

Corporate social responsibility and organic production business model – sustainability performance, consumer trust and motivation

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Abstract

The paper considers the link of the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) to organic production models discussing sustainability performance, consumer trust and motivation for organic. Organic production is concerned in five dimensions: economic, social, environmental, cultural and accountability, as are organic standards providing tools of guaranteeing consumer trust. Motivation for organic and application of CSR are both scrutinized from the point of view of consumers and operators taking into consideration the important role of state and civil society.

Key words: *corporate social responsibility, organic production, sustainable development.*

Corporate social responsibility in globalizing world: literature review regarding the link to sustainability

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is not a new concept but often it is viewed as such and misinterpreted (Isaksson *et al.*, 2014). Over the past several decades, corporate social responsibility has grown from “a narrow and often marginalized notion into a complex and multifaceted concept” (Cochran, 2007) developed into “a successful managerial tool to build a company’s reputation in the global market arena” (Isaksson *et al.*, 2014). The concept of corporate social responsibility is part of the debate about competitiveness and sustainability in the globalization context (Vasilescu *et al.* 2010). Thus, Menguc and Ozanne (2005) define natural

environmental orientation as comprising three components: entrepreneurship, corporate social responsibility, and commitment to the natural environment. Defining and delimiting corporate social responsibility and irresponsibility are key interdependent tasks (Windsor, 2013).

Corporate social responsibility consists of the obligations of businesses to society and from that point of view its directions are connected to society, environment, human capital and work conditions, knowledge and education. Some approaches divide marketing of others and gives it different types of manifestations. The varieties of CSR open many disputes of the levels of involvement, forms, etc. and turn the concept into the basic element of corporate culture in modern organizations. The uniting vector is in the specific attributes of CSR in different spheres (Fig. 1).

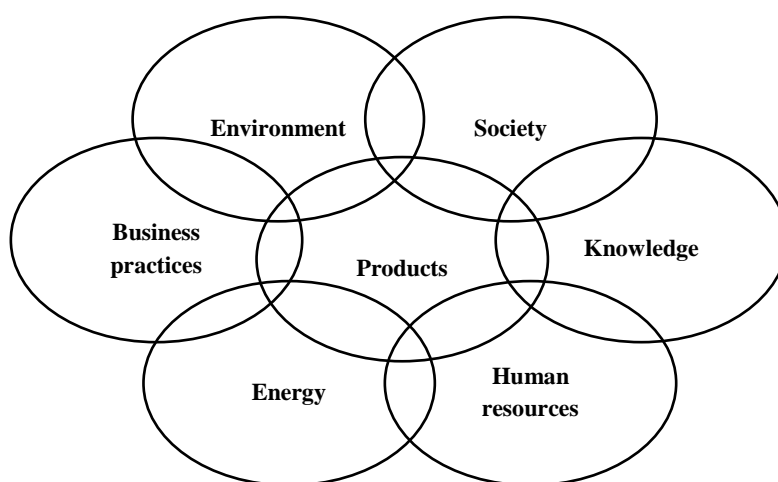


Figure 1. Spheres of CSR

Among the common characteristics of CSR are environmentally friendly and social policies in organizations as well as their inner and outer character. The notion that economic and social goals in organizations are separate and competitive (economic being connected to profit making and social to profit spending) is not the case anymore considering the fact that the organizations are part of the environment and society. The voluntary applications of CSR in modern organizations aiming at ecological and social effects are scrutinized as closely connected to raise in competitiveness and flexicurity. Today CSR policies are part of the strategies in many organizations as a means of integrating permanently increasing requirements

of society towards business processes and products and of increase in added value in business. Since the mid-1990s, an increasing number of organizations around the world started to disclose nonfinancial information related to social issues, such as environmental preservation, human rights protection, employees' welfare improvement, and contributions to their communities and societies (Dhaliwal *et al.*, 2014).

The issues surrounding the concept of corporate sustainability are complex and far-reaching (Aminia and Bienstock, 2014). Although the pressure to sustainability incorporation into actions of all kind of organizations, achieving success is a long-term process and *"most current research is based on a short time horizon and shows mixed results in linking CSR to profitability and aspects of good governance"* (Porter and Miles, 2013). Maas and Reniers (2014) conclude that the current overload of sustainability standards as well as the oversimplification of traditional management systems are two factors which often prevent organizations from translating their sustainable aspirations into their core strategy. Jeong *et al.* (2013) investigate *"how marketers could maximize favorable consumer responses to brand pages on social network sites through the strategic use of corporate social responsibility"* revealing that: (1) CRM leads to the greatest consumer intention to join the SNS brand page, followed by CS and control; (2) CRM results in the greater intention to invite friends to the brand page than either CS or control; (3) such effects of CSR are mediated by the consumer expectancy to be seen as favorable; and (4) the effect of CSR on the intention to join is moderated by the type of brand, but not the type of self-friend gender composition. Addressing the key challenges: climate change and clean energy, sustainable transport, sustainable consumption and production, conservation and management of natural resources, public health, social inclusion, demography and migration, global poverty, Pop *et al.* (2010) state that *"the goal of sustainable development is not only to conserve the natural environment for successive generations"*. The authors further underline the importance of social dimensions, governance and business accountability not only through transition to *"energy efficient"* economies but through establishment of social systems *"that are based on justice and equity, and that are built upon democratically controlled political structures, which give people a voice and a stake in their own future"*.

Besides it is difficult to define all CSR manifestations, it can be concluded that the responsible way of functioning of all kind of organizations on different levels

imposed by the increasing requirements towards accountability and transparency impacts image and performance of organizations in local and global scope considering globalization processes, innovations and knowledge society. Pop *et al.* (2011) give the following implications: *“Corporate social responsibility, also called corporate conscience, citizenship, social performance, or sustainable responsible business, is a form of corporate self-regulation integrated into a business model. CSR policy functions as a built-in, self-regulating mechanism whereby business monitors and ensures its active compliance with the spirit of the law, ethical standards, and international norms. The goal of CSR is to embrace responsibility for the company's actions and encourage a positive impact through its activities on the environment, consumers, employees, communities, stakeholders and all other members of the public sphere. Furthermore, CSR-focused businesses would proactively promote the public interest by encouraging community growth and development, and voluntarily eliminating practices that harm the public sphere, regardless of legality. CSR is the deliberate inclusion of public interest into corporate decision-making”.*

Vasilescu *et al.* (2010) write that *“social responsibility goes far beyond the “philanthropy” of the past, it is about the business contribution to sustainable development and about proactive solutions to societal and environmental challenges”* and underline the notion of the ISO Strategic Advisory Group on Social Responsibility (2004) which says that most definitions focus on the interrelationship between economic, environmental and social aspects and impacts of an organization's activities and that social responsibility means *“a balanced approach for organizations to address economic, social and environmental issues in a way that aims to benefit people, communities and society”*. Blodgett *et al.* (2014) examine the association between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and firm value considering that the business case for CSR or *“doing good while making a profit”* appears to be advancing within the business ethics literature as a preferred conception of CSR and state that *“the greater unification and refinement of both profit maximization and stakeholder interests through corporate acts, not statements alone, will sustain the financial value of CSR in a less regulated global business environment”*. Skare and Golja (2014) conclude that CSR is important for the economic growth in a country: *“countries without an organized and supportive CSR environment and guidelines can hardly expect to increase economy performance through the new growth channels generated by CSR companies (new markets and*

customers)”. Common drivers of corporate social responsibility are presented with their definitions (Table 1) according to an investigation in mining industry (Govindan *et al.*, 2014)

Table 1. Common drivers of corporate social responsibility¹

Societal drivers	Drives the social engagement activities and avoidance of anti-social activities within the organization to improve the societal support and benefits
Supply chain drivers	To improve the ethical supply chain efficiency, the pressures from supply chain operations and partners are called as supply chain drivers and these drivers result in the integration of CSR in SC which became a popular debate in recent years.
Environmental drivers	These drivers mainly concern the development and security of the environment in such activities as green manufacturing, and optimal resource allocation which results in sound green management.
Financial drivers	It is a kind of profit-based strategy, where the organization is pressured to increase its profit through CSR activities which directly impacts its economic functions.
Voluntary drivers	These drivers are a part of internal drivers which mainly focus on the standard of the organization to improve its brand recognition beyond the boundary and to satisfy and maintain good relations with the internal stakeholders through the rise in long standing market capacity of the organization.
Mandatory drivers	Mandatory drivers: the name implies these drivers are needed to satisfy the business. Other drivers support the business development of the organization but these drivers assist the organization to survive and stay alive in the competitive business environment.

¹According to: Govindan K., D. Kannan, K. M. Shankar (2014) Evaluating the drivers of corporate social responsibility in the mining industry with multi-criteria approach: A multi-stakeholder perspective. *Journal of Cleaner Production* xxx (2014) 1-19

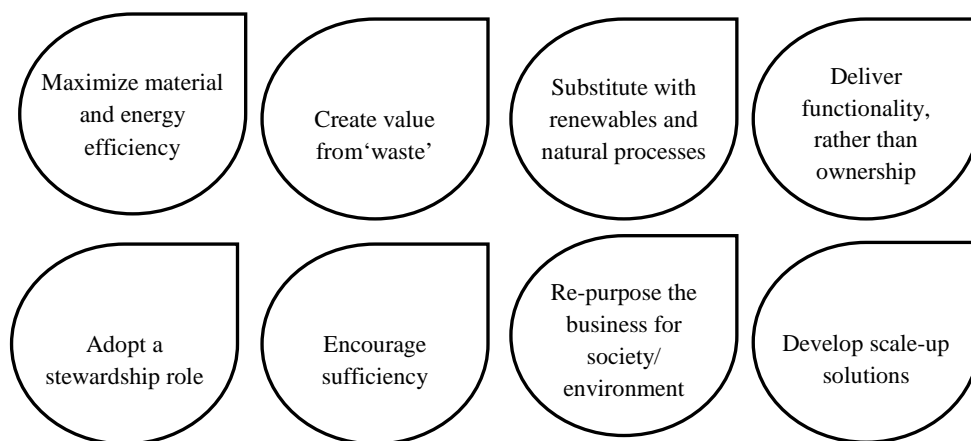


Figure 2. 'Sustainable business model archetypes'²

Bocken *et al.* (2014) propose a categorisation of “*sustainable business model archetypes*” aiming at categorizing and explaining business model innovations for sustainability; providing mechanisms to assist the innovation process for embedding sustainability in business models (e.g. through case studies and workshops); defining a clearer research agenda for business models for sustainability; and providing exemplars for businesses to de-risk the SBM innovation process. The sustainable business model archetypes are viewed as a starting point to broaden and unify the research agenda for sustainable business models (Fig. 2).

Asifa *et al.* (2013) develop an original framework for the integration of CSR into business processes stating that while many organizations utilize management systems to address their stakeholder requirements, their research “*elaborates on how organizations can capitalize on their existing management systems in order to more successfully introduce CSR practices*”. Abdirahman *et al.* (2014) propose an analytical framework of the implementation of CSR in food SMEs aiming at identifying the main network effects considering that innovation networks and networking activities, as in any innovation process, are major means to enhance and foster CSR in SMEs. They provide a better understanding how organizational and individual variables actually fit together and explain the implementation of CSR

²The figure is made according to a research made by Bocken N.M.P., S.W. Short, P. Rana, S. Evans (2014) A literature and practice review to develop sustainable business model archetypes. *Journal of Cleaner Production* 65 (2014) 42-56

principles in a particular SME context. Additionally, this framework is also “*an analytical tool useful to identify and to characterize the functions of different groups of actors: indeed it reveals synergies and complementarities at different levels*”.

