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CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES: THE REPORT FROM ITALIAN COMPANIES

JEL CLASSIFICATION: M14, M21

ABSTRACT:

This is an empirical analysis of CSR initiatives in the Italian region of Campania. The aim of this study is to clarify the share's differences in environmental protection in the overall CSR activities as well as the evaluation of the altruistic attitudes on the essence of CSR. The regression model examines the impact of investments in CSR, cost-benefit analysis and territory size on companies' interest in CSR. Campania companies have got a pronounced environmental awareness due to a significant number of national associa-

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tions promoting sustainable development and easier access to EU funds. When testing the altruistic attitude on CSR, companies in Campania are closer to the profit approach. Based on the results of regression analysis, the predictor variables synergistically explain CSR interest in Campania.

**KEYWORDS:**

ENVIRONMENTAL CSR, ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, ALTRUISTIC ATTITUDE, INTEREST IN CSR, CAMPANIA COMPANIES

1. INTRODUCTION

Environmental corporate social responsibility (CSR) is aimed at reducing the negative impact of the business process on the environment. It uses a full range of initiatives such as donations to reduce environmental pollution, save energy, water, waste management, recycling, saving from lower-cost material, emission reduction, and eco-friendly office policies. As a challenge to climate change, the company's environmental awareness is growing at the regional, national and international levels. Environmental protection is less and less seen as a cost, but as an opportunity to increase profits by transforming a pollution activity into a greener one. The research is conducted on the self-structured sample of companies in the Italian region of Campania. Campania has a large power of informal groups in all areas of society including environmental policy (waste management and recycling companies are directly influenced by Camorra). In the Italian region, capitalism was established earlier, the accumulation of capital is long over, and comparing for example to centralized Serbia, there is a long tradition of CSR and green policy (traditional festivals and fairs, easier regional access to green national and European funds). Finally, the rich and meaningful business practice of such a country as Italy, which has stretched from the time of the city-states of medieval and Renaissance to the present day, is always a suitable place to start interesting research on the application and effectiveness of managerial concepts in company's life.⁴

The main contribution of this paper is to clarify the level of environmental protection in the overall structure of CSR activities as well as the evaluation of the altruistic attitudes on the essence of company investment in CSR. Besides, the study examines the impact of the amount of investments in CSR, cost-benefit analysis, and the size of the territory in which CSR is carried out on the companies' interest in CSR.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Nowadays, companies operate in an era in which environmental protection and sustainable development are of great strategic importance for improving market visibility. In an effort to be socially responsible, companies are increasingly integrating environmental policy into their business operations and in their interaction with stakeholders.⁵ Environmental corporate social responsibility as a strategic marketing initiative, enhance customer's positive mental image of the organization and act as a pre-requisite (mediator) to their enduring loyalty.⁶ Mio and Venturelli compared the shares of non-financial information about sustainable development and environmental policy in the annual reports of Italian and UK companies.⁷ The authors have shown how different territorial contexts can qualitatively influence the non-financial disclosures contained in the companies' annual reports. On a sample of 211 manufacturing companies in Pakistan, the authors have shown that the mean CSR performance of environmental management system adop-

4 Fredona and Reinert (2020), pp. 5-38

5 Viola et al. (2013), pp. 151-156

6 Rashid et al. (2013), pp. 499-508

7 Mio and Venturelli (2013), pp. 340-358

ters was significantly higher than that of non-EMS adopters.⁸ According to results, EMS adopters had a positive effect on soundness, environment, protection, fairness and contribution to society while the non-EMS firms had positive and substantial influence on employee satisfaction and economic contribution. Speaking about Serbia and the countries of the Western Balkans, Đorić points out that these are small and poor countries, but with the potential for ecological entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship development should be accompanied by maintaining a balance between economic development, social responsibility and environmental protection.⁹ Mitrović and Božanić analyzed the possibility of Serbia's adjustment to the European "Green Agreement", in terms of reducing CO₂ emissions in the entire production process. The authors concluded that Serbian companies would incur high costs in this regard, which would likely jeopardize competitiveness in the EU market.¹⁰

