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Review of the doctoral dissertation

Mrs. Yllka Hoxha titled "The Impact of CSR Understanding on the Effectiveness of Economic Decision Making of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Kosovo", prepared under supervision of professor Przemysław Kulawczuk, Ph.D.

The basis for the review was the letter from the Chairman of the Economics and Finance Discipline Council of the University of Gdańsk, dr hab. Przemysław Borkowski of June 19, 2020.

Selection of the topic and definition of the research problem

The doctoral student took up the current and innovative topic of her doctoral dissertation, which is the impact of corporate social responsibility activities on the effectiveness of economic decisions of small and medium-sized enterprises operating in Kosovo. The research problem that she solves in the dissertation concerns the search for an answer to the question to what extent the understanding of the importance of CSR by employees affects the effectiveness of economic decisions. CSR activities are generally in the centre of interest of international corporations and large enterprises. Economic entities of this type most often appear in research works devoted to the issues that the PhD student has dealt with. Therefore, her concentration on the sector of small and medium-sized enterprises, which play an important role in every economy, is worth emphasizing and deserves a positive assessment.

It is also worth emphasizing that most of the research takes place in developed countries with an established market economy, while publications in this field referring to developing countries are much less frequent. Therefore, the PhD student took up a big challenge, deciding to conduct her research in a country that declared its

independence relatively recently, in 2008, after the end of the civil war, and is not recognized by more than half of the UN countries. The choice of Kosovo as the geographical area of research is due to the fact that it is the PhD student's home country, which is still a kind of terra incognita not only for the Polish readers. It should be noted that the cognitive and, at the same time, innovative qualities of work enrich Polish, but above all Kosovar literature with a position that is an important contribution to research on the issues of corporate social responsibility.

CSR activities build a positive image of the company on the market, which encourages conscious consumers to choose their products from many others. The acquired competitive advantage, resulting in increasing sales and generating certain profits, strengthens the market position of a given economic entity. However, in practice, decision makers in the SME sector are either unaware of the benefits of CSR activities, or they are convinced that, for financial reasons, their enterprise is not able to incur expenditures that do not bring immediate and direct economic results.

It should be recognized that the PhD student made the right choice and formulation of the research problem, stating that the subject of the doctoral dissertation is to examine whether and how understanding the essence and benefits of knowledge about CSR could affect the effectiveness and quality of economic decisions made by small and medium-sized enterprises in Kosovo.

Aims of the dissertation and research hypotheses

The doctoral student formulated the main purpose of the dissertation and additional aims. The main aim of the doctoral dissertation is to find an answer to the question related to the impact of understanding the concept of corporate social responsibility on the quality and effectiveness of economic decisions made by Kosovar small and medium-sized enterprises. She recognized that the knowledge - obtained through training - and the awareness of the benefits of the practical use of the concept of corporate social responsibility, may contribute to the improvement of the quality of economic decisions made by the examined persons. This assumption became the main hypothesis of the reviewed dissertation. If we agree, following T. Kotarbiński, that a hypothesis is "... an assumption about the occurrence of certain phenomena or the relationship between them, which allows to explain some unexplained set of facts that

constitute a problem", the PhD student formulated it correctly. The supposition formulated in this way became the starting point for adopting detailed research hypotheses for five thematic dimensions of CSR resulting from the main hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: CSR trained respondents show higher effectiveness in decision making towards fairness dimension compared to non-CSR respondents;

Hypothesis 2: CSR trained respondents show higher effectiveness in decision making towards personal honesty dimension compared to non-CSR respondents;

Hypothesis 3: CSR trained respondents show higher effectiveness in decision making towards employee rights dimension compared to non-CSR respondents;

Hypothesis 4: CSR trained respondents show higher effectiveness in decision making towards ethical dimension compared to non-CSR trained respondents;

Hypothesis 5: CSR trained respondents show higher effectiveness in decision making towards criminal act reactions dimension compared to non-CSR trained respondents.

The aim of the dissertation was formulated correctly, although some doubts may arise from the fact that the title of the thesis refers to small and medium-sized enterprises operating in Kosovo, while the empirical study was conducted among students assuming that they will be managers in the future. In this context, the substantive scope specified in the title of the thesis may seem broader than it was presented in the dissertation.

Selection of research methods

Solving the original research problem and achieving the aim of the dissertation required the use of appropriate research methods. In the theoretical part, including chapters 1 and 2, the PhD student used the method of critical analysis of the literature and the descriptive method, while in the empirical part she used the quasi-experimental method. Both the research process itself and the methods of its conducting are detailed presented in the third chapter of the dissertation, in which the author exhaustively explains the reasons for choosing such procedure. The quasi-experimental method differs from the experimental method mainly in the way the sample is selected. In the experimental method random sampling is used, which is not present in the quasi-

experimental method. It is usually used in a research process where application of random sampling would be impossible for ethical reasons or very difficult for practical reasons. An important barrier in the utilization of random selection may be the relatively high costs associated with the conduct of the study. It is worth noting that the use of the quasi-experimental method limits to some extent the possibility of generalizing on the basis of the results obtained in the study. Quasi-experiment is most often used in research aimed at assessing the effectiveness of a given intervention. Since the aim of the PhD student was to examine the impact of understanding CSR concept on the effectiveness of business decisions, the selection of such a quasi-experimental method should be considered appropriate. In the case of the PhD student, the intervention was an educational activity that contained training one of the studied groups of undergraduate students in corporate social responsibility and finding an answer to the question whether knowledge of corporate social responsibility leads to better and more effective economic decisions. The study sample consisted of 120 third-year business students at the public University of Pristina, aged 19 to 23, whose study program included subjects such as management, human resources management and ethics. Then, the students who were informed about the purpose and method of conducting the study were divided into two groups - the control group and the experimental group; gender and age were taken into account in both groups. The research instrument was a questionnaire consisting of two parts, part A of which was general and part B related to specific behaviours. The questionnaire, attached as Appendix 1 to the dissertation, contains 30 situations in which one of the four proposed decisions should have been made.