The study of Kemper *et al.* (2013) “*sheds new light on the intersection of the competitive environment, marketing, and corporate sustainability*” examining interactions of competitive intensity, marketing capabilities and CSR, as well as their influence on the performance of organizations and underlining that CSR is “*a significant moderator of the link between marketing capabilities and performance only in industries of high competitive intensity*”. A model of CSR specifies relationships among four categories of CSR initiatives as independent variables, three types of consumer trust as mediating variables, and corporate reputation as the dependent variable (Park *et al.*, 2014) showing that “*that the firm's fulfillment of economic and legal CSR initiatives had a direct positive effect on corporate reputation, whereas neither ethical nor philanthropic CSR initiatives did*”.

Coleset *al.* (2013) examining CSR in tourism management focus on three macrolevel topic areas: implementation; the economic rationale for acting more responsibly; and the social relations of CSR. Font *et al.* (2014), analyzing the pro-sustainability behaviour of tourism small and medium enterprises (SME) through different profiles of motivation against the implementation of sustainable measures and generic business variables, made a survey showing that “*small firms are more involved in taking responsibility for being sustainable than previously expected, including ecosavings related operational practices but also reporting a wide range of social and economic responsibility actions*”. The study contributes to the understanding of the reasons, practices, and impacts of sustainability management. Concerning that CSR provides principles and guidelines for food risk management, a study finding driving factors for both identifies the following drivers: implementation of international standards, corporate value, trainings received, status of early warning systems, the cost, financial performance of the company, management support, CSR recognition (whether or not CSR being part of the company strategy), and management attitude to CSR (Zhang *et al.*, 2014).

The standards of CSR in Bulgaria are discussed by Bakardjieva (2012). Some directions and positive practices are shown regarding socially responsible initiatives in Bulgarian organizations (Bakardjieva, 2009). The dynamics in CSR development in economic literature is considered in a study in Bulgaria which underlies the

pressing necessity of social responsibility of organizations (Dimitrov *et al.*, 2014, 66-73). The application of CSR standards in Bulgaria is revealed in an analysis revealing interesting trends and responsible practices in Bulgaria showing that Bulgarian organizations have passed the basic stage of conforming basic requirements and norms and they apply systematically socially responsible initiatives laid down in their business strategies and assuring corporate sustainability (Dimitrov *et al.*, 2014, 197-221).

Green economy and organic production from the point of view of sustainability

Discussing challenges of globalization processes and food and agricultural non-food products' quality and safety, some questions in connection to safe production and international trade are raised taking into account greater risks along with bigger advantages. The competition on international markets is bigger than ever before, as well as requirements regarding environmental protection and human health which impose higher investments and greater concerns. The problems are not only in satisfaction of consumers' demand but of assuring standard of living of producers in rural areas, protection of traditions and culture.

The concept of sustainable development gives a new way of thinking and management of the human impacts – creating more durable positive results for bigger benefits for human societies – common wellbeing / common capital (economic, human, social and ecological) do not decrease in time, i.e. availability and quality of resources in long term. The question of green economy is one of the most discussed now and in many cases put in priority goals in national economies or international documents bearing different implications.

Concerns about energy generation, resource use and environment management accelerate the expansion of green economy as an economic development based on the sustainable development model and knowledge of ecological economics. Pop *et al.* (2011) explain its distinguishing feature from prior economic regimes as “*direct valuation of natural capital and nature's services as having economics value and a full cost accounting regime in which costs externalized onto society via ecosystems are reliably traced back to, and accounted for as liabilities of, the entity that does the harm or neglects an asset*”.

Zhou *et al.* (2013) conclude that “*Green production or green manufacturing has become a requirement for sustainable development and a niche for competition for*

modern manufacturing enterprises. It applies the principles of environmental protection and energy conservation to production activities to reduce industrial waste, save energy and scarce resource, and minimize pollution to natural environment, while accomplishing desired production economy”.

