soon became a strategic approach where the last step incorporated the ethics issue in a company.

The theoretical way of thinking, the evaluations and promotion of CSR practices are being considered in every Latin American country. The progress on CR related issues is more advanced in countries with important industrial development and with a significant number of large companies as part of the economy. The CSR concept has spread around the region quickly. This has been adopted by the national and international companies from every country. Many of them have already had philanthropic activities before adopting CSR related initiatives.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The CSR concept is differently understood in companies depending on different contexts in different regions of the world. The institutional context has an important role to play in developing the CSR practice. Also, the relational contexts among different agents (public powers, enterprises, syndicates, NGOs) differ across continents and regions.

In less developed socio-economic spaces, where even though the ecological situation is less favourable, the environmental issue related to CSR goes beyond the need to implement high social standards.

Large transnational companies from the Nordic area tended to transpose their CSR model towards east and south but this does not necessarily meet the local needs of the place where it is implemented. Norms, definitions and concepts need to be adapted to the social and economic situation of the region or continent.

Some companies implement CSR practices by themselves, others get together into partnerships with different actors interested in organisational behaviour. Other stakeholders can be NGOs, syndicates, shareholders organisations, consumers associations, or public bodies and local governmental agencies.

The CSR dynamics is rather qualitative at a global scale, companies are willing to take CSR initiatives on a voluntarily basis and adapted to the local situation; a large number of stakeholders are aiming at a uniform standards framework which would allow a better estimation of the companies’ CSR behaviour and even regulations that
would allow a better sanctioning of certain trans-nationals when required as acting outside their established territories.

REFERENCES:


