

Perception of the content of Corporate Social Responsibility by Hungarian business students

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Abstract: - Corporate social responsibility (CSR) became a key strategic issue in the recent years. However, the concept of CSR is not novel, the models and frameworks continuously improved. Incorporating social responsiveness into the business is a complex challenge that requires the consideration of individual factors as well. Former studies dealing with the personal aspects of social responsibility point out that related attitudes depend on local characteristics, gender or depth of education. Local answers need local investigation of the topic. In addition, changes of attitudes must be considered in time. The paper investigates whether the changes of attitudes towards CSR show a pattern between 2014 and 2016. The statistical analysis uses ANOVA; the sample consists business students in Hungarian Higher education (various universities, n=100 from each year, random sampling). The results show a scattered pattern. There are significant differences between the years by gender. Fewer respondents believe that CSR can help to solve the global problems; however, the ratio of students who think that CSR implementation is expensive or it can only be successful in the case of large companies is reduced. The differences of responsiveness between females and males raises the question whether education requires two different strategies for them or a common solution is available. We believe that common way is viable.

Key-Words: corporate social responsibility, CSR, sustainability, environmental attitudes, perception of global problems, business students, ANOVA

1 Introduction

There is an enhancing interest in solving the global environmental and social problems over the past several decades. However, the break-through fails due to the conflict among the various interests, primarily economic ones (see e.g. Laudal, 2011). Sustainable development offered a comprehensive framework, but the coequal relevance between ecological, social and economic components may lead to excusing from responsible interventions (Ekins, 1993). In our approach sustainable development designates the goals to be achieved, but it is insufficient to settle and coordinate the proper actions. We believe that corporate social

responsibility (CSR) could be the answer on a corporate level since it incorporates stakeholder values and interests in business (Braun, 2013).

In the relevant literature, there is a conceptual diversity about defining CSR but a common core is to discover by incorporating responsibility beyond the usual business interest.

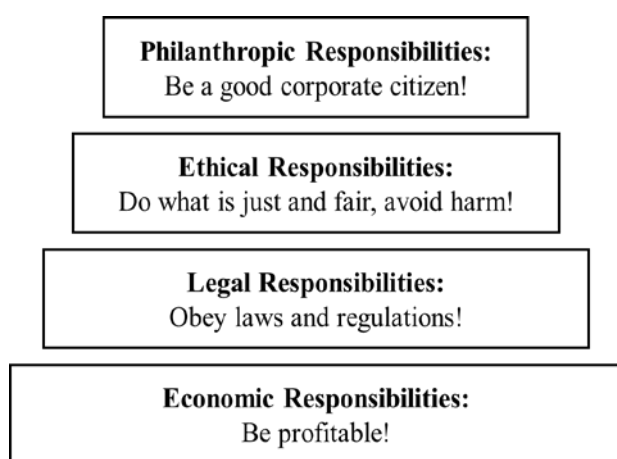
European Commission defines CSR as “a concept whereby companies decide voluntarily to contribute to a better society and a cleaner environment” (EC, 2001, p.4.).

The ISO 26000 standard gives a comprehensive definition of ‘social responsibility’: “responsibility of an organization for the impacts of its decisions

and activities on society and the environment, through transparent and ethical behavior...” (ISO 26000, p.3.). The approach incorporates a contribution to sustainable development as well as the welfare of society, stakeholder-oriented thinking and compliance with law. The scope of application covers both internal and external relations.

Carroll’s (1979) model of corporate social responsibility (CSR) shows the feasible levels beyond economic interest.

Fig. 1: Carroll’s pyramid of CSR



Source: Carroll (2016)

A review of the model (Carroll, 2016) confirms that ethics permeates these levels (Figure 1). Economical and legal levels are marked ‘required by the society’. Ethical responsibilities are marked as expected and philanthropic level as desired. The conceptual diversity also appears in the tools of meeting the requirements and expectations.