Green business can be defined as business practices which are evaluated to be environmentally friendly. These practices might include the use of organic and natural products to build its facilities, tighter protections against emissions, environmentally responsible sourcing of supplies and designing organizations and processes in order to efficient and economical use of resources (Karagülle, 2012). Eco-innovations, eco-efficiency and corporate social responsibility practices define much of the current industrial sustainability agenda. Sustainable business models (SBM) incorporate a triple bottom line approach and consider a wide range of stakeholder interests, including environment and society (Bocken *et al.*, 2014). Selection of green production strategy is a critical task because of the fact that it affects not only green benefits, but also production economy (Zhoua *et al.*, 2013). The shift towards greening the economy will be like the second greatest economic transformation after the industrial revolution paying attention to social dimension of sustainable development: its implications for “*employment, training and decent work*” (Pop *et al.*, 2011). There is a need of balancing ‘green’ measures with economic effectiveness. Organic production provides many opportunities for that but organic conversion should be preceded by preliminary profound analyses and go through some important steps: identification of activities, goals determination, cost-benefit analyses, etc., in order to be put on solid foundations and to have potentials for success.

The agri-food sector as a possible greening-oriented sector could, through careful environmental protection policies, the creation of new green professionals and by supplying goods and services to meet the responsible consumption, be socially responsible (Viola *et al.*, 2013). Discussing the concept in current study is in close connection to the main idea of organic production – ‘Good for nature, good for you’ and it is connected to the key stakeholders in the sector: state and local authorities, business / operators (producers, processors, traders), educational and scientific organizations, on one hand, and consumers, non-profit organizations, media, on the other. The relations between all of them are bilateral. In order to be applied by business, there should be ‘pressure’ by civil society and consumers. Organic

production turns into a way of investment in a production process which protects environment, creates employment but also raises social consciousness of the principles of sustainable development. In that relation organic production answers the ideas of CSR and could be successfully developed according to new trends and policies.

Organic production in terms of sustainable development, food quality and safety

Sustainable development is a fundamental goal in the contemporary world. The main question is how to achieve it once the aims are set in a number of strategies on different levels, i.e. how to involve all the groups in society. On one side are consumers and demand, on the other – producers and supply. It is for sure that demand is for safety and health, but the answer of the question how to respond in the supply chain is not so easy. Ecological problems as a whole, and in agrarian sector particularly, are going deeper in recent decades because of highly violated natural balances and negative cumulative effects on human health. As a sector in the very beginning of food chain, agriculture is one of the most important one for achieving sustainable development goals. Economic effectiveness, social responsibility and ecological conformability are the three pillars when characterizing sustainable development and sustainable agriculture in particular. Agricultural sector experiences a number of problems resulting in unfavorable economic outcomes, worsened social conditions and negative effect on environment. In sustainable development and in the agricultural sector in particular, especially sharp is the problem of economic effectiveness in the light of environmental protection – water, soil, biodiversity and landscape, and the need of increasing social status of the population. These three aspects are connected to each other and it is very difficult to be examined separately. Recently, two more aspects are added – cultural and accountability (Fig. 3). One of the main questions in world and national economies in terms of ‘economic effectiveness or social justice’ is now acquiring new dimensions in the context of environmental protection challenges and rural development. Thus, the achievement of sustainable development goals embraces a system of mechanisms and tools with different scopes and directions.

