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SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF INTERNATIONAL RETAIL CHAINS IN POLAND

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SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF INTERNATIONAL RETAIL CHAINS IN POLAND

Summary: the paper reviews the core conceptual aspects of the corporate social responsibility as a principle of business viability, and then focuses on the relevant practices adopted by major international retail chains operating on the Polish market. The empirical background consists of fact-based accounts, drawn from either authors' field experience or retail companies' reports; the narrative research method was extensively used, with a view to generating a kaleidoscopic "rich picture" of current practices. The main conclusions include: the sharp increase in public's and authorities' sensitivity towards social responsibility in business, the switch from external pressure to self-commitment of retail companies in pursuing relevant actions, and the concern towards fitting measures taken in this respect into corporate strategies, also adapting them to peculiarities of Polish market.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility, retail trade, international retail chains, practices, Polish market

1. Introduction

The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is not particularly well-known in Poland. There were primarily foreign companies which introduced the idea, including retail multinationals which have been developing dynamically on this market ever since the mid-1990s. This article presents the evolution of the concept of CSR and its theoretical dimensions. Indication is made of the meaning of CSR in retail trade and an attempt is made to present chosen aspects of activities of CSR retail multinationals in Poland. The fundamental research propositions are:

- the current position of corporate retailing determines significant social responsibility at various levels,
- CSR strategy of retail companies may have a significant impact on the competitive standing of these companies,
- the CSR activities of retailers operating in Poland were imposed by the changing surrounding conditions, primarily by increased competition,
- the reporting of CSR activities in Poland has been relatively undeveloped,
- the CSR strategies of retail multinationals in Poland fit within the bounds of their global strategies, though the implementation methods are adapted to the specific situation of each operating market.

The analysis makes use of case studies, the websites of retail companies and their Polish branches, as well as of materials supplied directly by the analyzed companies.

2. The concept of social responsibility

In the light of ever stronger competition and ever growing client expectations, companies are searching for increasingly effective action. One concept which comes into play is that of CRS – Corporate Social Responsibility.

The modern sources of CSR reach back to the 1960s. Over the years, a variety of approaches towards this concept have been formed. One may point out three main aspects: Bowen's school, M. Friedman's school, and the modern school – the managerial concept – which combines the previous approaches and concerns the forming of a relationship with stakeholders.

Bowen (1953) believes that business, by the fact that it functions, is responsible towards society. Bowen and other authors who think in a similar manner introduced the

model and definitions behind CSR as a concept, in which business has the responsibility to serve society in a pro-active manner (Freeman, 1984)¹.

Contrary to Bowen’s school, the representatives of M. Friedman’s school believe that the only social responsibility of business is to earn as much money as possible for stakeholders. (Friedman, 1962). These thinkers favor the orientation of companies towards profit. As a defender of free market play M. Friedman indicates, at the same time, the need to attain profit in a legal, honest and ethical manner. M. Friedman believes that altruism, favored by Bowen, belongs to the government, the social security system and individuals. Additional arguments which M. Friedman uses against the companies acting beyond the economic sphere are as follows:

- disruption in the functioning of market mechanisms, which are a guarantee of freedom of the individual, his right to ownership, and
- undermining the basic criteria of assessing the functioning of companies and debilitating the main purpose of their operations, which is the attainment of profit (Friedman, 1970).

P. Drucker indicates that the cost of social programmers which burden company budgets may have a negative impact on their competitiveness and, as a result, lead to higher costs being placed on products (Drucker, 1973).

Modern views on CSR are a compromise of the presented views (Bennett, 1997; Murray and Vogel, 1997; Commission of the European Communities, 2001, 2002). The thinking behind this concept is that the application of Bowen’s philosophy may increase company profit in the manner pointed out by M. Friedman. Profit-oriented company operations do not always bring positive social effect and the philanthropic approach should be replaced by the managerial approach, based on the ethical awareness of social aspects of business and the need to include pro-social measures into company strategy (Zorska, 2007). A review of the definition of CSR in this respect is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Definitions of corporate social responsibility

Reference	Corporate social responsibility
Marineau P. A., 2000	Business activities taking into account and reconciling the interests of a wide circle of entities.
European Commission Green Paper, 2001	Refers not only to binding law, but also includes the voluntary integration of social and ecological elements in corporate activities, investing in human capital, the environment and relations with stakeholders.

¹ R. Bowd, L. Bowd, P. Harris, Communicating corporate social responsibility: an exploratory case study of a major UK retail centre, “Journal of Public Affairs” 2006: 6

	Concerns two CSR aspects: internal and external. CSR in the internal sense concerns the management of human resources, security and hygiene at work, adaptation towards change and management which takes into account the impact of the environment and natural resources. The external aspect of CSR concerns activities which take into account local communities, business partners, human rights and care for the global environment.
The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)	Concerns business contribution to sustain development. The company is expected to guarantee not only profit for its stakeholders, employee remuneration, consumer products and services, but must also respond to problems and act in keeping with social and environmental standards.
Griffin R.W., 2004	Set of obligations for the organisation for renewing and consolidating the society in which it functions.
Enderle G., 2004	The role of companies in economic life is not limited solely to generating capacity to attain maximum profit, but also concerns the implementation of specific social and ecological aims, as well as moral obligations to improve the quality of the social community within it functions.
Kotler Ph., Lee N., 2005	Long-term implementation of the company's objective and, at the same time, company involvement in ethical operations, economic development, improvement in the quality of living of the employees and of society as a whole
Mallenbaker, 2005	How companies manage the business process to produce an overall positive impact on society

Source: prepared by the authors

The supporters of the modern approach are convinced that the aim of the currently operating companies is not only the gain of expected profit, but also the meeting of social expectations. They stress that the market is not a sufficient regulator of economic life. Of fundamental importance is the statement that “the ethics of social responsibility fulfill corrective functions. Its purpose is to limit economic rationality in areas in which the market does not operate perfectly or at least sufficiently” (Ulrich, 2000).

As far as American corporations are concerned, the most common argument referring to CSR is increasing one's own competitiveness. A company which cares about social objectives and maintains a positive relationship with all stakeholders is usually respected by society and improves its public image (Kotler, 1986).

The outcome of such an approach is not only better client relations and greater sales, but also easier access to the capital market, qualified personnel, the forging of a positive relationship with entities of power. All of this translates into greater company

competitiveness. For this reason, responsible action in the social, ecological and economic spheres is not perceived as contrary to the basic objective of business i.e. attaining maximum profit (Marineau, 2000).

G. Enderle – in referring to the concept of CSR presented in Table 1 – indicates three areas of corporate responsibility: social, economic and ecological (Table 2).

Table 2. Areas of corporate responsibility

Areas of business corporate responsibility	Specification
The economic area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attainment of maximum profits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in the short tem in the long term • improved output: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> improved quality of productions factors, production processes, products and services • maintaining and improving owner/investor profit • reliability and honesty towards suppliers • fair competition • concerning employees: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - maintaining and creating jobs, - fair pay, guarantee of social - security, educating employees, - guaranteeing and abiding by the right which permits employee organisations to operate
The social area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • protection and promotion of health • respecting the law and regulations • respecting social habits • getting involved in social and cultural life
The ecological area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promoting the concept of sustained development • protecting natural resources • limiting pollution and the degradation of the natural environment

Source: G. Enderle, Global competition and corporate responsibilities of small and medium-sized enterprises, “Business Ethics: A European Review”, January 2004, vol. 13, no 1, p. 54.

Business activities should be directed towards looking for solutions which are socially acceptable, friendly to the natural environment and economically sound.

It is worth underlining that in the new “social model” approach the authors refers to the shaping of relations with all stakeholders, not only owners and shareholders – as in the financial approach – but also with clients, suppliers, employees, government and social institutions and society.

The comparison of both approaches is presented in table 3

Table 3. CSR in the light of shareholder value and stakeholder value

Reference	Approach of CSR	
	In terms of shareholder value	In terms of stakeholder value
Emphasis placed on:	Profitability over responsibility	Responsibility over profitability
The organisation is perceived as:	A tool for attaining the objective	Community of interests
The objective of the organisation is	To meet the expectations of the owners of the organisation	To meet the expectations of all groups interested in the existence of the organisation
Control indicators	Share value+dividend value to shareholders	Satisfaction of all stakeholders
Greatest difficulty	Ensure that the manager's objectives are implemented	Balancing the expectations of various interests
Corporate supervision by:	Independent directors and managers holding shares	Stakeholder representations
Managing stakeholders	Is significant	The objective an plays <hr/> important role
Social responsibility	A case for the individual, not the organisation	A matter for the individual and the organisation
Society is best served by:	Implementing one's own interest, economic rationality	Co-existence, implementation of common objectives; economic symbiosis

Source: B. de Wit, R. Meyer, Strategy - Process, Content, Context, (second edition), International Thomson Business Press, London and Boston, 1998, p. 812.

Corporate stakeholders are all those entities which may refer to both positive and negative company operations. This group primarily includes shareholders, employees, clients, suppliers, competitors, local authorities, local communities etc. The expectations of stakeholders towards companies vary considerably. These are presented in table 4.

Shareholders and owners focus primarily on the financial aspects of company operations, but also on access to accurate information. Effective company operations also depend on competent managerial staff. It is important to care about the company's image and to publicly care about its conduct.

Table 4. The expectations of company stakeholders

Stakeholders	Stakeholder expectations
Shareholders and owners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased goodwill • Maximising share value

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive and reliable information • Competent management authorities • Creating a positive corporate image
Employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satisfactory remuneration • Meeting one's obligations towards employees • Comprehensive and reliable information • Job satisfaction, opportunities to develop • Efficient company management • Effective solving of conflicts • Building of career paths
Clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product quality • Purchase process • Personification of client relationships • Corporate image
Suppliers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial credibility • Meeting one's obligations • Ethical conduct • Operational culture and professionalism • Effective communication
Competitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparency and clarity of action • Fair competition • Culture of business activities
Government and social institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compliance with legal standards • Cooperation in stimulating local and national development • Supporting institutions involved in charity and social activities • Protecting the natural environment
National and regional communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure operations which do not endanger society • Protecting the natural environment • Patronage and sponsoring of cultural, sports and scientific events • Co-financing activities supporting local development

Source: prepared by the authors

Employees focus their expectations on appropriate and reliable personnel policy, management competence and compliance to their obligations.

Clients are becoming ever more discernible as consumers and a good price for the product is no longer enough. They expect a high quality product and one which is safe. More and more important is the service process, particularly after sale, and the client's personal relationship with the company. Clients look at the ecological aspects of the company and its reputation, whilst greater social awareness means that clients often make their choice on the basis of company trustworthiness and public image. Buyers place greater emphasis on

production measures and work standards in the overall supply chain. Product value must reflect additional attributes which are often difficult to measure and even to grasp.

