

## CSR at HEIs: Between Ignorance, Awareness and Knowledge

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** This paper focuses on CSR education in the Higher Education Institutions. It analyzes current approaches to this education and the enhancements already deployed in the international perspective. The main aim is to conceptualize on CSRS education forms within the context of technology-oriented HEIs and propose the model for this education. This model has also been partially verified using the cases of four technical universities.

**Design/methodology/approach:** This research uses qualitative and quantitative research methods. The literature review is applied to trace HEIs' educational and organizational CSR commitment methods. Based on this review, we proposed a model of CSRS education in HEIs. Using this model, we checked to what extent its elements are used in four technical universities from: Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine and Poland. For this purpose, educational programs at universities were analyzed. We also confronted the activity of these universities with the students' knowledge about CSRS. The results of the survey conducted among 3,424 students from these universities contributed to elaborating on this aspect.

**Findings:** The results confirm that students are ignorant of CSR, even those studying at business faculties. What is surprising, even those students who are business owners do not demonstrate a high level of knowledge about CSR. Universities, on the other hand, do not offer the possibility of eliminating this ignorance. Meanwhile, we believe they can do so not only through the standing-alone CSRS education but also by including CSR in other courses and by giving a good example.

**Research limitations/implications:** Due to language barriers, the submitted model was only partially verified at selected universities. We are also aware that the described situation may be one-sided as the four cases presented in this study are homogeneous, as they represent technical universities, so

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only one profile among a variety of universities' profiles (technical versus humanities versus economic). Moreover, the conducted research covered students and universities from Central and Eastern Europe, which might also have an impact on the obtained results.

**Originality/value:** Bearing in mind the current level of implementation of education in the area of CSR and the results of the research carried out, we propose a model of education that includes three pillars: a good example of a university (socially responsible university), responsible managers education (RME) and raising awareness among students of non-business faculties (ASR). At the same time, we indicated a large gap between the educational needs in the area of CSRS and the offer of four technical universities.

**Keywords:** CSR, responsible education, CSR awareness, responsible university.

**JEL:** M14, I23

## CSR na uczelniach: między ignorancją, świadomością a wiedzą

### Streszczenie

**Cel:** niniejszy artykuł koncentruje się na edukacji w zakresie CSRS (Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability) w szkołach wyższych. Analizuje obecne podejścia do tej edukacji oraz ulepszenia już wdrożone w perspektywie międzynarodowej. Głównym celem jest konceptualizacja form edukacji CSRS w kontekście uczelni zorientowanych na technologię i zaproponowanie modelu tej edukacji. Model ten został również częściowo zweryfikowany na przykładach czterech uczelni technicznych.

**Projekt/metody badawcze/podejście:** w badaniu wykorzystano jakościowe i ilościowe metody badawcze. Przegląd literatury służy do śledzenia metod zaangażowania uczelni w edukację i działania w zakresie CSRS. Na podstawie tego przeglądu zaproponowano model kształcenia CSRS w uczelniach. Następnie sprawdzono, w jakim stopniu elementy modelu są wykorzystywane w czterech uczelniach technicznych z: Łotwy, Litwy, Ukrainy i Polski. W tym celu przeanalizowano programy edukacyjne na uczelniach. Skonfrontowano również działalność tych uczelni z wiedzą studentów na temat CSRS. Do opracowania tego aspektu przyczyniły się wyniki ankiety przeprowadzonej wśród 3424 studentów z badanych uniwersytetów.

**Wyniki:** wyniki potwierdzają, że studenci nie znają CSRS, przy czym dotyczy to również tych, którzy studiuje na kierunkach biznesowych. Co zaskakujące, nawet ci studenci, którzy są właścicielami firm, nie wykazują wysokiego poziomu wiedzy na temat CSRS. Uniwersytety natomiast nie dają możliwości wyeliminowania tej niewiedzy. Tymczasem autorki są zdania, że szkoły wyższe mogą to zrobić nie tylko poprzez edukację dedykowaną w zakresie CSRS, lecz także poprzez włączenie CSRS do innych kursów i dawanie dobrego przykładu.