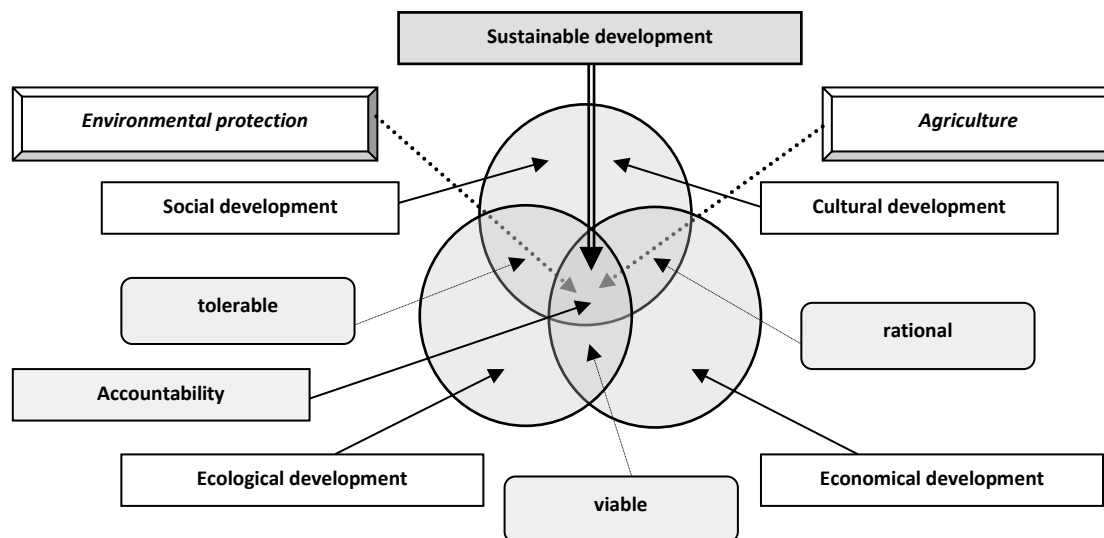


Figure 3. Sustainable development (in terms of the interacting dimensions – economic, social, ecological, cultural and accountability³⁾ and the importance of agriculture and environmental protection⁴

The idea of sustainable development includes the equal and balanced interactions between the three sectors in national economies– public, private and non-profit. Sustainable development is one of the pillars of strategic management. Companies aim to survive and earn above the average as they compete with their rivals. Besides an ongoing cut-throat competition, companies start to give more importance to the future⁵. An entrepreneurial approach allows firms the flexibility to address the unique nature of natural environmental opportunities and the

³Best Practice Guideline for Agriculture and Value Chains (2013). Developed by Sustainable Organic Agriculture Action Network and approved for the global organic movement by IFOAM. http://www.ifoam.org/sites/default/files/best_practice_guideline_v1.0_ratified.pdf

⁴According the adaptation made in Arabska E. (2014) Organic production – innovations and sustainability challenges in development framework and management. Lambert academic publishing, 978-3-659-56379-9

⁵ Karagulle A. (2012) Green business for sustainable development and competitiveness: an overview of Turkish logistics industry. International conference on leadership, technology and innovation management. Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences 41 (2012) 456-460

challenges posed by unique green markets⁶. Reaching high competitiveness is a key objective. Organic production and trade provide a sustainable competitive advantage. Above all, contemporary farmers should be good managers. Permanent changes in globalizing world impose new skills and approaches. Thus the increase in demand of organic product leads to increase in organic areas and number of organic farmers, processors and traders as a result of the search for entrepreneurial and innovative methods guaranteeing profit making and sustainability.

Thus the organic sector development from the point of view of the following characteristics of organic production embraces: sustainable management of natural resources, high standards for food quality and safety; human attitude towards animals, economic effectiveness, employment opportunities and rural development. One of the most accepted definitions concerning organic production methods is that of International federation of organic agriculture movements (IFOAM) along with its principles of health, ecology, fairness and care: *"Organic agriculture is a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. Organic Agriculture combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a good quality of life for all involved."*⁷

According to Codex Alimentarius' definitions: *"Organic agriculture is a holistic production management system which promotes and enhances agroecosystem health, including biodiversity, biological cycles, and soil biological activity. It emphasizes the use of management practices in preference to the use of off-farm inputs, taking into account that regional conditions require locally adapted systems. This is accomplished by using, where possible, cultural, biological and mechanical methods, as opposed to using synthetic materials, to fulfil any specific function within the system"*⁸.

⁶ Munguc B., L.Ozanne (2005) Challenges of the "green imperative": a natural resources-based approach to the environmental orientation-business performance relationship. *Journal of Business Research* 58 (2005) 430-438

⁷ IFOAM definition of organic farming: <http://infohub.ifoam.org/en/what-organic/definition-organic-agriculture>

⁸Guidelines for the production, processing, labelling and marketing of organically produced foods adopted by the 23rd Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission in 1999 and

The aims of organic farming are considered in two aspects of protection: environmental protection by using organic management practices that do not have the adverse effects of conventional practices, and the health of consumers, by the provision of organic products (Argyropoulos *et al.*, 2013).

