EDITORIAL ON SPECIAL ISSUE
SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY EDUCATION AND PRACTICES

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: AN INQUIRY ON ITS EDUCATION AND PRACTICE

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Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has provided a viable framework for practitioners, policy makers, non-governmental organizations, educators, and scholars. Considering its increasingly recognized positive effects to overcome social, ethical and environmental problems, CSR has been widely practiced by the business enterprises in almost all countries. The concept has been also promoted as a useful tool for enterprises by the international and intergovernmental organizations, such as European Commission, United Nations or World Business Council for Sustainable Development. In this context, the higher education institutions (HEIs) need to revise their role on shaping the young generations as the future leaders and practitioners. While they re-design their curricula including CSR and related themes, they start to be ranked by international accreditation systems on social and environmental domains. However, at this point, we increasingly need to assess the level of progress and analyze whether or how CSR is educated and practiced to meet the challenges of economic, environmental, and social problems.

This special issue aims to revisit the CSR education and practices in order to increase the effectiveness of this multifaceted system that is operationalized around the concept of CSR and collectively generated by different actors. The special issue is an incremental step of a longstanding process on generating scientific and practical knowledge on social responsibility at Yasar University. After the successful completion of Erasmus Intensive Programme Project, SOCRES-EDU, at Yaşar University in 2012, a book was edited and published by Lexington as a solid product of this project (Turker, Toker, and Altuntas, 2014). Then, in order to sustain the accumulated knowledge during the project and the edition of the book, an International Conference on Social Responsibility Education and Practices was held on 3-5 July, 2014. The conference provided a platform for all interested parties to identify the pros and cons of the on-going system on CSR and focus on how CSR, sustainability, and ethics can be integrated into our core education and business system better to achieve the overarching principles of sustainable development. As the next step of this important event, a special issue on social responsibility education and practices is presented in the Journal of Yasar University to increase the facilitation of information exchange between education institutions and corporate world regarding the adoption and application of CSR.

As Wood (2013: 491) emphasizes: "The relative success or failure of sustainability education in the coming decades, and its influence on government and industry practices worldwide, will be felt in the daily lives of billions of people both living and yet to be born." If we consider that today's organizations are the surrogates of societies (Perrow, 1991) and that organizations' propensity to influence the societies that they are embedded in and created by them in an accelerated manner (Stern and Barley, 1996), it would be highly relevant to assume that social responsibility education in universities will have significant impact on future organizations and consequently societies. The idea behind this special issue was inspired by this assumption and it can be considered as an effort to underline the importance of social responsibility education at HEIs. In addition to the education dimension, several articles reflect different social responsibility practices in different countries and industries where insights for future studies can be derived.

Interesting examples from an industrial design department indicate that, it is not adequate to gain advanced design skills for becoming a successful designer. In a socially responsible world, it is highly required that we change the design methodologies and priorities for the products and services we consume so that their negative impacts on the environment and society are decreased at source. Another

important initiative is to alter the way we look at design and adapt redesign practices to available goods and services. The study of Farooq et al. in the current issue present a case study where in-campus awareness raising activities against non-responsible consumption create superior impact on altering consumption habits and incorporate design thinking into socially responsible consumption. In another article in this special issue, Ovacik contributes to the same topic by providing a methodology for responsible design education and analyzing student projects as cases for using *design acts in education to create deeper social and ecological impacts*. These studies underline the emphasis in incorporating responsibility at the design phase for the development of new products and services that mitigate the negative impact on the environment and society.

This special issue shows that socially responsible education is required in many different areas of education. Language skills and especially teaching English as the common language for all nations and scientific disciplines also require attention to social responsibility issues. Such training programs generally follow the same or similar text books published by very famous companies. The study of Bulut and Arikan analyzes 240 reading texts and their pictures from 10 main English course books which are widely used around the world and they found stunning results with reference to Cunningsworth's (1995) checklist for social equity issues. Results indicate that texts lack equal representation of different nationalities, sexes and disability. Females are not represented equally with males and the pictures are selected to represent the native speakers of English language instead of non-natives. These findings may produce valuable inputs for leading publishers of English language coursebooks.

Certainly social responsibility education is not required only in HEIs. It can also be used as a tool to be incorporated into vocational training or education for social purposes. The article by Millet and Rodriguez in the current issue underlines such an aspect and defines a social responsibility project undertaken by private sector in Spain for providing new century skills to youth at exclusion. This is a good example of university-industry partnership in social responsibility and education and also of skill development for potential social enterprises.

Social enterprises seem to emerge as a solution to mitigate the negative impacts of global economic crises and to provide an alternative business model to the highly standardized business environment of globalized world. Despite their characteristics that rely on conventional business mentality, they require skills from many different disciplines in order to address the market gaps that they specify. Therefore a different educational framework is required in order to develop skilful social entrepreneurs. In their study within this special issue, Rodriguez and Millet respond to this gap by developing an alternative training and evaluation framework for developing the education programmes that will enable social entrepreneurs to respond 21st century challenges.

Incorporating social responsibility into the mechanisms of development has two important dimensions. Socially responsible education has a lot to contribute to the ultimate aim and half of the studies in this issue try to contribute this dimension with their findings. However practitioners are required to face the challenge by incorporating social responsibility into their daily operations. This part of the topic can be considered as a more frequently studied part under the term corporate social responsibility (CSR) and has been given a similar importance in this special issue as well.

In comparison, EU countries seem to have various requirements for CSR disclosure where some are under mandatory regulations to report on their CSR activities and others are bound by only their voluntary actions. In her study, Popowska finds out that Poland, as a case, presents some voluntary action towards CSR but still not strictly bound with corporate governance rules. Therefore the debate is still open if CSR disclosure and governance should be regulated with mandatory rules or left at voluntary structure.

In her study where it is analyzed if banks invest in CSR, Taskin finds out that the hypothesized relationship between financial performance and CSR lacks such evidence. On the contrary, there seems to have a relationship between interest margins and CSR indexes of banks which triggers the question of "Who pays for CSR?" Such research might require future interest from scholars and practitioners.

The views of practitioners indicate that there are some collisions between economic concerns and CSR necessity in business world. Although practitioners think that CSR should be handled by companies in a formal way via established and well defined departments and in a variable range not limited with the company's field of action, they also emphasize the requirement of extra budgets for such activities. Economic wellbeing is highly related with CSR capabilities of companies but again controversially CSR should not be adopted just to gain extra profits. Such action would result in unethical behavior as stated by the study of Ugur and Kursunluoglu Yarimoglu.

One interesting debate in this issue arose from municipalities' CSR practices. Being non-profit organizations municipalities also engage in CSR activities that are beyond their specified duties. The results derived from Kursunluoglu Yarimoglu et al's study might yield further research in social responsibility and state enterprises. Such studies might provide new conceptualizations towards socially responsible practitioner behavior.

This special issue is prepared to trigger the research curiosity on social responsibility education and practices. We invite further research on these issues and new methodology to incorporate social responsibility at the education phase for a business world that recognizes and acknowledges its duties to the societies that it flourishes within.

References

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