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Public Relations and Corporate Social Responsibility: Theory and Social Action

- Abstract of the PhD thesis -

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Key words: social corporate responsibility (CSR), public relations (PR), company, PR campaign, CSR campaign

Corporate social responsibility and public relations are nowadays reference points in the communicational and image activity of companies within the context of communities where they operate. Both concepts refer, each in its own representative way, to the way in which organizations choose to communicate with the categories of public involved in their activity. While public relations propose to build and maintain a long term positive image, reputation and popularity of the company, so that all categories of public have a most transparent and clear vision of the company and its activity, corporate social responsibility intends to meet various social problems facing the communities where the company operates in order to help improve their quality of life. Corporate social responsibility was a phenomenon that easily spread in developed countries because its necessity was understood both by the companies initiating such programs and by the beneficiary communities, considering that a company has the duty to support the community, to be its “good citizen” and neighbor. Naturally, there were skeptics who claimed that this type of activity was but a public relations instrument meant to improve the image capital of the company and its financial performance.

Having in mind the fact that corporate social responsibility is a process that has begun to be known in our country too, more among specialists than among the communities, and it is often put under the umbrella of public relations, this research intends to point out similarities and connections between the two processes and to observe the way in which the two operate within organizations. Thus, the present research deals from a theoretical and practical point of view with the connection and links that are established between the process of corporate social responsibility and the process of public relations, through the perspective offered by several research methods that are likely to provide enough data to answer research questions.

In this context, the present work has two general research questions:

- Can one speak about an overlapping between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and public relations (PR) within the activity of a company/organization;
- Are CSR and PR work instruments of the same whole?

Based on the above general question, the work enlists the help of three sets of more specific research questions:

1. To what extent is the overlapping between the CSR and PR visible at the mass-media level, more precisely at the written media level?

- a. To what extent is the concept of corporate social responsibility known in the written media in Romania?
 - b. To what extent is the connection between corporate social responsibility and public relations visible in the written media in Romania?
 - c. Which are the main fields of social involvement where CSR programs have been developed in Romania?
2. What is the opinion of public relations specialists regarding the connections between corporate social responsibility and public relations?
- a. Are there differences of opinion among public relations specialists regarding the overlapping between CSR and PR?
 - b. To what extent—from the point of view of PR specialists—does an image transfer occur between the CSR campaign and the company that carries out that campaign?
 - c. To what extent are CSR campaigns—from the point of view of PR specialists—a good way of improving the company's image?
 - d. To what extent are public relations specialists able to deal with the corporate social responsibility activity?
3. What is the opinion of Cluj-Napoca citizens regarding the involvement of companies in social life?
- a. Which are the characteristics of individuals who know the concept of CSR and its specific aspects?
 - b. What is the perception of respondents regarding the companies that get involved in social problems?
 - c. To what extent are CSR campaigns perceived as being a PR component of companies?

Research is focused on the city of Cluj-Napoca for several reasons. Firstly, the city of Cluj-Napoca is one of the greatest economic centers of the country; it is expanding and offers multiple possibilities of social involvement. Moreover, the fact that it is a university center may represent a good basis for the development of a culture of social involvement and of programs relying on volunteering (which may be of interest to students). Last but not least, personal reasons made us choose this city as a research location. One must also mention the fact that by choosing one single location we have the opportunity of a detailed analysis.

The subject of this work may be considered new and challenging especially because it deals with a problem less discussed in Romania until now, that of the perception of, involvement in, and

consequences of activities of corporate social responsibility in connection with the activity of public relations. Moreover, as a consequence of our research, this work may offer practically applicable arguments for an active, constant and visible involvement of companies in identifying and solving social problems of the Romanian communities they operate in. Therefore, the main *reason* to study this subject is represented by the fact that, in Romania, the social involvement of companies has started to become a desideratum for both companies and the community. The interweaving of social responsibility and public relations is a delicate and, at the same time, controversial subject and it offers a very interesting field of study. *The purpose of our research* is to bring new and definite elements in this dispute, elements offered by both the theoretical and the practical domains.

Considering the elements presented above, this theme is relevant from both a *scientific* and especially a *social* point of view. From a scientific point of view, the relevance of the theme is due to the fact that we intend to discuss a topic that is new to scientific activity in Romania having in mind the fact that the theme of corporate social responsibility in connection with public relations has not presented much interest in Romanian specialized literature. Consequently, studies referring to this subject are few in numbers in Romania. As regards the *social perspective*, the relevance of research stems from the obvious fact that any community, irrespective of the activities it carries out, is confronted with various problems and shortcomings that are difficult to solve from a financial point of view. Therefore, the individual but also collective involvement in identifying and solving community problems is necessary to both the individual and to organizations. Moreover, at a scientific level, the case study selected by us for research is likely to generate other research ideas and may be applied to other urban communities.

The work is structured in two main parts, each having several chapters and subchapters. The first part intends to debate, from a theoretical point of view, the concepts of corporate social responsibility and public relations, as well as the connections between them, while the second part proposes to point out the way in which the involvement of companies in social life is perceived at the level of the city of Cluj-Napoca, as well as the consequences of this activity from the point of view of the citizens. At the same time, through the press analysis and administered interviews, this part intends to outline a general idea regarding the connections between CSR and PR. The present work has had recourse to several research methods, both quantitative and qualitative, thus choosing to collect data by the mixed research method. The reason why this type of research has been implemented lies in the fact that it usually offers a much more complex understanding of the phenomenon to be studied.

Part I of the work intends to provide a theoretical framework meant to introduce the main concepts of our research: *Corporate Social Responsibility and Public Relations: theory and social action*. The purpose of this theoretical illustration is to familiarize the reader with the jargon used and to acknowledge the level reached by research, at international level, regarding corporate social responsibility in connection with public relations.

Chapter I begins with a review of the specialized literature dedicated to corporate social responsibility. Historically speaking, corporate social responsibility's origins can be traced back to the years 1930-1940, but it was perceived as field of research several years later. Specialized literature distinguishes four phases of publications in the field: **1.** gestation and innovation, in the 1960s, **2.** development and expansion in 1972-1979, **3.** institutionalization, in 1980-1987, and **4.** maturation in 1988-1996¹. A chronology of major authors that have contributed to the development and evolution of the CSR concept has been put together by Carroll who, in 1999, did a large scale research having as its objective the building of a definition for the corporate social responsibility concept. The period discussed by the author spans 50 years. Although he identifies theoretical elements dating back to the 1930s-1940s, Carroll decides to base his discussion on the periods after 1950, considered by him to be the *modern era of corporate social responsibility*. Thus, he discusses the periods of the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Carroll's research represented an important source of analysis for this work as it is marked by an attempt to chronologically follow the building of a definition of the concept of corporate social responsibility. One of the researchers who give a clearer meaning of the concept is Carroll himself who, in 1991, offers a new variant of the definition provided years ago, by stating that the CSR is composed of four key elements: economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic and underlining the fact that throughout time these aspects have always existed within companies but the aspects regarding ethics and philanthropy have started to occupy a major place only in the 1990s. Being called "the pyramid of corporate social responsibility," the 4 elements are explained thus: **1.** Economic – responsibility to have profit following the investment of stakeholders; **2.** Legal – responsibility to observe the law; **3.** Ethical – responsibility to adhere to social norms that are not stipulated by laws but are expected by actors operating in society; **4.** Philanthropic – responsibility of having a definite role in voluntary aid to a segment of society."² Carroll also briefly captures what CSR should mean: "the CSR firm should strive to make a profit, obey the law, be ethical, and be a

¹ Frank G.A. Bakker, Peter Groenewegen, Frank Den Hond. *A Bibliometric Analysis of 30 Years of Research and Theory on Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Social Performance*, in „Business Society”, Vol. 44, No. 3, 2005, p. 286, SAGE.

² Brian K. Burton, Michael Goldsbey. *Corporate Social Responsibility Orientation, Goals and Behavior: A Study of Small Business Owners*, in „Business and Society”, Vol. 48; 88, 2009, p. 89, SAGE.

good corporate citizen.”³ The idea of a good citizen applied to corporations is still predominant today in the development strategies of great companies.