**Ograniczenia/implikacje badawcze:** z uwagi na bariery językowe przedstawiony model został tylko częściowo zweryfikowany na wybranych uczelniach, przeanalizowano bowiem jedynie programy w języku angielskim. Badania przeprowadzono w uczelniach technicznych, co także może wpływać na ostateczny ich wynik. Uzyskane wyniki dotyczą studentów i uczelni z Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, co wymagałoby pogłębienia o badania studentów i uczelni z zachodniej części Europy.

**Oryginalność/wartość:** mając na uwadze aktualny poziom realizacji kształcenia w obszarze CSR oraz wyniki przeprowadzonych badań, zaproponowano model kształcenia obejmujący trzy filary: dobry przykład uczelni (uczelnia odpowiedzialna społecznie), kształcenie odpowiedzialnych menedżerów (RME) oraz podnoszenie świadomości wśród studentów kierunków niebiznesowych (ASR). Jednocześnie wykazano dużą lukę między potrzebami edukacyjnymi w obszarze CSRS a ofertą przebadanych uczelni.

**Słowa kluczowe:** CSR, odpowiedzialna edukacja, świadomość CSR, odpowiedzialna uczelnia.



## 1. Introduction

Due to the growing concern for the condition of our polluted planet and increasing inequalities, the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is moving towards sustainable development (SD) in almost every sphere of human life and activity. It is more and more important to respect the expectations of stakeholders, including future generations, and their social, economic and environmental needs. Public institutions, business and non-governmental organizations engage in various initiatives and policies of sustainable development and at every step try to draw the attention of stakeholders to their responsible behavior. The two main concepts behind this, corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainable development (SD), have become important organizational evaluation parameters over time. Higher education institutions (HEIs) are broadly claimed to be leaders of this global change, bearing in mind the fundamental role they play in society and economy (Giesenbauer & Müller-Christ, 2020). Universities can commit to this global transformation in many ways, through research, education and by giving a good example. In this context, some authors use a combination of both concepts, CSR and Sustainability – CSRS, claiming that in reality one cannot exist without the other (Murray, Haynes, & Hudson, 2010; Moon & Orlitzky, 2011).

Today's world is facing a lot of serious problems such as poverty, climate change, various dangerous diseases like HIV or COVID-19. Increasing the awareness of sustainable development imperative results from concerns about more and more frequent environmental hazards. Environmental discontinuities such as pollution, land degradation and climate change are examples of the effects of entrepreneurial activity on society (Chick, 2009). Therefore, there is a growing consensus that the business world should more dynamically reshape its scope of entrepreneurial activity and push it much beyond the ordinary financial performance – ethically and socially conscious behavior becomes an expected element of business life (Spence et al., 2010). Meanwhile, the entrepreneurial potential to cope with current and future complex challenges is related to competences and knowledge (O'Neill & Gibbs, 2016; Biberhofer et al., 2019) acquired in a more or less formal education process or through experience.

HEIs are also expected to play a crucial role in underpinning innovation and entrepreneurial activities. They provide the conditions, facilities and talent that foster the emergence of breakthrough ideas. Most of the characteristics of an entrepreneur include such qualities as creativity, innovation and willingness to take risks, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects to achieve goals. Importantly, in recent years, entrepreneurship has been combined with the intention to make changes in the environment, improve the life of a given community, or provide value, not only in the mercantile dimension, but also, more and more often, in



a more or less disinterested context. Entrepreneurship is not simply about how one creates a business or the workings of the economy. It is far more about how we organize today's society (Blundel et al., 2018).

This paper is an attempt to analyze the concept of CSR agenda within HEIs context, in particular in business and engineering studies, where most of the knowledge needed by a potential entrepreneur is transferred within other major subjects. Our main aim was to design the model of CSRS education at the university level. We partially verified this model, using the data from four technical universities representing different European countries. Thanks to the survey conducted among students from these universities, we could also examine the CSR knowledge among them. Its low level supported previous conclusions of the literature review that indicated the need to strengthen education in this area.

In summary, the main contributions of this paper are as follows: based on our quantitative research, we conclude that current understanding of CSR by students oscillates between ignorance and knowledge of this concept. We also put forward the thesis that CSR may bring a lot of freshness into the educational process, especially in the age of growing expectations for sustainable development of the world economy. It may also transform the university governance model into more sustainable and therefore help to satisfy expectations of a larger group of stakeholders. The starting point for considerations is a literature review, which allowed us to conceptualize and modeling the CSRS education at university level. The resulting picture is completed with a survey conducted among students of four technical universities in Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine and Poland.