Research carried out by E.L. Daugerty indicates that, whilst choosing goods, almost three-quarters of British consumers (70%) are guided by assessment of the company's social commitment, whilst more than half state that they will not purchase the product of a company which does not feel responsible for social matters². In the USA, this tendency is extremely strong; as much as 80% of consumers tend to buy the products of companies which they perceive as socially responsible³. As indicated by research carried out by the Conference Board, two-thirds of European consumers purchase products guided by company social image, whilst one-fifth is willing to pay more for a product with a justified message in the background⁴. In Poland, according to research carried out by the Instytut Spraw Publicznych (Institute for Public Affairs), in 2004, almost 70% of those questioned declared that they had chosen a company because part of its sales went to a charitable cause.

The role of consumers in increasing the social responsibility of multinationals means that, more and more often, when they take a decision to purchase, they take into account the "ethical context" of corporate conduct⁵.

Compliance with agreements and contracts, partnership and high quality communication are key values for suppliers. The economic cost-effectiveness of mutual exchange also plays an important role. Competition demands fair practice and clear operations. Financial credibility, the meeting of one's obligations and information access are aspects which e.g. financial institutions demand.

Government institutions expect national and international legal standards and customs to be observed, they expect national and local development to be supported, in other words - active cooperation in the creation of wealth.

² Daugherty E.L., Public Relations and Social Responsibility, in: Handbook of Public Relations, R.L. Heath (ed.), Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, London 2001, p. 393.

³ Maignan I., Consumer's Perceptions of Corporate Social Responsibilities: a Cross-Cultural Comparison, "Journal of Business Ethics", March 2001, Vol. 30, No. 1.

⁴ Łudzińska K., Zdziarska M., CSR: rynkowe zasady, socjalne cele, „Businessman” 2003, September, p. 28.

⁵Jarczewska-Romaniuk A., Przedsiębiorstwa międzynarodowe, Oficyna Wydawnicza Branta, Bydgoszcz-Warszawa 2004, pp. 189-192.

There are many positive ways of engaging in business activities whilst being socially responsible. These include:

- the building of a good reputation in the eyes of clients, local communities, mass media and employees,
- gaining the trust of communities, local governments, clients, company employees,
- current company clients will remain loyal towards the company, whilst potential clients are very likely to select a company which is committed ethically and socially,
- consolidating and making more credible the company's mission by including social and ethic aspects,
- increasing the opportunity of finding investors; for many social credibility is just as important as financial credibility.⁶

Changes in the approach to social responsibility were, in a sense, imposed on companies. Two groups of factors led to the increase in the importance of responsible business. External factors constituted the first of these groups, connected with changes on the market and the global socio-political environment. The following may be mentioned: the growing saturation of sales outlets, greater global competition, increasing and more individualised purchaser requirements, the protection of consumer rights, the development of the movement for the protection of the environment, the emergence of active anti-globalisation groups and better information flow. The second group of factors concerns the internal problems of corporations, connected with the growing pressure on the part of stakeholders to improve company effectiveness and goodwill.

Currently, companies operate under the permanent scrutiny and pressure of social groups, NGOs, mass media and public opinion. Mass media publish and analyse in detail instances of irresponsible social conduct, which have a negative impact on company image and reputation; this leads to deterioration of a company financial results, competitive standing and in radical cases, this may lead to the company going bankrupt. And, conversely, when a company engages in pro-social activities addressed to various groups of stakeholders, this becomes a conscious process in creating the company's image. This is one of the fundamental attributes which distinguish a company from its competitors.

A basic measure of company commitment in implementing the concept of CSR is the codes of procedure and codes of ethical conduct. These belong to a company's most

⁶ Sudoł T. ., Społeczna odpowiedzialność biznesu jako czynnik rozwoju przedsiębiorstw, in: Kulturowe i kadrowe problemy internacjonalizacji przedsiębiorstw, SGH, Warszawa 2008, pp. 253-254.

important set of principles, ethics, rules of procedure or expression of corporate philosophy concerning the environment, and in particular matters, such as responsibility towards employees, stakeholders, consumers and the natural environment⁷.

Marlin and Marlin (2003) identified three stages in the development of reporting CSR activities⁸. The first of these dates back to the 1970s and constitutes a mix of advertising and annual reports, which referred to environmental protection, but which were not linked to corporate activities. The late 1980s witnessed the emergence of the social audit, which analysed company activities in terms of social responsibility towards society, employees, consumers, suppliers and investors. One of the pioneers of this approach was the Body Shop. The third stage, which emerged in the late 1990s, was characterised by consolidation of the social audit by defining external certificate standards.

The dynamic development of the CRS concept imposed the application of uniform standards, in keeping with which it was possible to assess the real degree of company commitment to pro-social activities. The best known international standards are as follows: AA 1000 (Accountability 1000), GRI (Global Reporting Initiative), SA 8000 (Social Accountability 8000), EMAS (Eco Management and Audit Scheme) and ISO 14001. The last two standards i.e. EMAS and ISO 14001, serve as instruments which support the pro-ecological activities of companies. SA 8000, which came into being on the basis of the ISO 9000 model, is the most universal in character and is applied to companies engaged in any kind of activity and operating in any country.

An important role in assessing company achievement concerning the implementation of the concept of socially responsible business is met by the FTSE 4 GOOD and DJSGI (Dow Jones Sustainability Group Indexes) review indicators. In the FTSE 4 GOOD index it is necessary to attain ecological sustainability, to develop a positive relationship with stakeholders and to observe human rights. The DJSGI is a group of indicators set up in order to determine the market standing of the company by using its financial results.