The practical and scientific interest led to various conceptual possibilities and industrial differences. Beyond critical industries (e.g. chemical or automotive industry) the banking sector must be highlighted (see e.g. Pérez & del Bosque, 2015, Lentner et al., 2015; Pintér & Deutsch, 2016; Polychronidou et al., 2014; Mocan et. al, 2015) because it has a mediated effect on CSR activities by influencing the investments of other industries. Obviously, large and critical corporations’ performance can have a great impact, but solving the global problems requires a wider range of adopters.

Tóth (2007) pointed out that changes and a new approach in business strategy is necessary, or CSR is only a spectacular mask for influencing the consumer behavior. Beyond the direct corporate responsibility, there is an increased pressure on education because its output determines the opinions and attitudes of the future decision makers.

Education challenge covers both giving a methodological training and showing the possibilities of implementing truly responsible actions.

Wang and Juslin (2012) explored the poor knowledge of CSR in China and urge targeted CSR education programs that meet the expectations of students. Schmidt and Cracau (2015) and Bageac et al. (2011) denote significant differences by nationalities. We feel certain that CSR must be a core element of business higher education. In order to achieve it in an appropriate way, the characteristics of the target audience must be investigated thoroughly.

Recent researches on CSR attitudes explored differences by gender. Females responsiveness is clearly shown. Schmidt and Cracau (2015) found that economic side of sustainability is less important for females. A former research of Lämsä et al. (2008) also states that females place more emphasis on corporate ethical, environmental, and societal responsibilities.

Furthermore, other influencing factors shall be considered. Kaya et al (2014) did not find significant differences in attitudes by the level of CSR studies in Turkey, but Zsóka et al. (2013) found that education has impact on environmental behavior in Hungary.

Jablonkai (2016) shows a detailed analysis of national and institutional background affecting the educational context of CSR in Hungary. According to her findings, despite of the fact that there has been a slow but steady increase in the number of companies active in CSR, and several awards have been established, the general public in Hungary is not well-informed about CSR and citizens’ perceptions of companies’ social responsibility can be characterized by higher skepticism than in the EU in general.

This paper was initiated by the experience that there is a visibly change in business students’ attitudes to the order of the most important global problems. Investigating the reasons behind this process is currently out of the scope of our research activity, we handle the change as a fact. We examined the attitudes to the content of CSR among business students in Hungarian higher education in 2014 and 2016. The research goal is to explore whether the attitudes to CSR changed significantly.

The paper presents the comparative data on the issues above by years and gender as grouping factors. The analysis includes the significance test of the results.

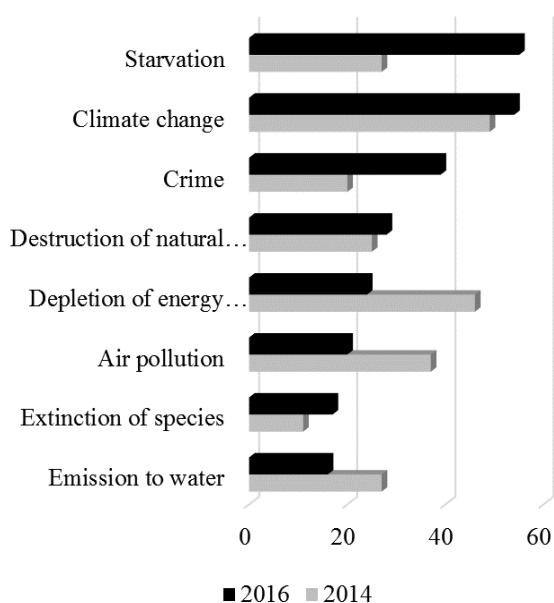
2 Problem Formulation

2.1 Perception of the most important global problems

CSR can be presented as the answer to the global problems. Considering the possible changes in the perception of the global problems, the continuous refinement of CSR is necessary. The recent survey of the authors points out that the judgement of business students on the most important global problems changed greatly between 2014 and 2016.

The survey includes a list about some environmental and global problems and asks the respondents to mark a maximum three of them as the most important ones. Figure 2 summarizes the ratio of markings. Climate change retains its leading position. Otherwise, social issues seem to overtake environmental problems. Particularly starvation and crime are appreciated while worrying about emissions, water or air pollution fell back.