The paper is arranged as follows: Chapter 2 features a theoretical analysis and puts forth the research questions. Chapter 3 features an overview of the research design. Chapter 4 focuses on the empirical results. Chapter 5 provides a discussion confronting results with . Finally, the article concludes the policy implication.

## 2. Context and Background – Literature Review

Facing growing environmental and social challenges and pressure, organizations worldwide are increasingly expected to behave in an ethical and socially responsible manner; therefore, their leaders and employees are supposed to have skills and competences enabling them to cope with a wide range of problems, including equality, sustainability and ethics (Young & Nagpal, 2013; Leveson & Joiner, 2014; Gonzalez et al., 2017). Therefore, for any organization, skilled, talented and motivated employees are a critical factor in sustained organizational success (Brammer et al., 2014). Considering that, CSR should become an important HEIs' component or even imperative for a number of reasons. The group of university stakeholders is very vast and includes current and future generations of

students and staff who are more and more environmentally aware. These stakeholders push universities to commit to this responsible governance and education. In reality, for more than 30 years, universities, as other organizations, have continued addressing their needs by practicing CSR in order to fulfill their accountability to the large public.

Universities should take care of both teaching about CSR and undertaking such activities. Universities are viewed as special types of corporates, and that is why the term USR – University Social Responsibility was introduced, where stakeholders are students, professors and administration (Sawasdikosol, 2009). Graduates of a socially responsible university are expected to be empathetic, altruistic, selfless and caring (Kouatli, 2020).

HEIs have a significant role to play in preparing the next generation of leaders both through CSR research and by incorporating CSR topics into their education and training programs (Kolondinsky et al., 2010). The current generation leaving universities, commonly known as “Gen Z” (defined here as born after 95), is entering the labor market at a time of increased sensitivity and scrutiny of sustainability. Sensitizing students to CSR issues should help them in their job search process by enabling them to more accurately distinguish between genuine CSR references and the ‘spin’ signaled by potential employers (Owen, 2007).

The first important perspective in the formation of future leaders are future leaders are educational programs. This educational effort, oriented towards CSR, is enhanced not only by European Union but also by several international rankings and rating institutions and associations. In 2007, following the communication of the European Commission “Promoting corporate social responsibility”<sup>1</sup>, worldwide HEIs were invited to introduce CSR educational contents into their teaching. The initiative was enhanced by the United Nations Development Program entitled “Accelerating CSR Practices in the New EU Member States and Candidate Countries as a Vehicle for Harmonization, Competitiveness and Social Cohesion in EU.” One of the concrete results was the UN Global Compact initiative aiming at promoting the six “Principles of Responsible Management Education” (PRME), namely: purpose, values, method, research, partnership and dialogue. Another global initiative, UI Green Metric World University Ranking, aims at providing the result of online survey regarding the current condition and policies related to green campus and sustainability in the universities all over the world. It takes into account different aspects of the university behavior in the field of environment protection and sustainable development and offers to university leaders a sort of sustainability benchmark. The American Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) mission is to inspire and catalyze universities to lead the global sustainability transformation. Since 2006, AASHE has supported university campuses in achieving sustainability goals and facilitated institutional efforts to integrate sustainability into teaching, research, operations, and public engagement.



There is an ongoing debate on the possible ways of teaching CSR (Larrán Jorge et al., 2017). Some researchers argue that it is best taught as a stand-alone subject, which allows for a comprehensive focus on the complexity of these issues (Stubbs & Schapper, 2011), and some others that it should be embedded in a wide range of courses for strengthening students' awareness and reasoning (Ghoshal, 2005; Blanthorne et al., 2007). It is worth mentioning that most of this scientific discussion regards management education and there is a very limited space given to humanities and engineering students. Meanwhile, both groups of students, should receive a message in which, apart from the noble goals of responsibility and sustainability, there will also be information about the possible benefits of taking such actions, which, among other things, legitimize business in the modern world (Snelson-Powell et al., 2016).