Modern corporate social responsibility, that of the year 2000, is much more specific in what regards its activity as the latter receives an ever greater attention from companies, becoming more and more one of their important management strategies. A *Report of the European Commission* says: “the rise of CSR can be seen as a response to scandals over the past two decades, involving mainly American corporations, as well as a direct response from within and outside the business community to engage directly in meeting challenges such as climate change, social exclusion and world poverty that have become of increasing concern in an era of economic globalisation.”⁴ In order to reach equilibrium, the company must balance its economic aspects with its ethical, and social ones and this balance must take into consideration all categories of stakeholders⁵. *International Institute for Sustainable Development* has identified ten factors that have influenced the development of the CSR and have attracted attention to the new role of companies, that of socially responsible citizens: **1. Sustainable development:** process that has identified the complex problems of society as well as the incorrect use of natural resources. CSR is seen from this point of view as a potential solution to solve problems of this kind by integrating the former into the business strategy; **2. Globalization:** by extending businesses at global level, social problems were also highly amplified. CSR plays a vital role in detecting the impact that globally extended businesses have on the workforce, on local communities and their economies. CSR may offer viable solutions for ensuring public well-being; **3. Governance:** governments and members of governments such as those of the European Union. *The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development* (OECD) and *International Labor Organization* (ILO) have produced various reports, guides, declarations, principles and other instruments in order to establish the proper conduct in business. CSR offers in this respect internationally accepted instruments regarding the rights of man, the environment and anti-corruption measures; **4. The impact of the corporate sector:** The way in which companies behave has become a problem of general interest as their influence on political, social and environmental systems is ever greater; **5.**

³ Archie B. Carrol. *Corporate Social Responsibility: Evolution of a Definitional Construct*, in „Business Society”, Vol. 38, No. 3, 1999, pp. 288-289, SAGE.

⁴ European Parliament. *REPORT on corporate social responsibility: a new partnership*, available at http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/a6/p6_a%282006%290471_/p6_a%282006%290471_en.pdf, consulted at 14.07.2010.

⁵ Geoffrey P. Lantos. *The Boundaries of Strategic Corporate Social Responsibility*, in „Journal Of Consumer Marketing”, Vol. 18, Iss. 17, 2001, p. 9, Emerald, *apud*. M. Novak. *Business as a Calling: Work and the Examined Life*, The Free Press, New York, 1996.

Communication: advanced technologies such as the Internet or mobile telephony offer increased possibilities of internal and external communication for any company. In the context of CSR, modern communication technologies offer the possibility of improving dialogue and partnerships; **6. Financial capital:** consumers and investors are more and more interested in supporting socially responsible businesses. CSR may help to create value and to achieve a better response from those interested in the business; **7. Ethics:** throughout time, corporations have often broken the rules of ethical conduct in business, which led to mistrust in their activity. A CSR approach from this point of view may lead to an improvement of company's relation with interested groups, to a greater transparency and to higher ethical standards; **8. Consistency and community:** companies should have the same high standards regarding the environment as they have regarding the social aspect, irrespective of country. CSR may balance this desire; **9. Leadership:** lately, there has been a greater acknowledgement of the limits of regulatory legislative and governmental initiatives in addressing effectively all the issues that CSR refers to. Thus, CSR offers the possibility of action in those areas that are not adequately covered by regulations; **10. Business instruments:** companies have begun more and more to admit the fact that the adoption of effective CSR programs may reduce the risk of business failure, may lead to new opportunities, to innovations, to increased brand reputation and even to the improvement of work productivity⁶. The same guide suggests the potential key benefits of companies implementing CSR strategies: **1.** a better prediction and management of potential risks; **2.** improvement of management reputation; **3.** increased ability to recruit, develop and keep personnel; **4.** increased innovation, competitiveness and market positioning; **5.** increased operational efficiency and better economy with costs; **6.** increased capacity of attracting and building relations that are effective and efficient to the supply chain; **7.** increased ability to approach changes; **8.** a better, more dignified "social license" to operate in the community; **9.** access to capital; **10.** improvement of relations with regulating authorities; **11.** a catalyst for responsible consumption⁷.

The arguments offered in favor of the existence of CSR are considered in specialized literature as being of three types: moral, economic and rational:

1. Moral arguments – talk about the necessity of all social groups of striving to add such other values to economic profit as could make life better; the interdependence between organization

⁶ Paul Hohnen. *Corporate Social Responsibility. An Implementation Guide for Business*, published by "International Institute for Sustainable Development", 2007, pp. 7-8, available at http://www.iisd.org/pdf/2007/csr_guide.pdf, consulted at 05.08.2010.

⁷ *Idem*, pp. 11-12.

and the infrastructure offered by society is necessary to the common benefit of the two entities⁸;

2. Economic arguments – are brought to convince those managers who are not persuaded by the moral arguments of CSR programs involvement; thus, the adoption of an effective CSR policy will influence all the aspects of the activity of the organization and will lead to a real market differentiation and competitiveness, thus attracting other successes too⁹. From among the economic benefits the company will have, some authors name benefits of financial nature, increased company visibility, preference of consumers for the products of socially responsible companies, increased internal cohesion of the team involved in developing the project within the respective company, etc.¹⁰ Because of its strong objectives, CSR can influence the daily activity of the organization, bringing advantages in each sector. From an economic point of view “CSR adds value because it allows companies to reflect the needs and concerns of their various stakeholder groups”¹¹. Thus, organizations have the possibility of being legitimate, of preserving this status and of maximizing economic efficiency in the long run.

3. Rational arguments – are proposed by Werther and Chandler who say that “in today’s globalizing world, where individuals and activist organizations feel empowered to enact change, CSR represents a means of anticipating and reflecting societal concerns to minimize operational and financial constraints on business”¹².

Other concerns, definitions and theories of corporate social responsibility may extensively be consulted in our work. To wrap up the discussion regarding this concept within this abstract, we will present the diagram proposed by Palezzi and Starcher quoted by Iamandi who speaks about six types of key-responsibility that the process of corporate social responsibility envisages:

⁸University of Miami, *A Guide to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)*, disponibil la http://www.miami.edu/ethics/pdf_files/csr_guide.pdf, consultat în 14.12.2008 p. 5.

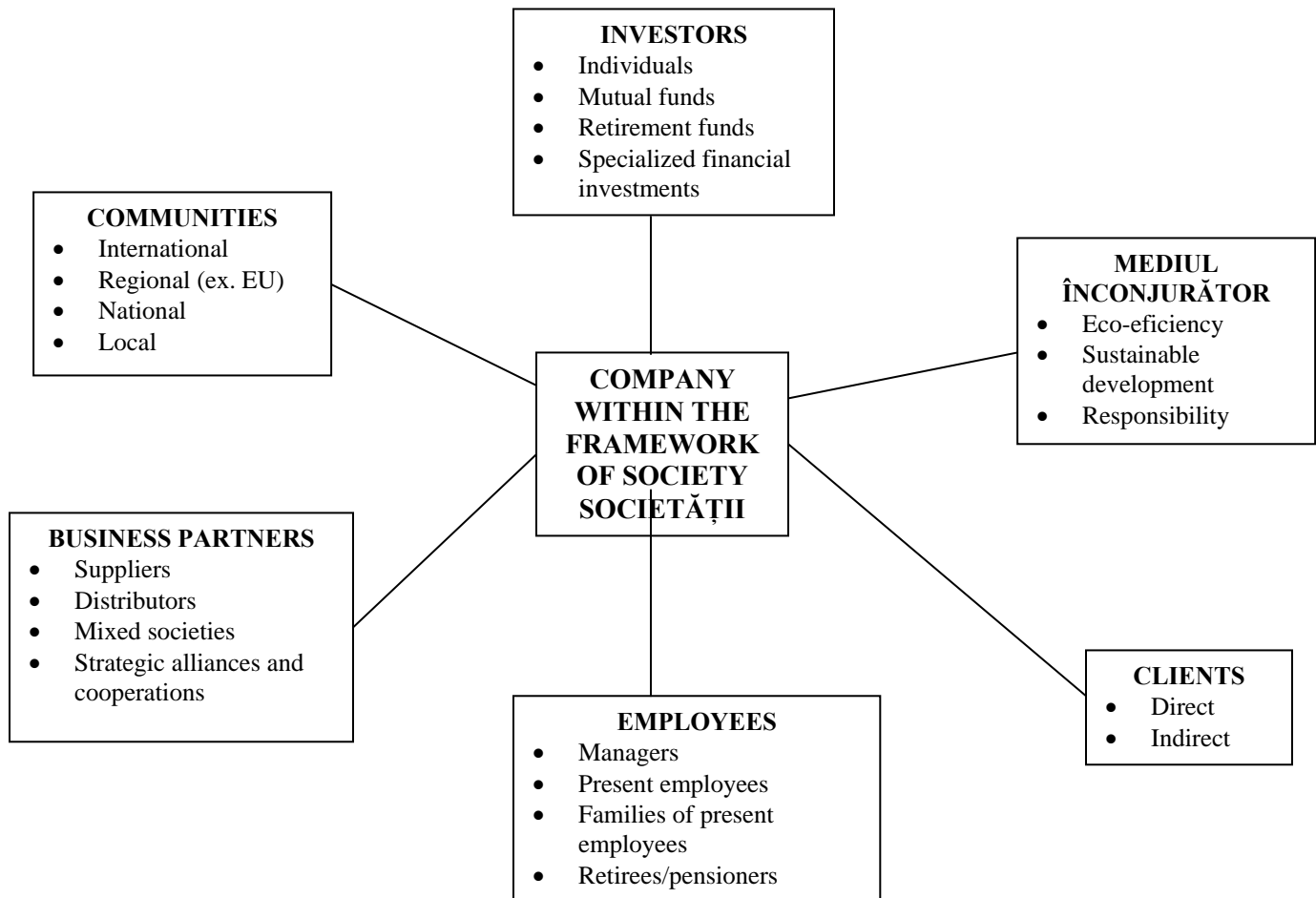
⁹ *Idem*, p. 6.