Fig. 2: The most important global problems (marked by % of the sample)



Source: own survey

The recent political changes, including e.g. Brexit, US presidential election, growing terrorism probably have an impact on students' thinking, the available data-sources of the authors and the short time elapsed do not allow the analysis of these effects and their significance in details.

Regarding to this research the fact of the change is highlighted. Giving quick responses to problems of the present interest may pursue corporate initiatives and improve the acceptance of CSR tools. The main educational challenge is to respond quickly to the relevant elements in order to

strengthen the students' confidence in the usefulness of CSR.

Perception of the global problems among Hungarian business students changed between 2014 and 2016, social issues come up. The purpose of this paper is to reveal whether the attitudes to the content of CSR were also to change. Assuming that business students will become corporate decision makers, it is important to monitor their opinion in order to develop the management toolset and education focus in a targeted way.

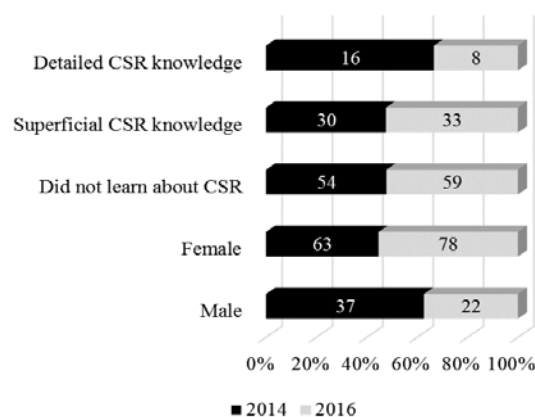
Former results (e.g. Schmidt & Cracau, 2015; Lämsä et al., 2008; Begeac et al., 2011) highlight that females are more sensitive to CSR issues and have a higher confidence in CSR usefulness. The sample is ready to investigate the state and changes of this assumption among Hungarian business students.

We formulated two hypotheses (the interpretation of the results considers the scope and limitations of our research):

1. Attitudes to CSR changed significantly between 2014 and 2016.
2. Females have a higher confidence in the usefulness of CSR than males.

2.2 Research sample and limitations

Fig 3: Distribution of sample characteristics (n)



Source: own survey

The research sample is based on a survey involving Hungarian higher education institutions. The data collection period is 2014 (n=713) and 2016 (n=1322). Business students are filtered for the research. The representativeness of the institutions or the faculties is not available. The sample of the analysis consists 100-100 responses, randomly selected from both years.

General characteristics of the sample are summarized in Figure 3.

2.3 Research method

The survey includes statements about CSR and asks the respondents to mark the level of agreement on a Likert-scale:

- CSR can help to achieve the goals of sustainable development (Helps achieving sustainability)
- Another tool for companies to generate profit (Increases profit)
- These actions represent only greenwashing and main problems are hidden (Tool of greenwashing)
- Excellent marketing communication tool (Marketing communication tool)
- CSR can help companies to coordinate and bring together various initiations (Coordination tool)
- CSR can only be successful in the case of large companies (Only for large companies)
- CSR implementation is expensive (Expensive implementation)

It is important to note that there are some differences in data collection method but comparison is feasible:

- the 2014 survey did allow to skip some answers so the number of cases for the analysis in this sample is lower than 100 (n>30 in all cases).
- the 2014 survey used a 6-point Likert-scale, and the 2016 survey a 5-point Likert-scale in turn. Before data processing, the individual answers were transformed to a 0-100 scale to allow the comparison.

The research uses the year of data collection and the gender of respondents as grouping factors.

3 Problem Solution

3.1 Perception of the most important global problems

Since the ratios by gender visibly differs from each other in the 2014 and 2016 samples, it is important to examine whether the change in the perception of the most important global problems is caused by the sample characteristic.

Table 1 shows that the changes have similar trends in all sub-samples.