Companies in Italy, in the last ten years, have begun to show notable interest in social and environmental responsibility. According to a survey conducted on 400 companies in Italy, 56% invested in sustainability and /or environmental safety activities.¹¹ Balluchi and Furlotti¹² aimed to investigate the degree of awareness that Italian small and mid-sized artisan enterprises paid towards social responsibility, especially towards environmental issues. Based on the sample of 3180 enterprises, the majority implemented special initiatives to prevent pollution, save energy and recycle waste. In a sample of 260 Italian consumers, it was examined whether the GMO food industry could have a positive impact on environmental protection.¹³ The results showed that consumer perception of philanthropic and legal responsibilities of producers can favorably affect the attitude and intention of consumers to buy GMO products. The authors concluded that managers could focus on these responsibilities to foster favorable attitudes and intentions toward genetically modified foods. Nazzaro and colleagues proposed a life cycle model of social responsibility in business processes.¹⁴ In three case studies conducted in Italian agro-food companies, the authors showed that corporate social responsibility actions might positively affect the agri-food process and product. As part of the *CSR Worldwide project*, Volkswagen is implementing a number of environmental initiatives in Italy, three of which are listed. Mention the Ducati project to detect pollution using excellent bio-indicators such as bees located within a 3-kilometer radius of high-impact activities such as Bologna Airport and the city's industrial zone. Lamborghini is implementing an initiative to reduce CO₂ emissions and release dependence on non-renewable energy sources. As part of the *Car pooling project*, Ducati encourages employees to share cars equipped with a mobile Carpooling app. when commuting to and from the workplace.¹⁵

CSR activities require costs but also bring certain benefits. Sprinkle and Maines believe that "*organizations need to assess what they—and others—are getting and giving up from their CSR decisions*".¹⁶ According to Khojastehpour and Johns, the costs associa-

8 Ikram et al. (2019), pp. 628-641

9 Đorić (2021), pp. 67-91

10 Mitrović and Božanić, (2021), pp. 33-51

11 Orsi, (2016). pp. 1-48

12 Balluchi and Furlotti, (2013), pp.147-158

13 Pino et al. (2016), pp. 2861-2869

14 Nazzaro et al. (2020), pp. 1287

15 Volkswagen Group, (2020)

16 Sprinkle and Maines, (2010), p. 452

ted with CSR's environmental activities can be estimated by comparing the so-called *green* with traditional costs.¹⁷The authors give an example of comparing the costs of products made from recycled raw materials with the costs of using new raw materials. In addition, it should be borne in mind whether customers who would buy socially responsible goods are willing to pay a higher price for a given product. The higher prices of socially responsible products may lead to a drop in production volume. However, when consumers buy socially responsible products at a higher price, it signals to companies that consumers are aware of the existence of the firm's CSR activities. When calculating potential costs, one should keep in mind the very nature of consumers. For instance, there are consumers who do not have a built-in awareness of social responsibility and who will always try to buy a cheaper product. There are also views in the literature that investing in CSR has exclusively altruistic and moral value. Therefore, when evaluating the benefits of CSR activities, one should not be guided by a traditional, economic and utilitarian approach.¹⁸Behind the companies' interest in CSR are various motives such as the competitive advantage and new value creation¹⁹, sustainable development goals^{20,21}, ethical and altruistic reasons.²²

The research starts from the following three established hypotheses:

H1. *In the Italian region of Campania, there is a significant share of environmental initiatives in the CSR structure.*

H2. *In Campania companies, there is a low valuation of the altruistic attitude on the essence of company investment in CSR.*

H3. *The level of investments in CSR, the presence of cost-benefit analysis and the size of the territory in which CSR is carried out, affect the growth of companies' interest in CSR*

3. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

3.1 Sample and data description

The sample included 106 companies in the Italian region of Campania. The sample contained the following economically important cities: Naples, Caserta, Salerno, Avellino and Benevento. When planning the sample, it was taken care to ensure a credible ratio of micro, small, medium and large companies in Campania²³. Selection of companies was

17 Khojastehpour and Johns, (2014), pp. 330-339

18 Botsian and Diachek, (2015), pp. 33-37

19 Fernández-Guadaño and Sarria-Pedroza, (2018), p. 2062

20 Poddar and Narula, (2020), pp. 85-94

21 Schönherr et al. (2017), pp. 33-47

22 Botsian and Diachek, (2015), pp. 33-37

23 OECD, (2020), pp. 1-12

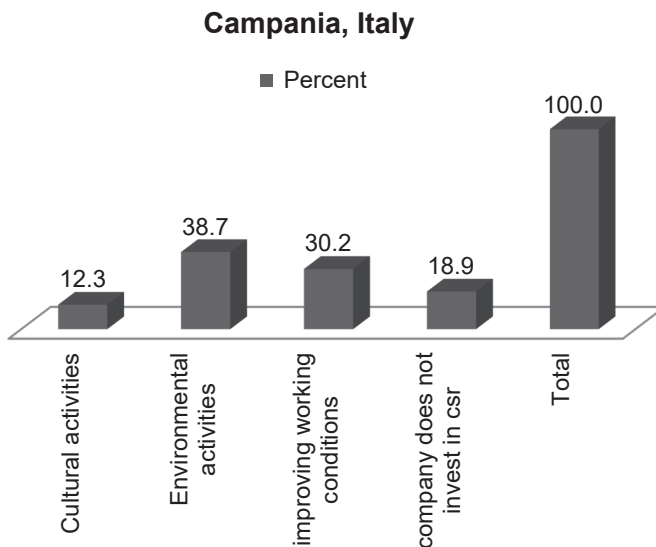
made from the list of Local business directory of Campania by using the simple random sample method without repetition.²⁴

The questionnaire contained interval scales, Likert scales and closed answers. Managers of selected companies were surveyed. An interview in Campania was conducted from January 5th to January 31st, 2020. Data were collected on types of CSR activities, annual investments in CSR, territorial involvement in CSR, cost-benefit analysis, companies' interest in CSR, testing altruistic attitude on CSR, motivation to invest in CSR, main obstacles for strong CSR development and benefits of investing in CSR. In methodological terms, descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis were used.

3.2 Descriptive statistics

The chapter presents the results on CSR issues in Campania companies with special reference to the environmental activities. Figure 1 shows the structure of CSR activity of the companies in Campania. As can be seen, the largest number of companies (38.7%), in this Italian region, invests in environmental protection activities. It is followed by improving of working conditions (30.2%) and cultural activities (12.3%).

▶ FIGURE 1. CSR ACTIVITIES: CAMPANIA, ITALY N=106



Source: authors' calculation

The reasons for the higher share of environmental activities in Campania can be found in a higher-level ecological awareness as well as in easier access to EU funds intended for environmental protection. The contributions of the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Deve-

lopment (L'ASviS) as well as the Festival of Sustainable Development should definitely be mentioned. It is concluded that hypothesis H1 was confirmed.

Table 1 shows the levels of annual investment in Campania companies by CSR activities. In general, at the level of the entire sample, 37.7% of companies invest EUR 1001-5000 per year in CSR. It is followed by 21.7% of companies that invest up to EUR 1000 and the same number that invests annually the amount of 5001-10000 EU. Observing the companies that invest in environmental protection, the largest number (46.3%) annually invests EUR 1001-5000, 36.6% invests up to EUR 1000, and 17.1% of the company invests EUR 5001-10000.