¹⁰ Coord. Cătălin Zamfir, Simona Stănescu. *Enciclopedia Dezvoltării Sociale*, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2007, p. 509.

¹¹ William B. Werther, David Chandler. *Strategic Corporate Social Responsibility: stakeholders in a global environment*, SAGE Publication, Inc., 2006, p. 18.

¹² *Idem*.

Figure no. 6: The six key responsibilities of CSR



Source: apud. Palazzi M, Starcher G. Corporate Social Responsibility and Business Success, The European Business Forum, Paris, France, 1997, revisited 2006, p. in Irina Eugenia Iamandi. Responsabilitatea Socială Corporativă în companiile multinaționale, Ed. Economică, București, 2010, p. 28, 9.

Chapter I of the work continues by analyzing another important concept of the specialized literature dedicated to CSR, namely *sustainable development* which represents a premise of CSR activity. *Sustainable development* presupposes an activity supported by projects for the present meant to support the company for the future too. Predictions are hard to make and therefore it is much more important that the management carry out an effective activity in the present with the purpose of being the beneficiary of results and opportunities in the future. In this sense it is essential for the management to identify present opportunities that will engender others in the future. The latter are, according to Drucker, consequences and effects of events already happened: “In human affairs – political, social, economic, and business – it is pointless to try to predict the future, let alone attempt to look ahead 75 years. But it is possible – and fruitful – to identify major events that have already

happened, irrevocably, and that therefore will have predictable effects in the next decade or two. It is possible, in other words, to identify and prepare for the future *that has already happened*.”¹³. Sustainable development and corporate social responsibility are processes that specialized literature discusses together, because sustainable development generally, as the literature says, works with the three pillars of environment protection, social responsibility, and economic development¹⁴. Extensively approached in our paper in connection with CSR, the concept of sustainable development is meant to complete the general picture of our discussion regarding the understanding of the concept of corporate social responsibility. The next subchapters of Chapter I cover the same theme as they present several tested strategies and practices of corporate social responsibility, as well as a brief review of CSR in the world and also in Romania.

Chapter II intends to review the specialized literature dedicated to the second central concept of this research, namely to the public relations (PR). Today, it is already well-known that public relations are acknowledged as a stand-alone, professional field that operates with clearly established methods, techniques and rules in order to establish relations between individuals and organizations, as well as between organizations and their internal and external environment. Based on the process of communication, one of the oldest and most necessary processes of humankind, public relations do nothing but facilitate social relations of individuals and groups. Defining the PR concept is, as mentioned in the specialized literature, quite difficult in the context of the continuous alteration of the understanding of the concept in time. If in the beginning it was perceived as a way of controlling the public (being much likened to propaganda and then with manipulation), today it is a concept that belongs to the management function, it is a process that “contrary to the opinion of many ... does not represent a system designed to make bad people and bad things seem to be something else”¹⁵. Until it got here, however, it was also understood as a way of informing the public and of manipulating public opinion. Today the function of public relations is defined in various ways. In order to build a general picture of what public relations represent we will next recall some of the definitions presented in our work.

¹³ Peter, Drucker. *Despre profesia de manager*, Meteor Press, București, 1998, p. 7.

¹⁴ Peter White. *Building a sustainability strategy into the business*, in „Corporate Governance”, Vol. 9, No. 4, 2009, p. 387. Emerald.

¹⁵ *Idem*, p. 21.

Thus, *British Institute of Public Opinion* says that “public relations are a deliberate, planned, and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its public”¹⁶.

One of the most complex definitions is the one of Harlow, because it incorporates other 472 definitions of the concept: “PR is a distinctive function of management that helps create a communicational bridge, a mutual acceptance and cooperation, between an organization and its external environment, a convergence between own structure and own image, as well as maintaining these relations. Through PR one must learn all problems and trap-questions related to own system; PR supports the management in its attempt to stay informed about the image of its own institution and to react accordingly. This function defines, through its specific work and activities, management responsibility in the eyes of the public, granting importance to the latter; it supports management so that the latter may keep pace with any change and use any transformation to the benefit of own firm; it has the role of alarm system for the discovery and prediction of future trends; PR uses study as well as healthy and ethical communication techniques as basic instruments for its actions”¹⁷.

The discussion regarding the activity of public relations is continued in our work by the clarification of confusions connecting this concept to other fields of activity, as well as by the clarification of the role of public relations within companies, the profile of the PR specialist, and by data regarding public relations campaigns.

Chapter III of the work deals with the role of public relations in the activity of corporate social responsibility. The desires of organizations to watch over the proper course of the social space are not fortuitous. The consequences of such activities are more often than not positive. In this context, the question is often asked whether corporate social responsibility programs are more than a mere maneuver through which companies aim to acquire a positive public image, beat competition and rank high in the preferences of groups of interests. For a period of time, corporate social responsibility was considered to be a new solution identified by the public relations department to improve the image of the organization by appealing to the sentimental side of the public that could be touched by the company’s involvement in solving social problems and could thus feel closer to that organization and could even turn into faithful clients, partners, collaborators. This suspicion still exists today. Frankental talks about the place and department attributed to CSR activity within the

¹⁶ Cristina Coman. *Realții publice, principii și strategii*, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2001, p. 19.

¹⁷ Flaviu Călin Rus. *Introducere în știința comunicării și a relațiilor publice*, Iași, Ed Institutul European, 2002, p. 53, *apud* Michael Kunczick, *Public Relations, Konzepte und Theorien*, Editura Böhlau, Köln, 1993, p. 4.

organization: “an indicator of the real value that companies attach to CSR is where they locate this function within the organizational structure. It is usually located within the external affairs, corporate affairs or community affairs. In other words, it is seen as an adjunct of PR, a function of company’s external relationships, a peripheral activity, not something that needs to be ambadded across the organization horizontally and vertically”¹⁸. It is still true, from our point of view, that the border between public relations and corporate social responsibility is a sensitive one. Actually, at first sight, we could not condemn those who believe in the hidden agenda of CSR. Positive consequences of an organization’s social involvement are clearly visible at once. Nonetheless, specialized literature identifies distinctions between corporate social responsibility and public relations. Multiple confusions generated by the interweaving of the two entities are also connected to the fact that CSR activity was often performed by public relations specialists and was sometimes included into the public relations department of the organization. Communicating CSR activities became incumbent to these specialists too and they became responsible for drafting and presenting annual CSR reports and more. Placing CSR under the umbrella of PR is also due to the fact that the organization is closest to the public through the intermediary of the CSR. Those who dispute the relation between CSR and PR say that actually there is no relation between the two and that CSR is a mere PR maneuver: “corporate social responsibility is an invention of PR and will remain so...This means that CSR can only have real substance if it embraces all the stakeholders of a company... if it is reinforced by changes in company law relating to governance, if it is rewarded by financial markets, if its definition refers to the goals of social and ecological sustainability ... if it is open to public scrutiny, if the compliance mechanisms are in place, and if it is embadded across the organization horizontally and vertically”¹⁹. Nonetheless, another type of specialized literature extensively discusses the interferences and similarities between CSR and PR and interrelate the two, as both work for common goals linked to corporation’s reputation, image, identity, etc. Motivations for taking part in CSR actions are often the same as motivation of practicing PR. Thus a study carried out in Singapore and analyzing among others the reasons and benefits that determine Asian companies to engage in CSR has pointed out the fact that “the most frequently cited benefits were improved customer loyalty (57%), improved organizational culture (53%), and attracting and retaining

¹⁸ Peter Frankental. *Corporate social responsibility – a PR invention?*, in “Corporate Communications: An International Journal”, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2001, p. 22, Emerald.