The comparison between female and male respondents is summarized in Figures 4 and 5. The results show that in 2014 the responses are more

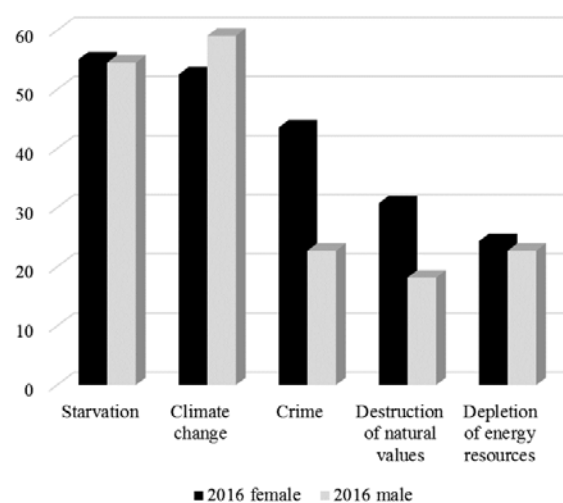
balanced between genders except the issues of climate change and energy resources (male keep those more important). The 2016 sample shows a different picture than the 2014. Female judgement on the importance of climate change as a global problem has visibly increased and in case of energy sources the order has turned. The importance of crime is increased in the female's opinion.

Table 1: The most important global problems by year and gender (marked by % of the sample)

	2014		2016	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Starvation	27.0	27.0	55.1	54.5
Climate change	44.4	56.8	52.6	59.1
Crime	20.6	18.9	43.6	22.7
Destruction of natural values	25.4	24.3	30.8	18.2
Depletion of energy resources	41.3	54.1	24.4	22.7
Air pollution	38.1	35.1	16.7	31.8
Extinction of species	12.7	8.1	16.7	18.2
Emission to water	27.0	27.0	16.7	13.6

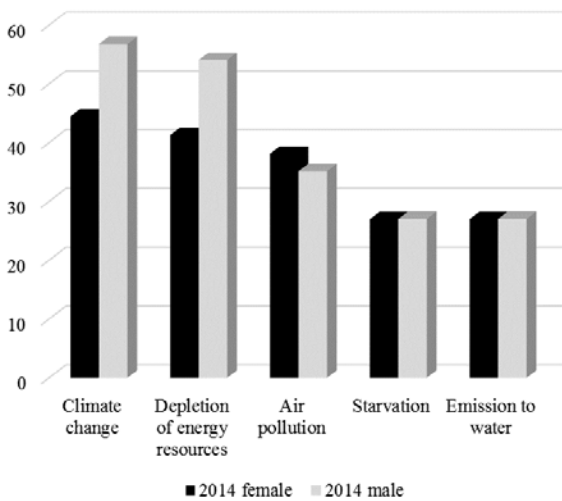
Source: own survey

Fig. 4: Top-5 global problems perceived by the respondents (2016 by gender, marked by % of the sample)



Source: own survey

Fig. 5: Top-5 global problems perceived by the respondents (2014 by gender, marked by % of the sample)



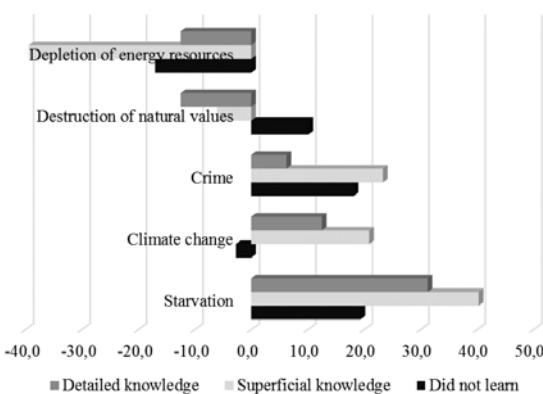
Source: own survey

Figure 6 shows the changes between 2014 and 2016 in percentage points. Positive values mean that the importance of the global problem is judged more important in 2016 than in 2014.

Among respondents with superficial CSR knowledge the restructuring is more conspicuous both in positive and negative changes.

However, the sub-sample of respondents with detailed CSR knowledge is far less than the others, it is worth to compare the results because their judgement represents the middle way. Respondents with a superficial CSR knowledge show the most extreme changes in attitudes.