Organic production as a way of achieving sustainable growth could be determined in the three main aspects of sustainable development as follows:

- economic sustainability – increasing competitiveness, strong market orientation and increased incomes;
- social sustainability – bigger responsibility towards consumers' demands, improving food quality and safety; regional development;
- ecologic sustainability – unified framework, effective implementation and control, standards of protection of environment and health,

and those are the basics of the presented study. Other aspects as shown in 'Best Practice Guideline for Agriculture and Value Chains' developed by Sustainable Organic Agriculture Action Network and approved for the global organic movement by IFOAM⁹ – cultural dimension and accountability dimension are considered too in current study.

Organic production business model: sustainability performance, consumer trust and motivation for organic

In the framework of the current study a round table was organized with 3 experts discussing organic production business model basics in terms of CSR, who made assessments according to the scale from 1 to 5 (1 – the lowest, 5 – the highest score). The assessment criteria are united in categories as follows: 3 categories with 5 criteria each. After collecting this information, the authors calculated the average for every one criteria and the sum of the criteria in each category. That way the highest result for a criterion could be 5, and for a category – 25. The results are shown in figures and commented.

revised by its 24th Session in 2001. They were subsequently amended by the 26th and 27th Sessions in 2003 and 2004.

⁹Best Practice Guideline for Agriculture and Value Chains. (2013). Developed by Sustainable Organic Agriculture Action Network and approved for the global organic movement by IFOAM. http://www.ifoam.org/sites/default/files/best_practice_guideline_v1.0_ratified.pdf

As a whole the relevance to CSR of ‘motivation for organic’ was assessed with the highest score, the second place is for ‘consumer trust’ and the lowest – for ‘sustainability performance dimensions’ (Fig. 4).

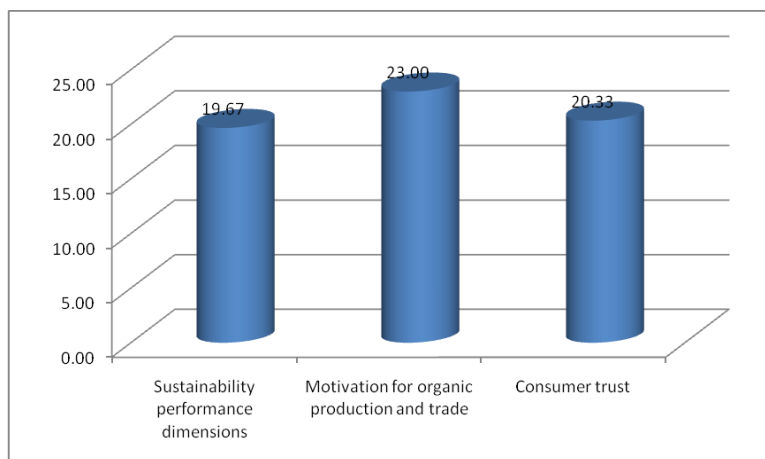


Figure 4. Average of experts’ evaluations of the five general criteria

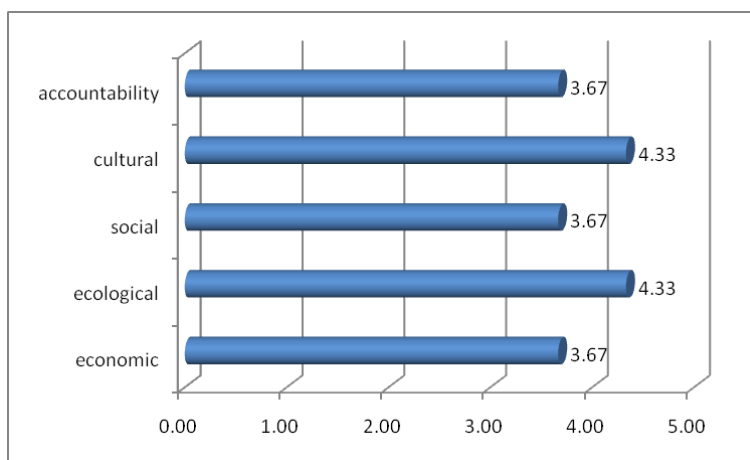


Figure 5. Average of experts’ evaluations in the category “Sustainability performance dimensions”