The doctoral student also presented the substantive scope of the training of the group subjected to training, which was spread over two days and included 6 lesson hours, during which students were introduced to corporate social responsibility issues and the managerial decision-making process. The time frame of the study was not defined in the dissertation.

The PhD student used the descriptive method to present the results of secondary research, whereas the results of primary research were presented in a descriptive, tabular and graphical manner. Full documentation relating to primary research is reflected in the appendices allowing the reader to follow the research process.

In my opinion the PhD student correctly selected the methods used in the theoretical and empirical parts of the dissertation. She dedicated a lot of attention to the presentation of the method used in the empirical study, presenting it exhaustively and justifying the reasons for choosing one and not another course of action, which allowed her to verify the formulated research hypotheses.

Probably examining the managers of small and medium-sized enterprises operating in Kosovo in this respect, and not students, would have been more appropriate from the point of view of the research problem covered in the title of the dissertation. However, I realize that it would have required a research team equipped with an appropriate fund and would be very time consuming.

Dissertation structure and its content

The structure of the doctoral thesis was subordinated to the main aim, specific aims and research hypotheses. The reviewed dissertation covers 217 pages and, together with attachments, lists of tables, figures and abbreviations, it consists of 230 pages. The dissertation consists of an introduction, eight chapters, conclusions and recommendations and a reference list.

The chapter titles have been given the following wording:

1. CSR concept development and its role in SMEs. Review of up to date conducted research;
2. The process of economic decision making in SMEs;
3. Research methodology;
4. Influence of CSR training on the effectiveness of business decisions in the area of fairness;
5. Personal honesty aspect: Influence of CSR approaches on the effectiveness of business decisions;
6. Employees' rights issues. The application of CSR training on the effectiveness of business decisions;
7. The influence of CSR approach on ethical dilemmas when making business decisions;

8. The role of CSR training towards making business decisions in the area of criminal act reactions.

The structure of the dissertation is correct, although in my opinion theoretical considerations could start with the process of making economic decisions and then present the concept of corporate social responsibility. Business decisions are an inherent feature of every economic entity, being the most important skill of every manager, while the issue of corporate social responsibility is not so universal and could be presented in the second chapter. This remark is debatable and is intended to give the PhD student an opportunity to respond to it. The rest of the chapters form a system consistent with the goals and hypotheses. The doctoral student conducts consistent arguments in them, giving evidence of her independence and scientific maturity, which gives me the basis for a high assessment of the substantive value of the reviewed dissertation. However, from the reader's point of view, it would be expected to get short summaries of the content of individual chapters and the conclusions resulting from the conducted research.

From the cognitive, application and scientific point of view, the most valuable parts are the chapters in which the PhD student analyses and evaluates the results obtained during the empirical research - chapters from four to eight. The detailed, but also clear analysis of the results, their interpretation, assessments and aptly formulated conclusions on this basis prove the high scientific reliability of the PhD student. Both the main hypothesis and the detailed hypotheses have been positively verified. The results of the study showed that the knowledge about the importance of corporate social responsibility positively influences the effectiveness of economic decisions undertaken by prospect managers. I believe that the content of these chapters, constituting the added value of the dissertation, is an original solution of the research problem. The dissertation demonstrates the skillful use of the theoretical achievements of economic and management sciences to design and conduct empirical research and thus achieve the purpose of the thesis.

Formal and technical sides of the dissertation

The formal side of the thesis does not raise any objections. Tables and figures have been properly prepared, described and documented. The list of literature and

other sources, containing 305 items, should be at least divided into books, articles and other materials and sources. Reliable documentation of the cited contents, reflected in numerous references to the literature and other sources, and the rich tabular and graphic illustration of the obtained results should be assessed positively.

Final conclusion

Assessing the merits of Yllka Hoxha's doctoral dissertation, as well as the formal side and the ability to independently design and conduct both literary and empirical research, I can say that her dissertation, entitled *The Impact of CSR Understanding on the Effectiveness of Economic Decision Making from Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Kosovo* meets the requirements for doctoral dissertations in the Act on academic degrees and scientific title as well as degrees and title in the field of art:

- it is an original solution to a scientific problem,
- demonstrates general theoretical knowledge in the discipline of economics and business,
- confirms the PhD student's skills in the field of independent research.

The presented remarks and comments are debatable and do not affect my positive opinion on the reviewed dissertation.

Therefore, I am applying to the Economics and Finance Discipline Council of the University of Gdańsk for the admission of Ms Yllka Hoxha to public defense.


Dorota Simpson