The meeting by the company of given standards and the holding of certificates strengthen its market standing, not only by shaping a positive image, but, above all, by

⁷ E.F. Carasco, J.B. Singh, The Content and Focus of Codes of Ethics of the World's Largest Transnational Corporations, "Business and Society Review" 2003, Vol. 108, No 1, p.71.

⁸ P. Jones, D. Comfort, D. Hiller, Marketing and corporate social responsibility within food stores, "British Food Journal" 2007 Vol. 109, No 8,

increasing investment in the company's shares and forging better relationships with business partners and social or government institutions.

Standards are expressed in codes on procedure and codes on ethics. The majority of codes in force, depending on the entities which adopt them, may be divided into five groups (see Table 5.).

Table 5. Codes regulating the conduct of socially responsible companies

Reference	Characteristics
Company codes	Unilaterally approved by given corporations which may concern both one's own activities as well as the activities of cooperating companies, suppliers and sub-contractors etc.
Trade codes	Elaborated and approved by given companies belonging to the same line of business
Stakeholder codes	The outcome of negotiations between given interested parties, such as companies, their representatives, NGOs and trade unions; government representatives may also be involved in this process
Model codes	These are used as models for companies concerning the elaboration of one's own codes of procedure i.e. Principles for Global Corporate Responsibility – Benchmarks, Social Accountability 8000, Global Sullivan Principles, and Global Compact.
Codes which are negotiated at international level as part of an international organisation	OECD Guidelines for Multinational Corporations, Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy.

Source: R. Jenkins, Corporate Codes of Conduct: Self-Regulation in a Global Economy, UNRISD Technology, Business and Society Programme Paper nr 2, April 2001.

Audit firms publish the reports on Corporate Social Responsibility. The best known and most credible reports are based on model codes: The Global Reporting Initiative, The Global Sullivan Principle, Social Accountability 8000, and Sunshine Standards for Corporate Reporting to Stakeholders, The Keidanren Charter for Good Corporate Behavior⁹.

3. CSR in retailer's strategies

The social responsibility of retail trade has always been an important aspect in its functioning, due to the type of operation involved, which entailed close contact with the client positioned, one might say, in his natural environment. Both the scope and size of CSR in retail trade evolved together with the change of situation in the sector itself, as well as in

⁹ Council for Economic Priorities, shopping for a Better World: The Quick and Easy Guide to All Your Socially Responsible Shopping, New York 2002.

its surroundings. The most important factors concerning these changes are as follows: the growing significance of retail trade companies in terms of distribution, increased competition in trade, client expectations and greater social awareness. As a result, measures taken by companies in this sector became part of the general tendencies expressed in the CSR, but only in terms of specific activities.

Under fragmented market conditions, the social responsibility of retailers boiled down to supplying clients with the goods they expected (Hutt, and Burnett, 1982). The retailer was perceived as an agent acting in the interest of the buyer. The guarantee of quality of service was the direct contact between clients and shop owners.

The emergence of department stores (in the latter half of the 20th century), followed by other forms of mass sales: supermarkets, discount stores, hypermarkets and “category killers”, triggered the introduction of specific standards such as return-of-goods guarantees or principles such as “guaranteed lowest price” or “satisfaction or money-back guarantee”. In the contemporary world, this is no longer enough. Consumers (both directly and indirectly, through various organisations) brought social pressure to bear on retailers to supply only what is good for the purchaser. The concept of “good” is very comprehensive. It means the supply of products which are safe in terms of the purchaser’s health, but also environmentally friendly; it also means ensuring that the process of rendering services does not devastate or destroy the natural environment.

S.C. Hollander (2002) notes that contemporary retailers not only offer products, but may also be the creators of a specific style of life; for example, the American outlets The Gap or The Limited tell their consumers, in part, what they should wear and, in part, characterise their buyers. The role of trade in creating a given style of life is becoming ever more significant. Focused retailers are not only “gatekeepers” who barricade entry on the market by unwanted goods, but they also constantly increase their impact on what is to appear on the market by offering goods carrying their own brand.

This trend means that, more and more often, retailers manage supply chains, for which they become responsible. This leads to their implementing social responsibility standards which they elaborate themselves in the supply chains; they also monitor compliance with these standards. Another aspect of this responsibility is the ethics standards on cooperation with the supplier, who is frequently a weaker market partner; these standards would be favourable to both parties in the exchange process. Their application favours the forging of long-term relationships with manufacturers; this is an important factor in the creation of permanent competitive edge by retail companies (Śmigielska, 2009).

An important role in creating a given style of life is currently carried out by shopping centres, which are also places where various types of services are offered, e.g. cultural services – for this reason they are referred to as shopping and leisure centres. Hollander (2002) compares the role of these contemporary centres to that of the old outdoor marketplace (the local market). He notes that these fulfill important social and recreational functions, at least for some market segments. Frequently they are the place where young people gather in search of casual meetings or who go to concerts and cinemas.

The retail trade remains an important employer, despite the tendency to replace the traditional methods by self-service and progressive computerisation, since work in this sector is frequently perceived as not requiring higher qualifications. For this reason, trade is responsible for recruiting employees, motivating them, creating the right work atmosphere and organising training sessions. The application by retailers of CSR principles towards their employees, under conditions of stiff market rivalry, is directly responsible for making them more competitive, which favours their popularity.

The outcome of retail structure development is more shops and larger shops. The location of retail outlets (particularly premises with large surface areas, which often look like commercial centres) may significantly impact the functioning of local communities. Companies which are guided by the principles of CSR should ensure that they are located in premises which are well adapted to the current structure, not disfiguring the surroundings and whose operation does not lead to greater noise or communication difficulties.