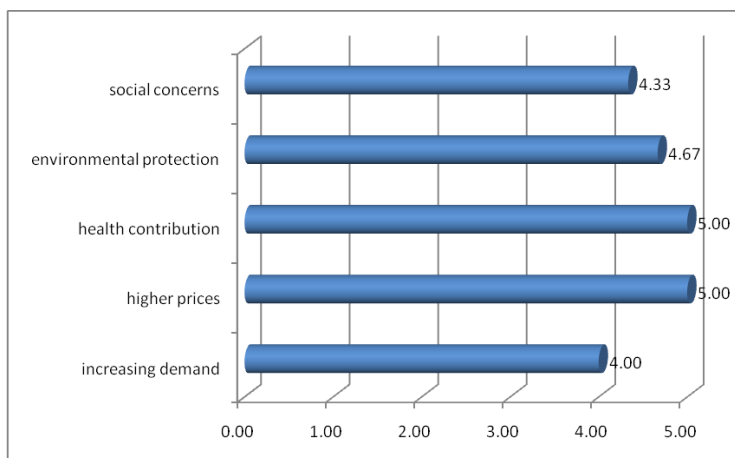


Figure 6. Average of experts' evaluations in the category "Motivation for organic production and trade"

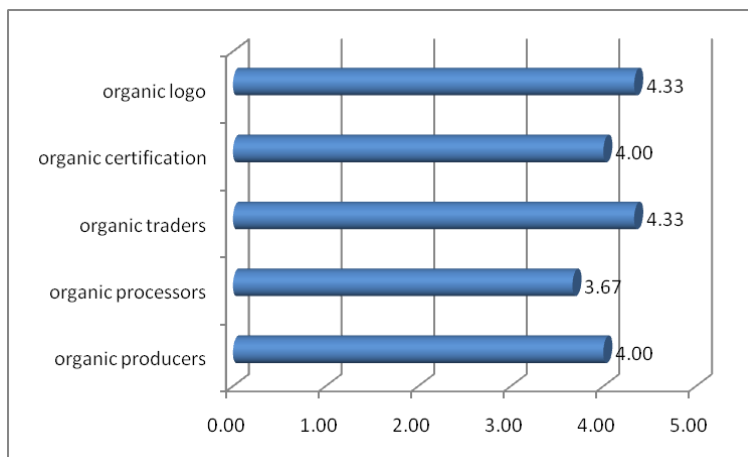


Figure 7. Average of experts' evaluations in the category "Consumer trust"

In the category 'Sustainability performance dimensions' the assessments stress on ecological and cultural (Fig. 5), for "Motivation for organic production and trade" the scores are the highest as a whole and with maximum points for 'higher prices' and 'health contribution' (Fig. 6). In 'Consumer trust' organic traders and organic logo are at the first place, followed by organic producers and organic certification and the last are organic processors (Fig. 7).

The results show that the leading is 'motivation for organic' because of the concerns about human health and environmental protection. Consumer trust is another

basics because of the nature of that production method relying on a strong management system and branding. Sustainability performance dimensions are not considered as high because of the point of different views of dimensions and in the concrete case – because of the doubts in accountability.

Conclusion

Organic production is a specific production method preserving environment and providing healthy food of high quality having the following advantages: production of healthy food with high technological characteristics; increasing demand; new markets; higher prices; less intensive use of land; lower energy consumption; environmental protection; rural development, etc. Organic farming is an overall systematic approach based on a number of processes leading to sustainable development. Organic production examined by the traditional pillars of sustainable development provides: economic sustainability – competitiveness increase, strong market orientation and increase in incomes; social sustainability – bigger responsibility towards consumers' needs, improving quality and safety of food, regional development; ecologic sustainability – a common frame, effective application, control, development of standards of environmental protection, health and welfare. Recently, the dimensions of culture and accountability are added too.

The link between CSR and organic production model is easy to be substantiated on a theoretical basis qualitatively but it is difficult to be shown in terms of quantitative assessments. As a whole, organic production corresponds with the main spheres of CSR: environment, business practices, products, energy, society, human resources and knowledge.

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