▶ **TABLE 1. INVESTING IN CSR ACTIVITIES IN CAMPANIA, N=106**

			CSR ACTIVITIES					TOTAL
			CULTURAL ACTIVITIES	HUMANITARIAN ACTIVITIES	ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVITIES	IMPROVING WORKING CONDITIONS	COMPANY DOES NOT INVEST IN CSR	
How much does your company invest annually	company doesn't invest anything	Column N %	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	100,0%	18,9%
	up to 1000 EUR	Column N %	23,1%	0,0%	36,6%	15,6%	0,0%	21,7%
	1001-5000 EUR	Column N %	38,5%	0,0%	46,3%	50,0%	0,0%	37,7%
	5001-10000 EUR	Column N %	38,5%	0,0%	17,1%	34,4%	0,0%	21,7%
	10000 + EUR	Column N %	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
	Total	Column N %	100,0%	0,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Source: authors'calculation

Observed by the size of the territory where CSR is practiced, 56.1% of companies in Campania, which invest in environmental protection, invest throughout Italy, while 43.9% are involved at the local community level (Table 2).

▶ **TABLE 2. WHERE IS YOUR COMPANY INVOLVED IN CSR ACTIVITIES? (CAMPANIA, N=106)**

			CSR ACTIVITIES					TOTAL
			CULTURAL ACTIVITIES	HUMANITARIAN ACTIVITIES	ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVITIES	IMPROVING WORKING CONDITIONS	COMPANY DOES NOT INVEST IN CSR	
Where is your company most involved in corporate social responsibility activities?	Within your company	Column N %	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
	local community	Column N %	69,2%	0,0%	43,9%	43,8%	0,0%	38,7%
	in Italy	Column N %	30,8%	0,0%	56,1%	56,3%	0,0%	42,5%
	in foreign countries	Column N %	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
	It does not apply them at all	Column N %	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	100,0%	18,9%
	Total	Column N %	100,0%	0,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Source: authors' calculation

To the question “Does your company do a cost-benefit analysis before undertaking a CSR initiative”, all companies in the Campania region that invest in environmental protection, claim to conduct a cost-benefit analysis before undertaking CSR activities (Table 3).

▶ **TABLE 3. DOING A COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS BEFORE UNDERTAKING A CSR INITIATIVE IN CAMPANIA, N=106**

			CSR ACTIVITIES					TOTAL
			CULTURAL ACTIVITIES	HUMANITARIAN ACTIVITIES	ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVITIES	IMPROVING WORKING CONDITIONS	COMPANY DOES NOT INVEST IN CSR	
Does your company do a cost-benefit analysis before undertaking a CSR initiative?	don't know	Column N %	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
	no	Column N %	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	100,0%	18,9%
	yes	Column N %	100,0%	0,0%	100,0%	100,0%	0,0%	81,1%
	Total	Column N %	100,0%	0,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Source: authors' calculation

According to the survey results, in the Campania region the largest number of respondents (63.4%) claim that relating to the period of two years ago the interest for envi-

ronmental protection is growing, while 36.6% of interviewed assert that interest stands at the same level. The greatest growth of interest in CSR is noticeable in the field of cultural activities (Table 4).