Rapid economic growth in the latter half of the 20th century brought with it negative effects in the form of devastation to the natural environment. Many social organisations and movements were founded and they started bringing pressure to bear on government policy, prompting the introduction of provisions on environmental protection, as well as provisions concerning companies, including retail enterprises. The growth in social interest in this problem and its propagation through mass media led to retailers demonstrating more and more often socially responsible conduct, with the objective of being perceived as good “corporate citizens” (Gunther, 2006). As a result, trade outlets started putting into practice a range of activities supporting different organisations and campaigns in the form of sponsoring. Apart from nationwide activities, it is the local environment activities which play an important role, organised by one or several shops belonging to the network. The driving force for this approach is the willingness to build a positive image in the local environment. As noted by Middlemiss (2003), “CSR is taking centre stage to provide more sustainable long term brand value”.

CSR retailers' operations practice is the result of their tradition, steps taken by various pressure groups and the competition, the image-building strategy and measures adopted in response to current social problems. These not only help building a positive image for a given retail organisation (whose impact on profitability is difficult to measure) but also facilitate the creation of sustainable competitive edge (as e.g. relations with suppliers or employees), and may also constitute the basis for long-term company strategy. As Porter and Kramer (2006) noted, CSR may signify not only costs, obligations and charity work – it may also be an opportunity, innovation and source of competitive advantage.

3.1. CSR as a source of competitive advantage - success story of Body Shop Inc.

The Body Shop Inc. cosmetics shops network was founded in the 1970s, at a time when it was universal practice to test cosmetics on animals and the origin of products was not of particular importance to purchasers (Galas, 1999). The Body Shop stood out amongst the competition by offering natural cosmetics, obtained from renewable sources and produced on commission by the company in African countries. These products were not tested on animals and their packaging could be reused (a client coming with his own packaging was given a lower price for the product), or disposed of relatively easily. The standard of advertising on the cosmetics market through the mass media was replaced by the Body Shop by sponsoring of campaigns protecting the natural environment. Both product and promotion strategy made use of CSR elements. An important factor in the building of the Body Shop Inc. image as a socially responsible network was aid offered to the inhabitants of poor African countries by locating production there. The rapid development of the Body Shop chain is evidence that strategy based on CSR may become the basis for long-term company success. The Body Shop also significantly helped to defining ethical standards on the cosmetics market, such as: “product not tested on animals”, or “product safe for the natural environment”.

The Body Shop's spectacular success was also, probably, partly due to the fact that its target segment were middle-aged women; as proven by T. Wagner, P. Bicen, Z.R. Hall (2008), the latter are more sensitive to operations which are not socially responsible, as the female personality is less economical and more philanthropic than the personality of males. This sensitivity also increases with the age of the client.

At the large trade enterprises which do not offer products marked with their own brand, or in whose selection of goods these products have a relatively small share, it is often the case that, in CSR operations, those measures prevail that are important from the point of

view of the nature of retail trade, in other words, measures addressed to employees and the local community.

3.2. Significance of CSR towards employees - The Wal-Mart experience

CSR adoption as an important element in company strategy was connected with specific experience, as in the case of Wal-Mart, which is currently the world's largest company.

As early as the late 1960s, the network introduced changes in management and employee relations, as it was recognised that, by caring for employees, treating them well and increasing their loyalty to the company, it was possible to save time and money spent on lawyers in disputes with trade unions (Walton and Huey, 1994, p.114). Employees were referred to as partners, whilst the principles used in relation to them e.g. sharing profit, motivating them, rewarding them, constant communication and openness occupied an important position in the private principles of management applied by the founder of Wal-Mart - Sam Walton (Oblój, 2001, pp. 214-215). This led to employees becoming committed to company matters and brought about the company's growth based on innovation. Employees themselves were at the origin of many innovations. Unfortunately, after Sam Walton's death (Walton was regarded as the master of personal contact), these principles lost their meaning (Małkowska, 2003). Sam Walton also strived for his company to be accepted in the local environment; this was evident in the offering of grants to talented pupils, in that the organisation of these events belonged to the managers of given shops. It is worth noting that this is a method of building a positive image not only in the local environment but also amongst potential future employees.

3.3. The impact of external factors on CSR

Sometimes, external pressure forced CSR activities to take place. An example may be the Rainforest Action Network, which, on St Patrick's Day, in 2000, broke the security code of Home Depot intercom system and electronically submitted the following message: "Beware buyers, in row seven you will find mahogany which was ripped out of the heart of the Amazon Rainforest (Reis, Betton and Pena, 2004). In this way, Home Depot was forced to analyse its orders and relinquish profits in favour of protecting the natural environment.

Modern trade enterprises, which are organised as networks, frequently holding a dominant distribution channel position, employing hundreds or even thousands of workers, increasing their share in the market of goods, having their own brand and impacting

significantly the local community through their trade outlets, are burdened with considerable responsibility towards society. It is not only the law and various pressure groups which force CSR activities to take place, but, above all, greater competition. Trade enterprises should formulate CSR strategies so as to ensure that their implementation does not only mean costs, but also helps them gaining a sustainable advantage over their competitors. The following statement admirably reflects the concept of social responsibility: “The companies that survive longest are the ones that work out what they uniquely can give to the world, not just growth or money but their excellence, their respect for others, or their ability to make people happy. Some call those things a soul” (Handy, 1999, p. 126).