¹⁹ *Idem*, p. 23.

employees (35%)”²⁰. Other advantages enumerated by the study were: a greater cohesion of the workforce, improved image, business costs reduction as a result of CSR practices and improved reputation. The relation between CSR and PR is also extensively debated in the pages of our doctoral thesis. In order to give a general perspective we have chosen to present in this abstract the opinion of one of the authors concerned with this subject (Clark: 2000) who wrote a work that is relevant to the CSR-PR relation; this author was interested in identifying, in the specialized literature dedicated to the two domains, the similarities between them, stimulated by the idea that they both represent an opportunity of improving the efficacy of the activity of corporate world. The review of the evolution of the two concepts has revealed the existence of four action steps for both PR and CSR:

Table no. 10: The four steps of action of CSR and PR presented comparatively

Four steps of PR	Four steps of CSR
1. defining the problem or opportunity	1. acknowledgement of a problem
2. planning and programming	2. analysis and planning
3. action and communication	3. answer in terms of policy development
4. evaluation of the program	4. implementation

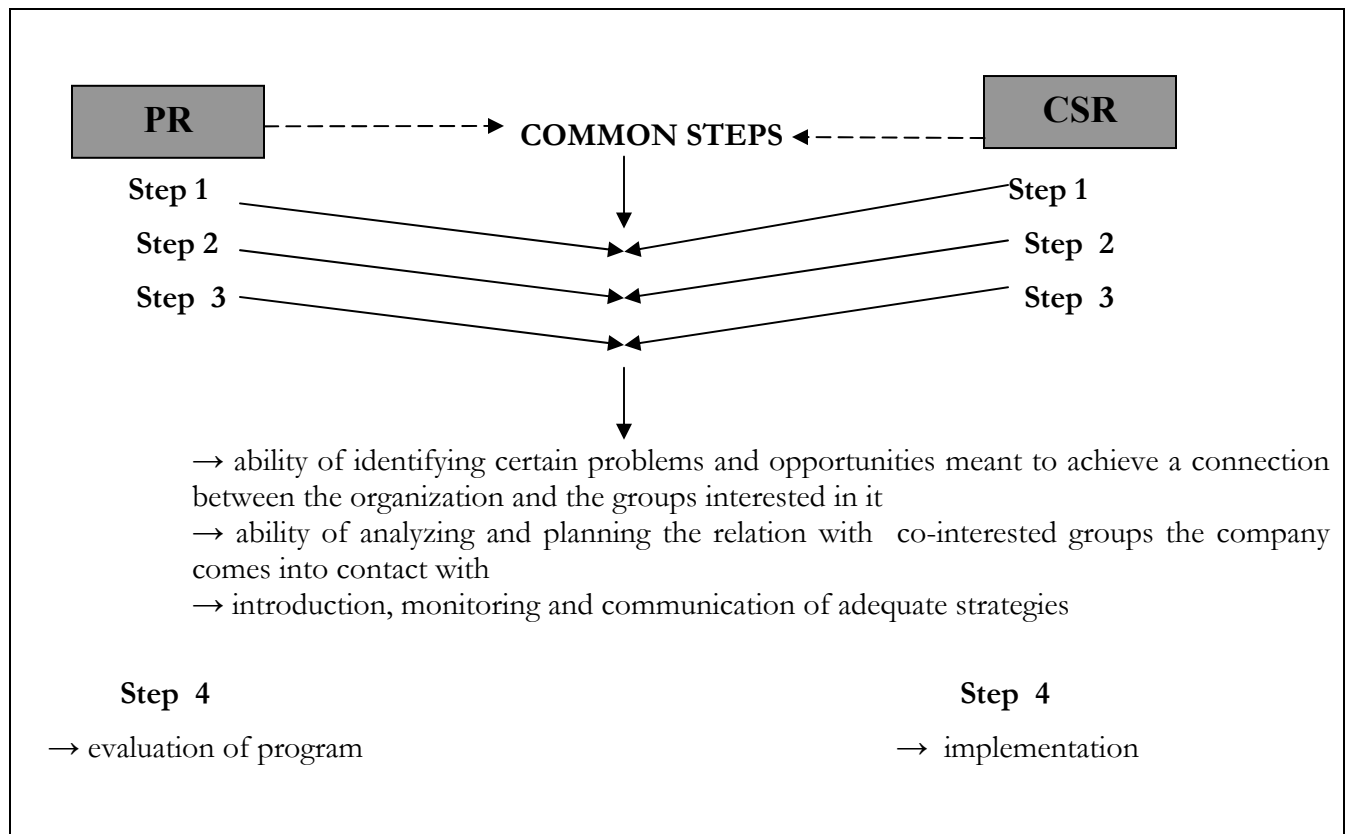
Source: adapted after: Cynthia E. Clark. *Differences Between Public Relations and Corporate Social Responsibility: An Analysis*, in “Public Relations Review”, Vol. 26, No. 3, 2000, pp. 367-368, ScienceDirect.

The first step described in the PR activity refers to the focus on researching and defining the problem or the opportunity for action, both inside the organization and outside it and it focuses on attitudes, opinions and behaviors of those who have a connection with the activity of the company. The first step of CSR activity, says Clark, resembles that of PR; a company that has the capacity of recognizing opportunities in terms of social and environmental policies will find it easier to answer social demands. Thus, both PR and CSR use within this step the ability of identifying certain problems and opportunities meant to achieve a connection between the organization and the groups interested in it. At the second step PR has the duty of recognizing the proper strategies likely to solve the problem or improve opportunity; all this activity is based on the needs of every group the company comes into contact with. At the second step, CSR performs an almost identical operation by which the company attempts to understand the environment and the relations of stakeholders as well as their demands and expectancies, thus trying to improve the relations with the networks of stakeholders involved. Thus, both CSR and PR use within this step the ability of analyzing and

²⁰ Krishnamurthy Sriramesh, Chew Wee Ng, Sho Ting Ting, Luo Wanyin. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Public Relations: Perceptions and Practices in Singapore*, 2007, p. 22, available at http://www.bledcom.com/uploads/papers/Sriramesh_Ng_Ting_Wanyin.pdf, consulted at 24.08.2010.

planning their relation with co-interested groups the company comes into contact with. The third step of PR involves implementing a strategy and communicating it to the stakeholders. For CSR it is now the moment of developing policies and programs to manage social problems. Thus, the third step involves, for both CSR and PR, the introduction, monitoring and communication of adequate strategies. The last step involves for PR the evaluation of pluses and minuses that occurred along the whole process. As regards CSR, this step completes the third one.²¹

Figure no. 15: Common steps of PR and CSR



The diagram is a personal vision, built on theoretical aspects presented by Cynthia E. Clark in her argument regarding the differences and similarities between CSR and PR in the previously cited work

Another common aspect identified by Clark consists in the fact that both PR and CSR bring dividends as regards the company’s reputation. Similarly, the responsibility of communicating with different types of stakeholders as regards the CSR activity lies in the hands of the PR. Both rely on communication, a process that has to be thought, applied and evaluated depending on all categories

²¹ Cynthia E. Clark. *Differences Between Public Relations and Corporate Social Responsibility: An Analysis*, in “Public Relations Review,” Vol. 26, No. 3, 2000, pp. 369-372, ScienceDirect.

of groups interested in the company and on their needs; both aim at increasing efficiency and have similar goals. Both are willing to improve the quality of their organization's relations with key stakeholder groups. If the PR is to strategically manage CSR, company top management has to be involved²².

Part II of the doctoral thesis represents the actual field research we carried out. Corporate social responsibility in connection with public relations is discussed here from the point of view of social action. For the beginning, within **Chapter IV**, a content analysis was performed on four Romanian newspapers, addressing the notoriety of corporate social responsibility and its interference with public relations as seen in Romanian written press. The purpose of this part of research was to answer the research questions exposed at the beginning of this work, namely: To what extent is the overlapping between CSR and PR visible at a mass-media level, more precisely at the written media level? To what extent is the concept of corporate social responsibility known in the written media in Romania? To what extent is the connection between corporate social responsibility and public relations visible in written press in Romania? Which are the main fields of social involvement where CSR programs have been developed in Romania?