▶ **TABLE 4. INTEREST FOR CSR BY ACTIVITIES IN CAMPANIA, N=106**

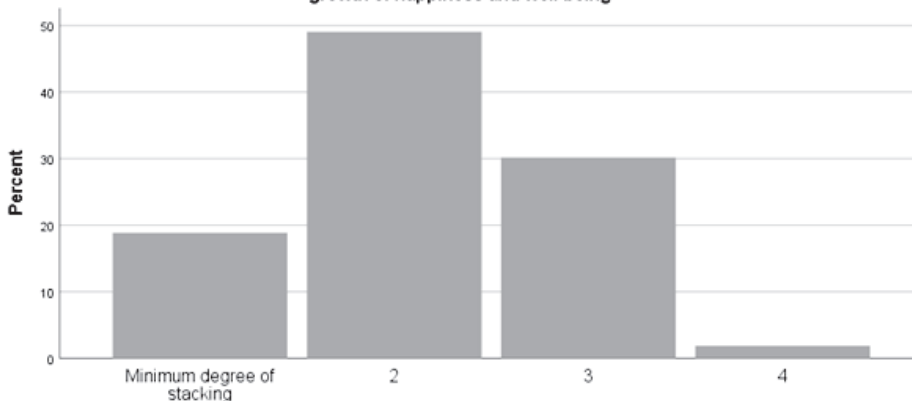
			CSR ACTIVITIES					TOTAL
			CULTURAL ACTIVITIES	HUMANITARIAN ACTIVITIES	ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVITIES	IMPROVING WORKING CONDITIONS	COMPANY DOES NOT INVEST IN CSR	
In your opinion, in relation to the period of two years ago, evaluate the interest of Italian companies for corporate social responsibility	It's declining	Column N %	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	18.9%
	It stands on the same level	Column N %	30.8%	0.0%	36.6%	37.5%	0.0%	29.2%
	It's growing	Column N %	69.2%	0.0%	63.4%	62.5%	0.0%	51.9%
	Total	Column N %	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: authors'calculation

On a scale of 1 to 5 the respondents were asked to select the degree of agreement with a following attitude: *In essence, a company's investment in CSR activities is a humane cause, goodwill to help others, the growth of happiness and well-being in the community (Figure 2):*

▶ **FIGURE 2. TESTING ALTRUISTIC ATTITUDE ON CSR IN CAMPANIA (1 = MINIMUM, 5 = MAXIMUM)**

On a scale of 1 to 5, please select the degree of agreement with the following point: **In essence, a company's investment in corporate social responsibility initiatives is a humane cause, a good will to help others, the growth of happiness and well-being**

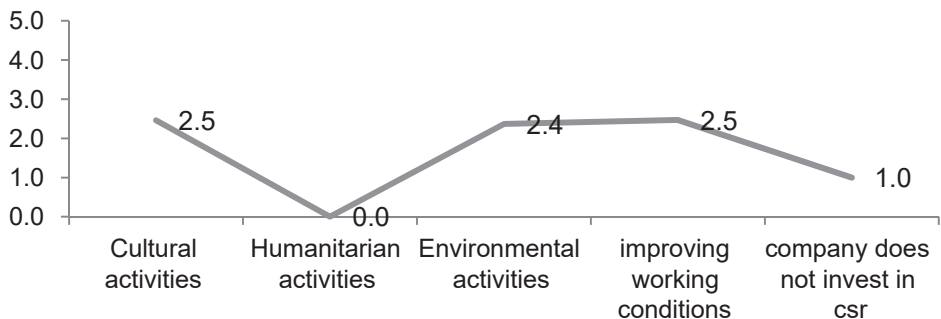


Source: authors'calculation

As can be seen for the Italian region of Campania, the majority of respondents express subminimal (49.1%) and minimal (18.9%) agreement with the altruistic attitude. Practically only 1.9% on the scale rated agreeing with a score of 4 while no respondent has the maximum degree of agreeing with an altruistic attitude. This fact is corresponding to Kotler's crucial attitude on profit increasing as the main reason for the existence of CSR initiatives.^{25,26} Analyzing the practices of the largest US companies, Kotler concluded that the path from understanding CSR as one of the obligations of large corporations passed to CSR becoming strategic commitment. The traditional approach to CSR shows the companies' need to develop and implement specific initiatives seen as the companies' obligations. In line with such an approach, Kotler points out the fact that the traditional approach has very little focus on exploring the quantified outcomes of these initiatives. The new approach focuses on understanding CSR as a support for the achievement of the corporation's business goals.^{27,28} According to the distribution by types of CSR activities in Campania, companies that invest in environmental protection valued an altruistic attitude with an average score of 2.4 (Figure 3):