4. Development of CSR in the Polish retail sector

In Poland, the development of CSR, and, especially, the publicity related to such activities in retailing result from the expansion of foreign companies on the Polish market over the recent years. It is true that, in the centrally planned economy, efforts were made to analyze the so-called "social costs" of trade, including the noise caused by night deliveries, waste disposal and the way in which staff were treated, but they had minor significance. The social and political changes of the late 1980s introduced the liberalization of trade and, consequently, often resulted in the failure to comply with the basic rules of the past – setting prices, meeting specific standards (which were much more restrictive for Polish products as compared with imported goods), or hygiene-related requirements. Increasing demand for retail services and the underdeveloped retail structures (hypermarkets, discount shops and “category killer” outlets were introduced as late as in the 1990s) resulted in the failure to observe the rights of the buyers. This was reflected in the press, which criticized the following phenomena (Szewczyk, 2002):

- outdated goods offered to clients,
- inconsistency between prices in self-service outlets – prices on tags were lower than the actual prices,
- advertised products were not available,
- failure to comply with hygiene and safety standards,
- exaggerated behaviour of security staff, treating clients as potential thieves,
- some standard services were not available or restricted – for example the use of payment cards in mass-service outlets.

Social criticism also focused on the activities carried out by large retail companies in their relationships with suppliers:

- fees and charges for selling activities,
- delayed payments, which led to the insolvency of low-capital producers,
- imposing unfavourable terms of agreements, product requirements and terms of delivery on the producers.

Another social concern was caused by the location of mass merchandisers outlets not on the outskirts of cities – a common practice in industrialised nations – but in the close vicinity of town centres and residential areas. This was, to a certain degree, stimulated by small retailers, who were concerned about their market position.

Criticism focused on FMCG foreign retail chains, rapidly developing on the Polish market. It also concerned direct sales companies, including Amway and Zepter, which entered the Polish market at a relatively early stage and developed dynamically. In the case of Amway, a large part of society disapproved its organizational culture, especially the applied system of incentives offered to distributors. Much publicity was given to the events of clients' careless choices of purchased products – buyers often acted in an irrational way and on a sudden impulse, and the blame was put on distributors.

Such activities were possible due to the lack of regulation concerning the above discussed issues, the dispersed production facilities, the lack of negotiation skills and experience in dealing with large trading chains as well as the competitive advantage of powerful retailers – in most cases large foreign trading chains.

Regulation was gradually introduced but its implementation faced a number of obstacles:

- the Act of 16 April 1993 on counteracting unfair competition, with later amendments. In terms of this Act, unfair competition included, in particular, confusing names of companies, falsified or purposefully confusing signs of the origin of goods and services, confusing signs of products and services, violations of company secrets, encouraging to terminate or violate business agreements, product "clones", unjustified criticism or unfair approval, hindering access to the market, bribery of public officials, unfair or banned advertising, organizing Ponzi scheme sales systems¹⁰,

¹⁰ <http://www.lex.com.pl/bap/student/Dz.U.2003.153.1503.html>, 22.07.2009.

- HACCP, as provided by the Act of 11 May 2001, on food health conditions (HACCP in Retail Trade, the Polish Entrepreneurship Agency) and the Institute for Organization and Management in Industry ORGMASZ, March, 2004¹¹,
- the Act on the terms of payment in trade transactions of 1 January 2004, specifying the creditor's and debtor's obligations in trade transactions¹²,
- the Act of 11 May 2007 on the development and functioning of large-surface commercial facilities, regulating the development and legalization of the existing commercial outlets exceeding the surface of 400 m²¹³.

Simultaneously, the Polish market was being saturated with new formats of retailing. The increasing competition was accompanied by the policies adopted by foreign retail chains towards consumers, as well as local communities and suppliers. Strategic significance was attributed to image building.

In this respect, the most active chains of hypermarkets included Tesco, Carrefour and Real, the largest chain of discount shops – Biedronka, and Ikea – the unrivalled market leader. The above companies engaged in charity events and environmental projects.

The rapid development of hypermarkets has been noticeable on the Polish market since the mid 1990s, so, in 2007, the market appeared to be saturated, which may account for the activities undertaken by the chains in the area of CSR. Tesco, Carrefour and Real actively engage in the social programme “Share your meal with others”, initiated by Danone. The programme's objective is to counteract the cases of underfed children in Poland. It is based on food collection, also organized by commercial outlets. The collected food is transferred by the Food Bank to schools, day care and child care centres¹⁴.

Also, retail chains regularly engage in holiday-related events; most chains collect food which is offered to the poor; Santa Claus and Child's Day are opportunities for offering gifts to children's homes and sick children from healthcare centres.

The frequent targets of charity projects are healthcare centres. For example, the Biedronka chain, in cooperation with Caritas – the Warsaw and Prague District Diocese, has

¹¹ [http://www.carsekt.pl/pobierz/haccp\(3\).pdf](http://www.carsekt.pl/pobierz/haccp(3).pdf), 22.07.2009.

¹² <http://www.przepisnabiznes.pl/dzialalnosc-gospodarcza/co-wynika-z-ustawy-o-terminach-zaplacy-w-transakcjach-handlowych-2.html>, 22.07.2009.

¹³ <http://www.abc.com.pl/serwis/du/2007/0880.htm>, 22.07.2009

¹⁴ <http://www.carrefour.pl/>

been offering help for a number of years to 2 children's hospitals and the Child's Health centre at Międzylesie¹⁵.

Retail chains also offer occasional material and financial assistance to different organizations in the periods of crisis. For example, Biedronka offered assistance to the Centre for the Blind at Laski after the fire in one of the wings of the building, and its Wyszaków distribution centre donated a defibrillator to one of "ZOZ" cardio-surgery units.