Article analysis was performed in the *January-February 2010 period*. Articles are presented in a concise form within each subchapter, being analyzed in a chronological order corresponding to the order of tables presented in the work. Analysis was carried out from both a quantitative and a qualitative point of view. We set as our purpose to identify the number of occurrences of the word CSR in articles and titles, the number of articles dealing with CSR, the number of articles that speak about CSR but refer to PR elements. Then a comparison among selected newspapers was drawn. From a qualitative point of view articles were grouped into three categories: positive, negative and neutral. In order to complete our analysis we chose to briefly review the main CSR campaigns in Romania and the fields of activity where companies in Romania invested in CSR programs. This analysis was based on activity reports published on the specialized site www.responsabilitatesociala.ro. Analyses have shown that issue of corporate social responsibility occurs in the written press in Romania quite summarily presented. If we come back to the research questions regarding the written press in our country we can state that the overlapping between CSR and PR is visible in those articles analyzing the CSR concept and process but their number is too small to be certain in this respect. Then, as regards the image transfer between CSR campaigns and the organization that carries them on we can say that indeed the articles analyzed prove that fact.

²² *Idem*, pp. 376.

Moreover, the analysis of activity reports demonstrates that corporate social responsibility begins to take shape in our country too. The 48 companies presented in our discussion have their own programs of this type, included in their management strategy. Upon the whole we can say that they are less visible in written press than actual facts would grant.

The research part of the doctoral thesis continues with **Chapter V** where we performed an analysis of semi-structured interviews administered to public relations specialists and having as their subject the role of public relations in the activity of corporate social responsibility seen from the respondents' perspective. We considered it timely to learn the opinion of persons who are operationally in charge of such activities and to point out the connection, from a practical point of view, between the two elements. In this sense, during the February-March period of 2010 a semi-structured interview was administered to a number of eleven specialists dealing with the public relations activity within companies operating in Romania. The interview was meant to answer the research questions: What is the opinion of public relations specialists regarding the connections between corporate social responsibility and public relations? Are there differences of opinion among public relations specialists regarding the connections between corporate social responsibility and public relations? Are there differences of opinion among public relations specialists regarding the overlapping between CSR and PR? To what extent—from the point of view of PR specialists—does an image transfer occur between the CSR campaign and the company that carries out that campaign? To what extent are CSR campaigns—from the point of view of PR specialists—a good way of improving the company's image? To what extent are public relations specialists able to deal with the corporate social responsibility activity? The conclusions of the analysis of administered interviews were: The activity of corporate social responsibility is seen in our country as being in its infancy, having many shortcomings and, moreover, being often misunderstood or superficially performed. However, respondents argue that beside economic aspects, CSR also has beneficial effects on the image of the company, which is not a negative aspect, on the contrary, it contributes to a favorable general image of the company. Thus, the simultaneous use of CSR and PR activities is seen as an exercise likely to bring positive results both at a managerial level and as regards the general image of the company. Having in mind the fact that all respondents said that the CSR and PR use the same work instruments and rely on direct communication with all categories of publics involved in the activity of the company, the connection between the two is more than obvious. Moreover, the image transfer achieved between the company initiating CSR and the CSR campaign was confirmed by all PR specialists, although some of them believed that this image transfer not always helps the

company in the intended manner. Nonetheless, the link between corporate social responsibility and the image and reputation of the company is clearly visible from the answers offered by the participants to the semi-structured interview.

Respondents' arguments and explanations lead us to the conclusion that, to a great extent, the activity of corporate social responsibility and that of public relations are complementary, and the public relations specialist has all the qualities and abilities to deal with this type of activity, especially in the circumstances where it relies heavily on communication with the company's publics. We can thus conclude by saying that public relations experts have an important role within the activity of corporate social responsibility, due to their work instruments and to the fact that they have the capacity and ability of knowing how to communicate, carry out, and evaluate a CSR campaign, and how to manage the whole process of corporate social responsibility of a company. Thus, CSR and PR may be considered the instruments of work of the same whole, overlapping in various respects within the framework of a company's activities.

Chapter VI of our doctoral thesis intends to identify the perception of corporate social responsibility and of its connections to public relations as far as Cluj citizens are concerned. Having in mind the novelty of the process in Romania, we intend to discover the extent to which the process is known to the citizens of the city, the level of perception of the phenomenon and the visibility of companies and of their CSR activity at the level of the city of Cluj-Napoca, as well as the interferences between the features specific to corporate social responsibility and those specific to public relations. The main purpose of this research, therefore, is to see to what extent the citizens are familiar the term and features of CSR, their degree of openness towards the involvement of companies in social life and the extent to which they associate variables specific to CSR with those specific to PR.

The main research question this methodological part starts from is *to what extent do the citizens of the city of Cluj-Napoca perceive corporate social responsibility as a visible phenomenon, one that is beneficial to community and likely to improve the image of a company?* Moreover, research intends to analyze both the extent to which CSR campaigns are associated by citizens (target public) with the organization initiating the mentioned campaign and the perception of consumer citizens of the consequences of such a campaign. The picture given by these data is completed by data regarding citizens' interest in different social problems (ecological, related to child abandonment, education, poverty etc.), in the extent to which companies should get involved in social community life, in the visibility and perception of social campaigns carried out at national level in general and at Cluj level in particular,

in identifying and associating certain social campaigns with the organization that carried them out, as well as in aspects connected to the image of companies performing CSR activities. Thus, the stress will fall on the acknowledgement, at city level, of social problems, of companies carrying out CSR activities, on the image those companies created at Cluj level and especially on the relation between variables specific to CSR (involvement with the community, help offered to community) and those specific to PR (image, reputation, popularity and company promotion).

The research questions of the opinion poll are therefore the following:

1. Which are the characteristics of individuals who know the concept of CSR and its specific aspects?
2. What is the perception of respondents regarding the companies that get involved in social problems?
3. To what extent are CSR campaigns perceived as being a PR component of companies?

In this context, **the research hypotheses of the poll** are the following:

I1: Young individuals, with higher education but irrespective of sex, know the concept of CSR to a larger extent than the rest of individuals.

I2: The degree of openness towards involvement in social problems and the interest in them are higher with less young respondents provided they have at least high school education.

I3: The majority of respondents, irrespective of age, believe that in their city companies do not carry out enough campaigns to solve social problems.

I3.1: The extent of knowledge of the CSR campaigns carried out in Romania until now is a low one, irrespective of the characteristics of individuals.

I4: CSR campaigns are perceived as a good source of improvement of company's image, reputation and popularity.

I4.1: The better the individuals know the concept of CSR, the more they consider that the purpose of a company initiating a social campaign is to improve its image, reputation and popularity.

In order to find answers to research questions and check hypotheses, we used the method of the opinion poll, having the questionnaire as an instrument. The data were collected in the February-March 2010 period. The sample was formed exclusively of individuals living in the city of Cluj-Napoca and consisted of 698 individuals²³. Quota sampling was used, observing in broad lines the

²³ In the process of administering the questionnaires, this research benefitted from the help of students from Communication and Public Relations, class of 2010 and of 2011, Faculty of Political, Administrative and

structure of the population used for sampling (National Institute of Statistics). The main quotas used to make the sample are: gender, age, level of education. The main reason for choosing these variables for sampling consisted in the fact that they are considered in specialized literature as being important aspects that underline the perception of the subject to be dealt with. Analysis involved making associations both among these variables and between variables specific to corporate social responsibility and those specific to public relations. The instrument used to carry out the opinion poll is the questionnaire. The questionnaire used administered to respondents is formed of 29 questions, each with several variables. The main problems approached in the questionnaire were the following: *perception regarding the standard of living; level of acknowledgement of various social problems of the city; perception of social involvement of companies in Romania; interest in social life and problems in general; extent of knowledge of the term and features of CSR; knowledge of companies having carried out CSR programs; and socio-demographical aspects*. In order to analyze data, the statistical SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) program was used.

