

Chapter 10

CSR in the Spotlight: Location and Gender as Drivers of Its Development

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ABSTRACT

This study has as its aim to analyze the existence of a possible theoretical relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR) development and two factors, namely business location and managers' gender. The industrial district (ID) theory serves as the basis to demonstrate the possible influence of location on this type of environment with an improved implementation of social practices. At the same time, the authors will also consider the possible influence of internationalization within the cluster on CSR development since globalization itself can further favor the implementation of CSR practices. The study additionally examines the role that the variable 'directors' gender', and more precisely, women directors, can play as a key factor in the development of such practices. The implications that the concurrence of these factors might have, along with the future lines of research that would derive therefrom, will finally be considered.

INTRODUCTION

The current business environment is facing what could be referred to as *the age of social demand*, where the concern for CSR has gone from simply being an option to becoming a must for business survival. In fact, some authors consider that CSR has become a modern corporate mantra (Sarkar and Searcy, 2016). The emergence of present-day historical landmarks such as *the Climate Emergency Statement* by

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the European Parliament on November 28, 2019, whereby the European commitment to neutralize all of its greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 was expressed, casts serious doubts on many of the practices implemented by companies over the last few decades. Despite their great relevance, environmental problems are not the only ones that need to be solved within the scope of CSR. Thus, authors such as Husted (2015) referred to the paradoxical fact that although the infrastructure available in the current economic reality is sufficiently developed to carry out CSR practices, companies make fewer efforts.

It is evident that in the period from the first references to caring for social issues to the most current visions, in addition to not bearing fruit, this concept is not being efficiently implemented. This can be seen in the Taylorist practices which are still implemented in different types of businesses and in the unsuccessful efforts of various national and supranational organizations to achieve what they began to promote centuries ago. Thus, from the elaboration of the well-known *UN Global Compact* (1999) to the most current global plans such as the *Sustainable Development Goals* approved in 2015 by the United Nations, efforts continue to be made not only to achieve stable fundamental human rights principles but also to foster initiatives aimed at developing environmental and social responsibility through a wide range of objectives. In spite of these efforts and although some progress has already been made, quite a few of these principles remain unfulfilled, both in developing countries (which is one of the main goals that should be addressed) and in many of the countries considered to be developed. For this reason, numerous researchers have focused their lines of research on analyzing factors that can reduce the difficulties faced by companies in the development and effective implementation of CSR practices.

In this regard there are 2 issues that still need a more in-depth examination. Firstly, the role played by location in CSR (Lund-Thomsen and Pillay, 2012; Husted et al., 2016). More specifically, this chapter looks at how Industrial Districts (IDs), as concrete environments in which companies can choose to locate, can stimulate the development of CSR practices through the well-known *district effect*, amongst many other factors that will be analyzed. This line of research is of great contemporary interest (Battaglia et al., 2010; Von Weltzien Høivik and Shankar, 2011; Testa et al., 2012; Santos, 2014; Horzela, 2019). We will also consider the possible influence of internationalization within the cluster on CSR development since, according to many current researchers (Lund-Thomsen and Pillay 2012; Attig et al., 2016; Zyglidopoulos et al., 2016), globalization itself can further favor the implementation of CSR practices and this information, along with the benefits gained from an ID, could be of great importance to managers and business studies students as it can guide them towards the best locations in which to develop their CSR strategies.

Secondly, the influence of gender on CSR practices is another interesting line of research. Thus, diversity in the boardroom can be considered a key variable, because it will impact on board decisions (Cabeza-García, 2018). One could say that a company's board of directors, as an important component of corporate governance, is expected to play a fundamental role in CSR decisions (Kruger 2009). Concretely, the analysis of factors that lead boards with more women members to adopt more CSR practices than male dominated boards (Landry et al., 2016; Alonso-Almedia et al., 2017; Rajasekar and Deepa, 2017; Cabeza-García et al., 2018; Pucheta-Martínez et al., 2018; Cullinan et al., 2019) is an emerging line of research and thus constitutes the second element analyzed in this chapter.

Therefore, a combined model is proposed which allows us to harness two types of benefits. Firstly, the advantages that an ID can bring to CSR development, while simultaneously understanding that IDs can operate globally, and that an international presence would make it easier to implement CSR. Secondly, an understanding of the factors that show how women can facilitate the development of CSR practices.

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