Environmental protection has become to be one of CSR major activities. A significant step in this field, taken by most of large-surface outlets in 2008, was the abandoning of the use of disposable plastic shopping bags¹⁶. Instead, paper and biodegradable and cotton or plastic non-disposable bags were introduced. The first company which adopted this policy was Ikea, followed by Carrefour, Tesco and other large-surface commercial chains. This project was based on several months of cooperation between ecological organizations, local governments and large-surface commercial chains.

Environmental protection is also supported by energy saving programmes. Tesco, relying on its overseas experience, introduced a new solar and wind energy system in its outlet at Zdzieszowice¹⁷.

In its programme "Carrefour – Friend of the Forest", the chain, in cooperation with other organizations, helped children in planting 1.5 thousand trees. In 2007, it organized an educational forest excursion for children from 10 schools from 10 different towns. The objective of this undertaking was to increase awareness of the need to protect the flora and fauna and the impact of the environment on climate change.

Sometimes, CSR activities respond to a specific situation. An example is the situation in which a blind person led by a guide dog was not allowed to enter one of Carrefour outlets, leading to much criticism on the part of the general public. In response to that, the Management of Carrefour Polska decided to introduce the relevant procedures as of 14 May 2008, allowing blind people led by their dog guides to do shopping. Carrefour Polska also got engaged in supporting programmes "A friendly place for assisting dogs". In cooperation with the CZE-NE-KA Foundation, it launched an educational campaign for teaching children with special needs to do shopping while being en led by dog guides. Another aspect of the activities carried out by foreign retail chains in Poland is their cooperation with suppliers. For

¹⁵ <http://www.biedronka.pl/>

¹⁶ *Wycofanie foliówek zagrozi środowisku?*, wp.pl, 11-06-2008, www.portalspozywczy.pl

¹⁷ *Energooszczędne sklepy*, <http://www.tesco.pl/ekologia>

example, Tesco stresses the significance of activities in favour of promoting Polish products through the proper product labeling, encouraging exportation to Tesco European outlets and organizing conferences for suppliers¹⁸.

Retail companies differ in terms of promoting relationships with their employees. While Tesco, for example, stresses the importance of creating jobs, hiring unemployed people, people with no experience and the disabled, Biedronka engages in preventive health projects and events for its employees' children¹⁹.

In 2008, three retail companies, Avon, Ikea and Tesco, were placed on the list of CSR good practices, drawn up by the Forum of Responsible Business, which has been operating in Poland since 2000. Avon was distinguished for launching a prevention campaign related to women's breast cancer, Ikea – for the Green House – an ecological educational project, and Tesco – for mitigating the adverse impact of its activities on the environment.

CSR activities undertaken by foreign retail chains are long-term and repeated programmes (they are carried out before Christmas and Easter and at the beginning of the school year), while other events are occasional. They mainly target children, the disabled and local communities. Most activities are conducted by the largest retail chains which operate nationwide; they may be initiated by the entire chain – when a project is financed by the corporate budget, or when all the outlets are obligated to be engaged – or at a local level. Assessment of such activities is not easy, since most companies do not make information on CSR activities available on their web pages.

5. The activities of retail multinationals in Poland in the context of their CSR global strategies

The development of CSR activities undertaken by foreign retail companies in the late 1990s leads to the question regarding their role in the companies' overall global strategies. The analysis will also focus on the awareness of Polish managers with respect to the way in which such issues are reported. Reporting is based on the data obtained from the mother company's and its Polish subsidiary's websites, as well as information directly communicated by the companies. The analysis is confined to selected direct sales companies and Carrefour. The choice of companies is determined by the advancement of CSR activities and the possibility of obtaining reliable data.

¹⁸ <http://www.tesco.pl/polskie-produkty/co-robimy.php>

¹⁹ Conference "Leaders of Responsible Business", Warsaw, 16.11.2006, <http://www.biedronka.pl/str/2/i/652.php>

The direct sales system was one of the first new forms of retailing introduced in Poland as a result of foreign investment. Oriflame Poland Spółka z o.o. (a limited liability company), Amway, and Zepter International Poland started their distribution activities as early as in the early 1990s (Tajer 1995). Their wide range of goods and high standards of service quality position them well on the unsaturated market. Those companies also faced problems – one of them, for example, resulting from the show of a film presenting the meeting of Amway distributors; the company's organizational culture, not appealing to the Polish general public, had an adverse impact on Amway's image. Other critical remarks refer to the situations in which buying decisions are made on a sudden impulse, because clients are not able to make rational choices when pushed by salespeople who apply persuasive sales techniques. In this context, it was much appreciated that, in 1995, the Polish Direct Sales Association (PSSB – its members represent most of major companies operating in Poland) introduced the Direct Sales Code. The Code follows, to a large degree, its European (FEDSA) and world (WFDSA) counterparts.

The most important provisions of the Code include (European Federation of Direct Selling Associations, 2000):

- the salesperson is not allowed to apply confusing and unfair sales practices,
- demonstration of the offered product and necessary explanations should be thorough, especially with respect to its price, possible lending conditions and terms of payment, the consumer's right to withdraw from an agreement or to return the product, warranty conditions, post-sales servicing and terms of delivery,
- the company and its staff are obliged to include a notice in the order agreement, allowing the Consumer to withdraw from the agreement within 10 days of the date of concluding it, and to get a refund.

As regards salesperson-client relationships, the Code goes much further than the binding Act of 1 July 2000 in terms of certain consumer rights, and in the area of the consumer's right to return products, it guarantees the rights not offered in non-direct selling agreements.