The relations between variables specific to CSR and those specific to PR, together with the quota variables chosen for sampling, were intended to characterize the population to be studied especially in terms of the CSR activity in the city, of its relation to PR; they were also meant to underline the main social problems facing the city. Due to the fact that information is scarce regarding this activity, many of the results obtained are not necessarily relevant too. Nonetheless, analysis points out several important explanatory directions that are worth observing and mentioning in the perspective of national and local development of corporate social responsibility activity.

Generally speaking, we can state that there is not enough knowledge regarding the significance of corporate social responsibility especially having in mind the fact that both men and women know the same information regarding the term of CSR. Moreover, we would have tended to believe that the majority of young people understand the term better than the less young. It seems however that there is confusion in the very young, as well as in the young, middle-aged and elderly. Moreover, one can say that a higher level of education influences to a certain extent the degree of understanding of the term but this is not valid for all elements of CSR. Some of these are understood correctly or incorrectly, almost uniformly, irrespective of the level of education. We can

Communication Sciences, the “Babeş-Bolyai” University. Each of the students involved received a set of criteria based on which they had to find respondents. This set included gender, age interval and the level of education of individuals included in the sample.

state that this is due to the general lack of knowledge related to the term of CSR. Starting from this information we can say that there are no great differences between the knowledge possessed by those with higher levels of education and the rest as regards the understanding of the term, features and actions of CSR, the only exception being a slightly better knowledge of those with university education. Nonetheless, we cannot say about the latter that they know the term in significant numbers. Although there were individuals who could characterize the term to a certain extent, we consider that the extent of knowledge of the term is quite small. Thus we can state that at the level of the city of Cluj-Napoca, one of the main activities that could work in favor of the general community, CSR, is a little known phenomenon. Notions about this process are few and confusion is persistent. Therefore we cannot outline a clear profile of those who know what CSR means. Moreover, the conclusion we reach is that generally speaking, although in small percentages, both men and women that finished at least high school, irrespective of age, have some knowledge of what CSR means, although not enough to allow us to say that the phenomenon is known. In conclusion, the first of our hypotheses -- young individuals, with higher education but irrespective of sex, know the concept of CSR to a larger extent than the rest of individuals – could not be validated because no profile of those knowing the term could be outlined.

Similarly, upon the whole, we could say that the majority of the respondents, irrespective of gender, agree with the fact that the involvement of companies in social life is important as companies owe a lot to the communities they operate in. It is to be noticed that women trust companies more than men; they are, at the same time, generally speaking, more preoccupied with the shortcomings of society than men. Similarly, young men up to 25 years of age seem to have more faith in the stimulation of companies by the citizens in what regards social involvement. Starting from these data we could state that, as regards men, things are more balanced between for and against opinions whereas in the case of women differences are more visible. That seems to demonstrate that with men there is a certain balance between skepticism and optimism as regards social life and the involvement of companies in it, whereas women are slightly more optimistic in this respect. At the same time, women's expectations regarding various ways of involving companies in society are slightly higher than those of men. When talking about the extent to which a company gets involved in community problems one can note the fact that the higher the level of education, the higher the interest in this aspect at the moment of forming an opinion about the company. An even more profound analysis of the data reveals the fact that those who generally consider that companies should get involved in a very high degree in the problems of the society where they

operate are especially women between 26-35 years of age having postgraduate studies. Men who display the same level of interest in the involvement of companies in social problems are between 36-45 and have postgraduate studies too. We can therefore state that, generally speaking, there is a higher interest regarding this subject in people over 25 and up to 55 years of age that have graduate studies. Thus, the second hypothesis of our research – the degree of openness towards the involvement in societal problems and the interest in them are higher in less young respondents that have at least high school education – is partially validated as indeed less young individuals seem to be more open to the subject of social involvement but those falling into this category generally have graduate education.

As regards the ways in which they would get involved in the life of society if they run a company, women and men generally have similar opinions, which may signal a general wish to benefit from such ways of involvement from companies. Concerning age categories, they would – with no exception – get involved, first of all by providing jobs, which, having in mind the rate of unemployment in the city of Cluj, may signify an acute shortage of workplaces and may explain the choice of respondents. In the case of involvement by carrying out campaigns of acknowledgement and education one can notice that interest diminishes as age grows. Following the trajectory of this subject, one can conclude by saying that some of the alternatives of social involvement are perceived differently according to education, probably because for those with primary and secondary education the access to information on those topics is more narrower, the latter falling out of their sphere of interest. The tendency is, therefore, for those having graduate education to accept as valid any of the mentioned alternatives, the latter being much appreciated by this educational class. Moreover, the data tell us that women between 18 and 55 years of age and having at least high school education would get involved to a larger extent in social life if they run a company; the same thing would be done by men over 26 and up to 65 having at least post-secondary education.

Although, generally speaking, the data concerning the level of life satisfaction and the direction in which things go in the city tell us that, at the level of Cluj, the perception of the trajectory of things is quite positive, there is enough proof to state that there is a quite high interest in social life and problems in general. However, there is a perception of a good number of social problems of the city, three of them being particularly conspicuous: those connected to disease, poverty and education, which determines us to say that these are the three most citizens have to face. Leaving aside these types of problems that seem to preoccupy both women and men, we can underline the fact that men seem to pay more attention to more pragmatic issues, those connected

to the national patrimony and ecology whereas women seem to pay more attention to problems of emotional nature like violence in the family and child abandonment. Moreover, as regards the education of respondents we can state that a certain group of social problems like those connected to disease, poverty, education or ecology presents a very similar degree of interest irrespective of the level of education of the respondents, and another group of problems, such as those connected to child abandonment, the destruction of cultural patrimony, violence in the family, etc., seems to preoccupy in a higher degree those with graduate studies or at least high school education.

In principle, the majority of Cluj citizens would be satisfied with a general picture that offers more jobs and with a city whose social problems would more significantly addressed by companies. As regards the institutions that should get involved in social life and problems, results show that none of the institutions listed in the questionnaire has registered a high percentage, all being under 50%. Thus, most of the citizens consider that none of the institutions carries out sufficient campaigns to solve the problems of the city. Although we would have expected the younger ones to have more knowledge of the fact that, for instance, in Cluj it was the banks that initiated campaigns rather than the Mayor's Office, this fact is quite unknown to respondents up to 25 years of age. Neither are other categories familiarized with it, they generally tend to credit the Mayor's Office or NGOs with such initiatives. Moreover, if the majority of interviewees consider social involvement as important, most individuals cannot see this happening in Romania. It is desired that the companies get involved in the social life but for the time being this involvement is not perceived as active, at least not locally. The only social campaigns that registered a higher percentage are "Cluj has a soul" and "Campaign against breast cancer." The low interest of respondents towards the other campaigns reveals the fact that Cluj respondents to the opinion poll are not very aware of the social campaigns already carried out in our country. We can infer from this that either campaigns did not have enough visibility and were not promoted enough, or that they were not understood and perceived as campaigns of public responsabilization and education regarding some of the most stringent social problems registered in Romania. Therefore we can even state that the efforts of these companies and their CSR activity are not known sufficiently.

The already familiar statement regarding the insufficiency of social campaigns in solving city problems is confirmed and underscored by the fact that both men and women have very similar opinions in this respect. There is no discrepancy between the two genders in their perception of social campaigns carried out in the city. However, either gender tends to say that there are not enough campaigns for the problems felt more strongly and differently from the other gender. As

regards the age of respondents, although confusions are to be found in all categories, it is surprising that those who know least about this subject are, generally speaking, young people under 35, those groups recording most confusion regarding social campaigns and the companies that carried them out. As a conclusion we can state that the third hypothesis of our research – that the majority of respondents, irrespective of age, consider that in their city companies do not carry out enough campaigns to solve social problems – is validated. At the same time, the secondary hypothesis of the third hypothesis – the extent of knowledge of specific CSR campaigns developed in Romania so far is low, irrespective of the characteristics of the individuals – is validated, as the majority of respondents expressed themselves in this sense.