Fig. 6: Changes in perception of global problems between 2014 and 2016 (%point)



Source: own survey

3.2 Judgement on CSR

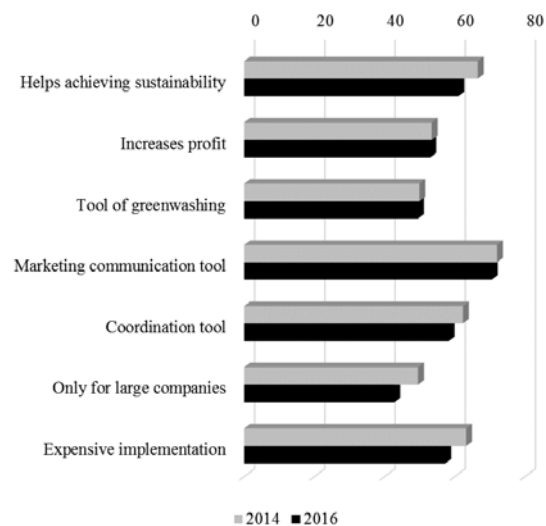
Our first hypothesis states that the judgment on the content and acceptance of CSR is changed (in a favorable direction) between 2014 and 2016.

The changes are presented in Figure 7, based on the total sample mean values; the values are lower

in 2016 than in 2014 in case of any questions. The interpretation of these results indicates that the growing confidence in CSR cannot be observed:

- however, the respondents think less that CSR is only a tool for increasing corporate profit, the confidence in the contribution to achieve the sustainability goals is also decreased,
- the respondents think less in 2016 that CSR is an excellent marketing communication tool as well as it helps to coordinate activities,
- it is encouraging that in 2016 the respondents keep the CSR less expensive and the number of disagreeing respondents is increased related to the statement that CSR can only be successful for large companies.

Fig. 7: Judgement on the content of CSR (total sample, 0-100 scale)



Source: own survey

The changes of attitudes of the respondents by gender show a scattered picture. Next chapters focus on the changes in attitudes.

3.3 Changing attitudes by gender

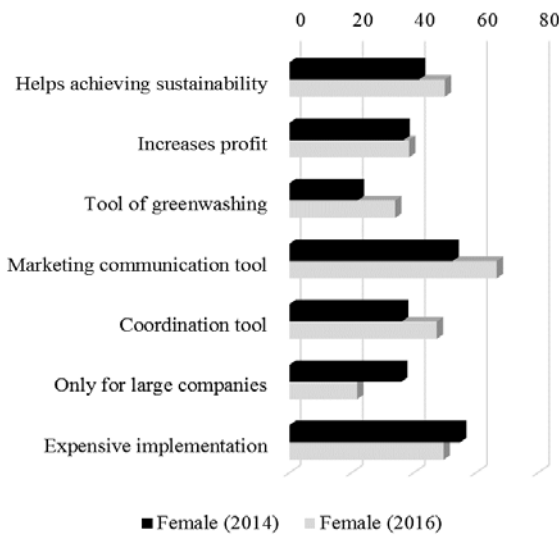
The mean values of male responses are usually lower in 2016 than in 2014 and the judgement by gender seems to converge in time. Appendix 1 contains the detailed results with sub-sample size, mean and standard deviation.

Beside the mean values it is interesting to examine the distribution of the responses. Figures 8 and 9 highlight the ratio of ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ answers.

It is to note that the ratio of disagree and strongly disagree responses (Appendix 1) related to the

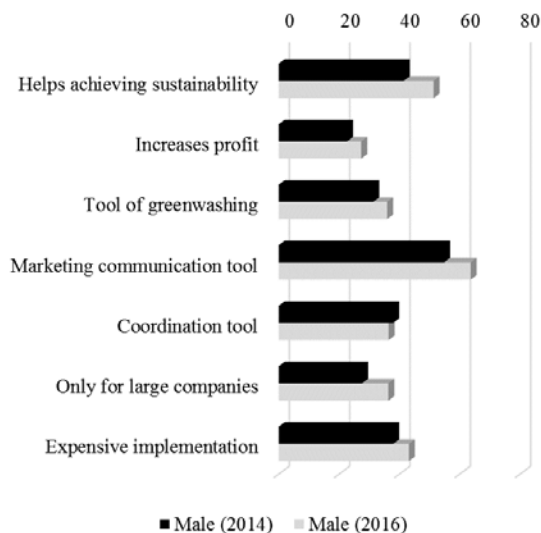
statement about the corporate size. The ratio moved from 34.5% to 54.5% among males and from 32.1% to 44.9% among females. The judgement on CSR as a greenwashing tool shows similar change among the male respondents (21.9% to 31.8%).