Also, international direct selling companies introduce CSR activities on the Polish market. In connection with the character of their activities, their positive image is an

important source of competitiveness. For example, Amway stresses that social responsibility is not confined to social aid programmes but also includes the following issues:²⁰

- respect for staff,
- cooperation with Amway's partners based on partnership relationships and trust,
- relationships with customers based on mutual trust,
- offering safe and high quality products,
- concern about the environment through the protection of natural resources,
- engagement in social issues.

Those activities, however, with the exception of the One by One campaign offering assistance to children, are not sufficiently developed. More information is available on Amway Corporation's website.

Cosmetics companies competing on the Polish market - Avon Cosmetics Polska and Oriflame, have similar experience. Avon's global website describes CRS activities related to such areas as Economics, Empowerment, Environment, Governance, People & Diversity, Philanthropy, Product Responsibility, Stakeholder Engagement, Supply Chain, Workplace & Safety, while the company's Polish website presents a detailed description of social programmes. They include two social campaigns: "Avon against breast cancer", focused on increasing awareness and preventive measures, and "Avon against violence", offering assistance to women who have experienced physical, psychological, economic and sexual violence²¹. Such activities target mainly women (the company's market segment) and comply with CSR global strategies.

Oriflame's Polish website presents CSR issues as part of its code of ethics, which stresses cooperation with suppliers within the framework of Oriflame Supplier Code of Practices, the safety of the products supplied, the company's friendly attitude to the environment and assistance offered to children under Oriflame Poland Foundation for Helping Children. As part of the activities carried out by the Foundation established in 1999, a number of projects have been implemented, including "Bring back childhood" (2004-2005), "We care about health" (since 2006), and since 2008 - "KuKu", aimed to offer help to children from foster families and family children's homes. Activities conducted in Poland are part of the global strategy of Oriflame – a cofounder of World Childhood Foundation. The presented examples indicate that international direct selling companies introduce the basic

²⁰ http://www.amway.pl/cms/about_amway/corporate_citizenship

²¹ <http://www.wielkakampaniazycia.pl/>, <http://www.avonpolska.pl/akp/03.html>

concepts of their CRS strategies on the Polish market, creating certain patterns of such practices. It should be noted, however, that CSR instruments are introduced several years after starting their Polish operations. On the basis of information obtained from companies, it may also be stated that the concept of CSR in Poland is often confined to social campaigns, while no attention is given to the other dimensions, including product safety, ethical behaviour towards customers and suppliers (although information on such issues is available on company websites).

Carrefour, a leader of huge distribution in Europe, the world's second largest company and seventh largest employer, also has a significant position on the Polish market. It may be distinguished among other companies as the one which emphasizes CSR activities, which is reflected in its mission statement. The mission stresses the policy of sustainable development based on the "harmonized and simultaneous development in three areas: economic development, environmental protection and social development". In practice, this policy is implemented through the company's engagement in CSR activities.

Carrefour Polska's report on CRS activities of July 2009 focuses on three major areas: social CSR, ecological CSR and systemic CSR. Social CSR is mainly based on the programme "Wings with Carrefour", focused on equal opportunities for all children through supporting children from the poorest families. It is organized by the directors of local hypermarkets. Activities have also been continued to offer help to blind shoppers and cooperate with the CZE-NE-KA group as well as to support the activities of the Food Bank. New initiatives include educational programmes: „Reach your destination safely by bike”, or ”Be trendy, set an example for others” – the sales of shopping bags with fluorescent lights.

Ecological CSR focuses on ecological packaging, energy saving and the promotion of pro-ecological attitudes, especially among the youth.

Systemic CRS concentrates on two major areas: human capital management and activating the disabled. Carrefour stresses that it offers job opportunities to people who might have difficulties in finding jobs, women, people without education or extended work experience, and people who have been unemployed for a long time. Staff is offered professional trainings (several thousand participants in 2007) and attractive social packages.

A number of projects have been implemented jointly with other organizations, including Caritas Polska, the Polish Humanitarian Action, the Foundation "Our Earth", the Polish Organization of the employers of the Disabled, schools, etc.

All those programmes comply with Carrefour's major CSR activities, although the way in which they are implemented is adjusted to the individual needs and the Polish market.

Quite a long 38-page report, however, does not include such significant aspects of social responsibility, such as product quality and cooperation with suppliers, which are given much attention in Carrefour's group report; projects related to those issues are also implemented by the company in Poland. It refers, among others, to Carrefour's brand ecological products.

6. Conclusions

Fierce competition in retailing requires companies operating in this sector, especially those participating in global competition, to adopt CSR strategies. Many of those activities strengthen companies' competitive position; expenses in this area may be treated as investment outlays – not costs. The concept of CSR is also based on the dissemination of information regarding undertaken programmes.

In Poland, the development of this concept in retail trade goes back to the late 1990s. A number of companies, especially foreign retailers, use their websites to communicate information on the undertaken projects. Unfortunately, only in few cases does such information have a form of well-structured reports, and many CSR projects are described as different-category activities including permanent relationships with suppliers, promoting Poland abroad, or HR-related issues. Interestingly, many Polish companies which engage in such activities do not find it necessary to communicate it to the public and do not respond to questions with regard to this area. This indicates that there is no sufficient awareness of the CSR concept and its benefits. This situation makes any systematic research on the subject difficult. On the other hand, the rapid changes in retailing and its increasing significance in Poland encourage authors to monitor current development and undertake further analyses.

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