Regarding the relation between CSR activity and PR specific variables, results tell us that most respondents, irrespective of age, education or gender, consider that the purpose of a company that carries out social campaigns is to a very large extent, that of improving its own image and promoting itself. Moreover, it seems that the general image of the company counts to a very large extent to the youngest of respondents, up to 25, and also for the 46-55 age group and it counts least to those over 65. Therefore we can say that the profile of those who take the general company image into account when forming their opinion about it is: people having at least high school education and belonging to the 18-55 age group. This fact is natural in the context where the element itself, the image of the company, is rather new and modern, which probably makes it easier to understand and better understood by the younger than the elderly. At the same time, both genders grant credibility to PR specific elements, considering that each could represent, to a large extent, purposes for carrying out social campaigns. This balance between the opinions of the two genders can be understood as being the consequence of general trends at the level of the city, where knowledge and information connected to these aspects is generally perceived and assimilated identically. Company's reputation and popularity are also seen as positively affected, to a large extent, by social campaigns. Differences between age groups are not significant in this sense but one can notice that people belonging to the 36-55 age group are more inclined to agree with the fact that a company should get involved in the life of society and that its purpose is to help community. These things can be noticed also in the case of the variable connected to the company's image. In what regards the other two variables, one can notice an increased attention from those up to 55. Moreover, it is to be noticed that the tendency of those who have at least post-secondary education is to grant credibility both to the intention of helping community and to the intention of improving the company image as a result of social involvement activity, this tendency increasing with the level

of education. Thus we can state that, although there are certain differences between educational categories, generally speaking, a higher level of education supports a more correct understanding of the association between CSR and PR. An even more profound analysis tells us that generally speaking, young and middle-aged men having at least post-secondary education believe in the image of the company as a purpose of social campaigns and the same holds good for young women up to 26 who have at least high school education. It is therefore interesting that people up to 45 believe to a large extent in the improvement of the image of the company as purpose of social campaigns. As regards the variable connected to the promotion of the company as purpose of the CSR activity, those aged between 18-45, who have at least high school education, are the greatest believers in it. Interesting is, however, the fact that, considering age, we notice a difference between men and women, in the sense that men believe in the promotion of the company as purpose of CSR activity generally after 25. We can therefore notice that those who attribute to CSR consequences connected to the PR activity are generally those up to 45, who have at least high school education, women being more inclined to do so. Nonetheless, we could say that both women and men aged between 18-45 and having at least high school education believe to a large extent that the purpose of a company, when carrying out a social campaign, is to improve company image, to promote it, to increase its popularity and improve its reputation, *all of these being clear elements of public relations activity*. Although we would have expected those with graduate studies to know more about the subject, we can say that they are no different from the rest of the educational categories (at least high school). Therefore, the fourth hypothesis of our research – CSR campaigns are perceived as a good source of improving company's image, reputation and popularity – is validated, since the majority of individuals, generally speaking, irrespective of their characteristics, agreed on that.

Upon the whole, we consider that the activity of corporate social responsibility and its consequences on the general image of the company are quite weak at the level of Cluj city. Nonetheless, we note the fact that those who have minimum knowledge in this sense, associate, through the intermediary of variables specific to each separate element, the activity of CSR to that of PR. In conclusion, the secondary hypothesis of the fourth hypothesis -- the better individuals know the concept of CSR, the more they consider that the purpose of a company that carries out a social campaign is to improve its image, reputation and popularity – is validated since in general, the variables of the two elements, CSR and PR, were associated by the majority of individuals with minimum knowledge in this sense. Thus we can say that the two interweave within the activity of the company and are work instruments of the same whole. Given these results, we can state that

although there is a number of persons believing the contrary, the general tendency is to believe that the purposes of the company when it carries out social campaigns are both those of helping the community and those of improving its image, promoting itself, increasing popularity and improving its reputation. We can also signal the fact that there are persons who consider that the purpose of the company is only to a small extent to help the community and to a large or very large extent to improve its image, to promote itself, to increase popularity and improve its reputation. These PR elements are therefore considered to be purposes of the CSR activity by the majority of respondents. Having in mind all these results, we consider that in the opinion of Cluj citizens participating in the opinion poll, the development of a social campaign has, beside the purpose of active involvement in the community, the goal of outlining a most positive image of the company. Bearing in mind the fact that in most cases CSR campaigns are carried on, promoted, developed and evaluated by public relations methods we can say that indeed the two interweave and cooperate for the same whole, which answers the general question at the beginning of this doctoral thesis: *Can one speak about an overlapping between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and public relations (PR) within the activity of a company/ organization, in other words are CSR and PR work instruments of the same whole?*

As we mentioned above, the two are indeed work instruments of the same whole, their activities being perceived by respondents as overlapping.

Conclusions

This work started from the premise that there is an overlapping between corporate social responsibility and public relations within the activity of a company. Moreover, we assumed that the CSR and PR are work instruments of the same whole.

Consulting specialized literature we could notice that corporate social responsibility together with sustainable development and “triple bottom line” represent at present processes and actions considered to be important in the management strategy of companies. A socially responsible activity will place the company among the most desired businesses both as employer and as provider of goods and services. At the same time, the social involvement of companies is seen as a necessity in the context of their operating in communities that they influence profoundly. Thus, the greatest part of specialized literature agrees with the fact that corporate social responsibility is an effective method to bring advantages to all parties involved, namely both to the company and to all categories of publics it comes into contact with. Moreover, corporate social responsibility supports sustainable development that has as its main goal the careful supervision of work done by companies and of the

consequences of the business environment so that they do not cancel the chances of future generations to live in harmony and develop.

Specialized literature proved the fact that the phenomenon of corporate social responsibility is widespread in the majority of developed countries in both Europe and in America and Asia. As regards Romanian territory, literature dedicated to this subject is poor for at least two reasons: firstly, because the phenomenon is new and often misunderstood, and secondly, because there have not been enough campaigns and CSR actions in the true sense of the word.

Connections between corporate social responsibility and public relations are no new subject to international specialized literature and neither are they so for the discussions taking place at international conferences and forums. For Romania, however, this is a less discussed subject, especially in the context where specialists say that CSR is often mistaken for the PR. Consulting specialized literature showed us the fact that corporate social responsibility and public relations have many aspects in common. Although they are not the same thing, their instruments and work techniques are similar. Precisely because the CSR activity is communicated and promoted by instruments and techniques of public relations, it has come to be considered another instrument of work of PR, fact that we cannot deny entirely. This statement is proved by specialized literature by identifying the similarities between the two and by clearly specifying the fact that a CSR strategy will always be communicated and strengthened by the PR activity, and the transfer of image between the company initiating the CSR campaign and the latter is never denied by authors and researchers. Therefore, beside its primordial purpose of offering support to communities, CSR activity will bring both financial and image benefits to companies.

In the context of data offered by specialized literature, the empirical research part of this work has established several sets of research questions that addressed aspects linked to the connections between corporate social responsibility and public relations. Using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, we chose to collect data through a content analysis based on newspaper articles, a semi-structured interview administered to public relations specialists and an opinion poll administered to Cluj-Napoca citizens.

Regarding content analysis based on press articles, research questions referred to the visibility of the corporate social responsibility activity in the Romanian written press, as well as to the visibility of connections between CSR and PR at the level of written press, the reason being the attempt to outline a general image of the degree in which corporate social responsibility is known, and to ascertain the degree of interest of the press towards this phenomenon. The analysis of the

articles of the four chosen newspapers (*Adevărul, Jurnalul Național, Gândul* and *Cotidianul*) revealed to us the fact that, generally speaking, the concept of corporate social responsibility appears in the press written in Romania quite summarily presented. Moreover, we can say that the overlapping between the CSR and PR is visible in those articles that analyze the concept and process of CSR but their number is too small to grant certainty in this sense. Another aspect that was of interest to us within this section refers to the main domains of social involvement where CSR programs had been carried out in Romania. In this sense we made an analysis of the main campaigns having a CSR activity in Romania, through the activity reports published on the specialized site www.responsabilitatesociala.ro. This part of analysis was meant to complete the content analysis of newspapers, the goal being that of more profoundly underscoring the reality of CSR activity in Romania. Thus, the main social fields where companies in Romania got involved are education, the social field, and the environment.

The second set of research questions that we presented at the beginning of this work referred to such aspects as the opinion of public relations specialists regarding the connections between corporate social responsibility and public relations. In this sense an interview was administered to a number of 11 specialists activating in this field at present. The fact that PR specialists were chosen is no coincidence. The first reason would be that specialized literature has proved that many times CSR activity is subordinated to PR departments or at least it is carried out in close connection with them, and the second reason is that in our opinion PR specialists are the most entitled to speak about the connections between CSR and PR, about the overlapping of the two and about the consequences linking the company image to the CSR activity. The semi-structured interview revealed to us the fact that there are no major differences between the opinions of PR specialists regarding the CSR and PR overlapping. The majority of interviewees agreed with the fact that the two overlap within the activity of the company, being work instruments of the same whole. We mention, however, that only four of the specialists answered that the CSR and PR activities can be equaled, which determines us to say that CSR and PR are just complementary within the activities of the company, one cannot replace the other and vice-versa. To underscore the opinion of specialists, the latter were asked to say whether there is an image transfer between the CSR campaign and the company that carries it out. The answers prove the fact that this happens to a large extent, thus we can say that, from the point of view of PR specialists, the CSR activity is a good way of improving the image of the company, although this is not the primordial purpose of this activity. Similarly, interviews proved that PR specialists feel generally able to deal with the activity of

corporate social responsibility, which is not entirely surprising, especially as it is explained by specialists in terms of the similar instruments and work techniques of CSR and PR (but specific for PR), and of CSR campaigns being always communicated through instruments and techniques of public relations.