Fig. 8: Ratio of high agreement answers by female respondents gender (%)



Source: own survey

Fig. 9: Ratio of high agreement answers by male respondents gender (%)



Source: own survey

3.5 Test of significance

Based on the test of homogeneity of variances (Levene-test) it can be concluded that the ANOVA test is feasible for analyzing the changes between 2104 and 2016 in most cases because variances do

not differ significantly (the exceptions will be highlighted below).

The mean values do not differ significantly in most cases, except the statement that ‘CSR can help to achieve the goals of sustainable development’ ($F=4.186$; $sig=.042$). For the other statements the changes of attitudes are to conclude.

In the sub-sample of male respondents, the opinions changed significantly in all cases. However, for the statement that CSR is ‘Another tool for companies to generate profit’, the test of homogeneity of variances is failed ($sig=.044$), the significant difference is confirmed by the Welch-test ($t=-0.287$; $d_f=50.756$; $sig=.775$).

The sub-sample of female respondents show significant changes between 2014 and 2016 for all statements.

According to the second hypotheses we conducted ANOVA analysis in both years separately by gender. The statement ‘CSR implementation is expensive’ fails the Levene-test ($sig=.025$) in 2014; the Welch-test confirms the significant differences of the mean values ($t=-0.210$; $d_f=74.074$; $sig=.834$). In connection with the statement that CSR is ‘Another tool for companies to generate profit’ the ANOVA analysis explores equality in means in 2014. Other results show significant differences.

4 Conclusion

4.1 Evaluation of the results

However, the opinions about the role and possibilities did change between 2014 and 2016 significantly in most factors involved the investigation, the impacts seem to lag behind the changes of opinions about the most important global problems. The results open up an encouraging vision:

- the overall picture shows a slightly increasing confidence of CSR,
- the attitudes of females and males seem to converge.

Lower ratio of the respondents agreed that CSR is the proper tool for achieving sustainability in 2016. Male respondents had a higher confidence in this statement in 2014 and females in 2016, but both sub-sample show a decrease. Based on the ratio of ‘agree/strongly agree’ and ‘disagree/strongly disagree’ answers the opinions are more extreme in 2016 than in 2014, both groups show an increase.

There is no essential change in the case of the statement ‘Another tools for companies to generate

profit' in the total sample and the difference by gender also remains in time. Checking the agreement level, it is to note that male respondents are more willing to agree that CSR is not only a tool for generating profit.

About the greenwashing role of CSR, the mean values do not show a great change of attitudes, but the variance within the groups is remarkable. Female respondents' mean value shows an increase and males' a decrease which is in harmony with the changes of the ratio of consenting and dissenting opinions.

CSR is useful if it can coordinate various actions and initiations related to greening or solving social problems. Sadly, respondents less believe in it in 2016 than in 2014, primarily the loss of confidence of female respondents determine the results.

It is a common assumption that CSR implementation is expensive and can be a useful tool for large organizations. We consider, that impressive and transparent results require huge investment including financial background, organizational tasks, communication etc. It is encouraging that more respondents see the wider possibilities of applications in 2016 than in 2014.

4.2 Checking the hypotheses

The first hypothesis (attitudes to CSR changed significantly between 2014 and 2016) can be accepted. The fact of the change is significantly proved, but the direction of the changes is not clear. The results are favorable in case of attitudes about the feasibility of CSR, but the faith in its true efficiency is questionable. About females' attitudes it can be concluded that females usually represent higher values.

The second hypothesis (females have a higher confidence in the usefulness of CSR than males) must be rejected because the increase of some values related to the survey questions suggests loss of confidence in CSR. However, dynamics of changes is more remarkable among female respondents.