▶ **FIGURE 3. TESTING OF ALTRUISTIC ATTITUDE BY CSR ACTIVITIES (CAMPANIA)**
(THE VARIABLE 'TESTING OF ALTRUISTIC ATTITUDE' WAS SCALED BY MEANS 1-5)

On a scale of 1 to 5, please select the degree of agreement with the following point: In essence, a company's investment in corporate social responsibility initiatives is a humane cause, a good will to help others, the growth of happiness and well-being



Source: authors' calculation

Since it has been proven that there is a low valuation of the altruistic attitude on the essence of company investment in CSR, it is concluded that hypothesis H2 has been confirmed.

Based on the results of the research in the Campania, the largest number of companies that invest in environmental protection initiatives (56.1%) state the contribution to susta-

25 Kotler, (2005). pp. 1-168;

26 Kotler, (2013), pp. 1-240

27 Kotler and Lee, (2005), pp. 1-320

28 Kotler, (2017), pp. 203-208

inable development as the main motivation, while 17.1% state public access and 2.4% innovation as main the motive.

According to the survey results, of the companies investing in environmental protection in Campania, 41.5% cite the lack of short-term financial return, 22% cite lack of tax reliefs, 22% managerial culture, and 14.6% of them point out lack of funding.

Based on the results of the survey, of the companies investing in environmental protection in Campania, 36.6% cite increase in sale as the biggest benefit from investing in CSR, 36.6% cite growing consumer trust in their company, while for 26.8% of companies the benefit is improving of reputation.

3.3 The model

In order to test H3, the following model was set:

$$Y_i = b_0 + b_1 X_{i1} + b_2 X_{i2} + b_3 X_{i3} + \varepsilon_i \tag{1}$$

Where, for $i = n$ observations:

Y_i = dependent variable (Company's interest in CSR)

b_0 = y intercept (constant)

b_1 = slope coefficient of the predictor x_{i1}

b_2 = slope coefficient of the predictor x_{i2}

b_3 = slope coefficient of the predictor x_{i3}

x_{i1} = independent variable (Annual investments in CSR)

x_{i2} = independent variable (Doing a cost-benefit analysis before undertaking CSR)

x_{i3} = independent variable (Where is your company most involved in CSR activities?)

ε_i = random error

A significance level was set to $\alpha=0.05$. The results for Campania showed significant values for all three R coefficients (Table 9).

▶ **TABLE 9. CAMPANIA, REGRESSION MODEL SUMMARY**

MODEL	R	R SQUARE	ADJUSTED R SQUARE	STD. ERROR OF THE ESTIMATE
1	.835 ^a	.697	.689	.434

a. Predictors: (Constant), Where is your company most involved in corporate social responsibility activities; how much does your company invest annually; does your company do a cost-benefit analysis before undertaking a CSR initiative

Source: authors' calculation

Based on the value of adjusted R^2 , a set of three predictor variables synergistically explained 68.9% of the variability of 'company interest for CSR'. The remaining 31.1% could

be attributed to other variables that were not included in the model. According to results, the most significant contribution was made in the case of cost-benefit analysis. It is concluded that hypothesis H3 is confirmed.

4. CONCLUSION

Campania companies have got pronounced environmental awareness. Italy, as a member state, has got easier access to EU funds. The country is decentralized to 20 regions that can individually or jointly apply for domestic and European green projects. Besides, there are a significant number of national associations and events that promote sustainable development.

When testing the altruistic attitude on CSR, companies in Campania are closer to Kotler's approach that focuses on CSR as a support for the corporation's achievement of increasing profits.

This study is not without limitations. They are primarily related to the sample size. However, based on insight into the prevalence, frequency and distribution of responses received, there is no reason to challenge the sincerity of respondents. In addition, it would be interesting to extend the analysis to one of the Northern Italian regions and in one of the following studies to analyze the structure of joint-interregional environmental projects.

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