As regards the third set of research questions, it referred to the opinion of Cluj-Napoca citizens regarding the involvement of companies in social life. The answers were obtained through an opinion poll administered in the city of Cluj-Napoca which revealed, first of all, that generally speaking the extent of knowledge of the term and features of CSR is quite low among Cluj-Napoca citizens. Moreover, a profile of those who know the term better could not be established since there were persons of either sex, of all age groups and education levels who knew about CSR. Another aspect that the opinion poll wanted to emphasize was the degree of interest of Cluj-Napoca citizens regarding the involvement of companies in social life. We can thus draw the conclusion that there is, in general, a high enough interest in social life and problems, and the involvement of companies in society is considered by a majority of respondents as welcome. Nonetheless, the opinion poll proves that the visibility of the already carried out CSR activity is quite low. Last but not least, in order to complete the data obtained through content analysis and semi-structured interviews administered (which showed that there is a transfer of image between the CSR activity and the initiating company and that the two processes are work instruments of the same whole, the opinion poll also brought this aspect into discussion, through variables specific to PR (image, reputation, popularity and promotion). The reason was to see if the citizens, who are the direct beneficiaries of messages sent by companies, consider that a company carrying out programs of social involvement has positive benefits in terms of its reputation, popularity and image in general. The data revealed the fact that the majority of the respondents consider that the reputation, popularity and image in general of the company are to a large extent positively affected by the company's social involvement programs. This fact determines us to say that CSR campaigns are perceived by citizens to a large extent as being an image component and therefore a PR component.

As a conclusion to our entire approach we can say that, in general, the activity of corporate social responsibility, although little known in our country both at individual and press level, represents a phenomenon that is sufficiently appreciated and therefore could be implemented and accepted by citizens. One notices an increased interest from citizens regarding the social involvement of companies in the community. As regards the connections between CSR and PR, the main object of this research, it is noted that the two overlap to a great extent within the activity of

the company, being work instruments of the same whole. The transfer of image between the companies carrying out CSR programs and the campaigns is clearly visible both at the level of citizens and at the level of PR specialists. A slight visibility in this sense was also noted following the content analysis of newspaper articles that on the other hand confirmed that the subject is not much debated because of not being well known.

The present research, by having recourse to specialized literature, on the one hand, and to quantitative and qualitative research methods on the other hand, tried to create an overview of the perception of corporate social responsibility in connection with public relations both from the point of view of theory and of social action, as its title mentions. Moreover, our approach can also be seen as the beginning of more detailed research and analysis, focused on a larger research space, in both time and space, covering the national territory, with the purpose of educating, rendering conscious of, and properly using this phenomenon to beneficial purposes.

Limits of the Work and Research Perspectives

As any research, this work presents several sets of limits. These limits can be grouped in the following three categories: limits pertaining to the choice of the case study, limits pertaining to the chosen research methods and to the way they were applied and limits pertaining to the perspectives used by research. Based on these limits, several research perspectives will be traced with the purpose of improving the results obtained.

The limits pertaining to the case study refer to the choice of only one city for study, namely the city of Cluj-Napoca. Due to the fact that the latter Cluj-Napoca is a city in full economic swing, dynamic and dominated by a multitude of social situations, the data collected during the Cluj-Napoca analysis cannot be generalized at the level of other towns or cities. Moreover, the present work intends to underscore the social situation of the city of Cluj-Napoca and the perceptions of its citizens regarding a new phenomenon, corporate social responsibility and its connections with public relations. Being a university city, specialized knowledge, though scarce, could be richer than in other towns.

The limits pertaining to research methods refer to the chosen research methods and the way they were applied. First of all, as regards content analysis, research took into consideration the monitoring of the press for a period of time that ended in February 2010. Although all articles published until that moment have been taken into consideration their number proved to be small

enough and the information given, especially in the context of the connections between corporate social responsibility and public relations, was scarce and not always consistent. At the same time, only four national newspapers were taken into consideration, a larger number being perhaps more adequate in order to obtain more complex results. Moreover, having in mind the fact that the third most widely circulated newspaper in Romania, *Evenimentul Zilei* did not offer any useful article to our research, we had to select the fifth most widely circulated, namely *Cotidianul*. Regarding the administering of semi-structured interviews one must state that although we have chosen interviewees that were representative for their field of activity, the number of administered interviews is small when considering the importance of the theme. Last but not least, the opinion poll was administered by using quota sampling. As quota sampling is no probability sampling, the extent of generalization of collected data is limited.

The third set of limits refers to the necessity of approaching the subject within the socio-political context in Romania. As it is still struggling with international economic crisis, Romania is at present perhaps not in the best situation to accept programs of corporate social responsibility and invest in such activities as well as in activities related to company image, which may generate reticence regarding the subject and may even distort information at a certain point. Although in the past years investment in this direction has started to be remarked, with the onset of the world economic crisis company budgets began to shrink. Moreover, at the level of Romanian Government the necessity of social involvement is not properly acknowledged, although in many developed countries the governments started such initiatives even before companies did. In general in Romania, it was the foreign companies that began a minimum of CSR activities by adapting various strategies to the Romanian context. Then, the subject could have been approached from the point of view of the law but in Romania such laws do not exist. Romanian Government adopted in 2005 an Emergency Ordinance on environment protection stipulating that companies are compelled to have a representative to supervise the harmonious interaction of the company with the environment²⁴. As regards other characteristics of corporate social responsibility one notices that they did not receive the proper legal framework, regulations being due to other criteria. However, the implementation of international standards ISO 26000/2008 for corporate social responsibility was a step forward towards an adequate activity in this direction. On the other hand, another limit of research refers to the other concept we approached, namely that of public relations, which,

²⁴ The law can be accessed here:
http://www.responsabilitatesociala.ro/images/stories/ilustratii_articole/indaco/OUG_195-2005.pdf

because of being little known and, even worse, mistaken for customer care, has made us approach it through the intermediary of other variables that define it in the opinion poll. Its straightforward expression would have led to confusions as, in the case of many respondents, it would not have answered the goals of the study. Moreover, questioning respondents about this concept would have complicated the questionnaire and data collection. Last but not least, an important limit of this study is given by the scarce literature regarding corporate social responsibility on Romanian territory which made it more difficult to confirm certain data and make sure that obtained data were sufficiently clear.

Based on these limits of research one may outline research perspectives that could lead to a more detailed image of the way in which corporate social responsibility in connection with public relations is perceived by specialists and the public. Firstly, the research performed in the city of Cluj-Napoca may represent a starting point of similar research at national level that could determine the extent of knowledge of this phenomenon for the whole country, also pointing out the way in which Romanians feel the need for the involvement of companies in social life. Subsequently, a national study could underscore various social problems facing the population as well as the ways of social involvement expected from companies. Moreover, a study at national level would clarify even further the issues regarding the connection between corporate social responsibility and public relations and especially the consequences of the transfer of image between companies carrying out CSR programs and their campaigns. At the same time, a national study could outline a clearer image of the visibility of companies that are already involved in CSR programs and the impact of the campaigns they developed.

A more detailed analysis of the press, based on a greater number of newspapers and articles would better reflect the situation of the visibility of the process of corporate social responsibility in Romanian media as well as the way in which its connections to public relations are seen and approached.

Last but not least, a larger number of semi-structured interviews would generate more accurate data regarding the perceptions of public relations specialists on the subject and would bring more arguments to demonstrate the connections between corporate social responsibility and public relations. Moreover, it would clearly demonstrate whether those in charge with CSR in Romania are public relations specialists or not; and if yes, to what extent.

In all this context, future research could give a more complex picture regarding both corporate social responsibility taken *per se* and seen in its connection to public relations.

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