4.3 Further challenges

Main conclusion of our research is that business students' attitudes towards CSR changed between 2014 and 2016 remarkably. The mean values foreshadow the convergence of opinions between the sub-samples, the direction of changes by changes is scattered. There are more extreme judgements that may lead to uncertainty. Feasibility of CSR is evaluated better in 2016 than in 2014; but

the confidence in its authenticity did not increase. Therefore, a special attention should be paid to ensuring that people understand the possibilities.

The key elements of the utilization are as follows:

- popularity of the topic boosts up the interest in CSR tools and applications,
- beyond a more detailed knowledge it must be taught how to adapt to changes,
- differences by gender can be managed by a common strategy.

We find that these changes open new opportunities for CSR. The growing importance of social issues may broaden both the target audience and the development of CSR tools. Popularity can boost up the number and level of applications; on the other hand, it is a warning sign if the increasing awareness is temporary or fragile. Continuous monitoring of the changes can give a satisfactory answer to this challenge.

Among others, based on a Hungarian investigation Jablonkai (2016) finds that CSR education has a positive effect on behavior and attitude towards CSR of students. For teachers, the results of the survey point out that an enhanced attention must be given to the topic including the ability for adapting the changes. Considering that the respondents are business students, a special attention should be paid for building up a stable conceptual framework which allows the adaptation to the either dynamically changing environment.

The differences of responsiveness between females and males raises the question whether education requires two different strategies for them or a common solution is available. We believe that common way is viable. Courses and subjects those rely on teamwork (e.g. project management) may cover initiations. A project-work needs the cooperation of various fields of knowledge. Proper assignment of project roles and tasks can utilize the approach of both females and males. E.g. in case of a project with impact on climate change, females may have a higher influence on the decisions.

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Appendix 1.**Descriptive statistics of sub-samples by gender (mean values on 0-100 scale)**

Year	Gender		Helps achieving sustainability	Increases profit	Tool of greenwashing	Marketing communication tool	Coordination tool	Only for large companies	Expensive implementation
2014	Male	Mean	66.9	44.52	51.88	72.9	62.07	45.52	63.45
		N	29	31	32	31	29	29	29
		Std. Deviation	17.135	31.711	29.12	20.362	24.695	31.576	22.084
	Female	Mean	66.33	58	48.81	71.53	62.41	51.7	63.08
		N	60	60	59	59	58	53	52
		Std. Deviation	18.592	25.432	26.851	20.411	22.502	31.485	32.991
	Total	Mean	66.52	53.41	49.89	72	62.3	49.51	63.21
		N	89	91	91	90	87	82	81
		Std. Deviation	18.034	28.293	27.548	20.29	23.113	31.462	29.404
2016	Male	Mean	60.23	46.59	47.73	67.05	54.55	43.18	59.09
		N	22	22	22	22	22	22	22
		Std. Deviation	14.758	20.839	21.697	20.968	21.32	32.898	30.419
	Female	Mean	61.22	54.81	50	71.47	59.29	42.63	56.73
		N	78	78	78	78	78	78	78
		Std. Deviation	20.003	26.438	28.774	25.394	23.184	27.946	26.32
	Total	Mean	61	53	49.5	70.5	58.25	42.75	57.25
		N	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
		Std. Deviation	18.91	25.446	27.289	24.459	22.768	28.932	27.13
Ratio of highest marking (agree and strongly agree) by gender									
2014	Male	%	41.4	22.6	31.3	54.8	37.9	27.6	37.9
	Female	%	41.7	36.7	22	52.5	36.2	35.9	54.9
2016	Male	%	51.3	27.3	35.9	63.6	36.4	36.3	43.1
	Female	%	50	38.5	34	66.7	47.4	21.8	49.6
Ratio of lowest marking (disagree and strongly disagree) by gender									
2014	Male	%	3.4	38.7	21.9	3.2	13.8	34.5	10.3
	Female	%	5	18.3	30.5	3.4	8.6	32.1	15.7
2016	Male	%	4.5	40.9	31.8	9.1	22.7	54.5	22.7
	Female	%	9	25.6	33.3	9	16.7	44.9	20.5