Besides, as mentioned above, education of the future leaders perspective, a CSR approach is gaining more and more importance in various accreditation processes (Lamoreaux & Bonner, 2009; Persons, 2012). Therefore, HEIs should invest in their strategies and follow a responsible approach, not only in the education but also in their strategies and management activities (Teixeira et al., 2018; Mascarenhas et al., 2020). According to the ISO 26000, responsible governance is related to incorporating the principles and practices of accountability, transparency, ethical behavior, respect for stakeholder interests and respect for the rule of law into decision making and implementation, responsible involvement in the public sphere, fair competition, promoting social responsibility in relations with other organizations and respect for property rights (Nejati et al., 2011). The university strategic management is considered successful when its managers are able to respond to all stakeholders' needs, gain their trust and cooperation, and to create welfare (Ramos-Monge et al., 2017). In other words, there is a need of institutionalization of the CSR agenda by universities which can affect their legitimacy with key institutional actors in the higher education field, such as governments, funding bodies, professional and sector-specific associations (Reay et al., 2013; Beddewela et al., 2020).

The CSR institutionalization principles have become, in recent years, one of the dimensions assessed by independent accreditation institutions. Universities interested in gaining international visibility, and thus brand recognition and credibility, are the most active accreditation seekers. Pressure from accreditation bodies and initiatives such as PRME, the Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative (GRLI), and the Academy of Business in Society (ABIS) is growing. The leading one (in terms of numbers) is PRME, whose goal is to "guide business schools toward sustainability-focused curricula and building responsible managers of the future" (PRME, 2020). All these institutions focus on universities educating in the field of management, i.e. business schools, especially private, operating on a very competitive market are the major customer of accreditations. Among them,





only those able to gain the so-called triple crown: EQUIS (European Quality Information System – accreditation of the European Foundation for Management Development, EFMD), AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) and AMBA (Association of MBAs) have a chance to attract the best candidates from the country and the world. These and other accreditation bodies are now looking for the evidence of the responsible behavior of HEIs not only in terms of responsible education and research but also in the everyday governance practice.

Both above aspects of the CSR agenda, education and institutionalization are extremely important and discussed in the literature mostly in the context of business schools (Roach & Slater, 2016). Meanwhile, it seems important to understand that future leaders are not only among the graduates of management schools but also among humanities and engineering students. CSR-minded firms may seek out humanities-educated executives, and engineers are recognized as the leaders in the startups generation. Public trust in engineering requires that the profession considers its impacts on human safety. There is widespread consensus in the codes of ethics of professional engineering societies worldwide that engineering has a primary duty to protect public safety, health, and welfare connected with the environmental protection (Bielefeldt, 2018). Therefore, it is important to at least sensitize them, in other words, raise their awareness, on the subject of responsible manner of running a business and providing innovative technologies to the market. Special emphasis is placed on the creation process within artificial intelligence, where an entire field of research is directed toward searching for regulations allowing for the creation of “ethical” systems. The literature points to additional benefits that may be brought by the practice of sustainable solutions by universities, i.e. maintaining and building the legitimacy of HEIs in society (Snelson-Powell et al., 2016).

While applying for accreditation or being accredited, universities implement obligations promoting CSR activities in various ways. Usually, they do not engage in all areas related to responsibility – an analysis conducted among six universities with AACSB accreditation indicates that each of them implements CSR activities in a different scope, emphasizing different elements (Dzięgiel & Wojciechowska, 2017). However, the analysis carried out concerned only documents and not actual actions. The reality presented in the documents when applying for accreditation is not always reflected in the actual activities. Consequently, the analysis of the actual activities of HEIs often deviates from the provisions that are the basis for obtaining accreditation. This is often due to the resistance of employees, for them it sometimes means an additional effort, consisting in changing existing habits (this applies, inter alia, to the introduction of new content related to RME) or forcing them to undertake additional activities. This is one of the possible reasons for the institutions’ failure to comply with their formal obligations (Rasche & Gilbert, 2015). Other reasons are limited resources



or institutional pressures on other goals. This problem, which was pointed out by Rasche and Gilbert (2015), is still relevant, although the authors suggested that it would probably disappear over time. However, this time has not yet come, as evidenced by the results of our research carried out on undergraduate students. The idea of PRME is to constantly improve CSR activities. However, not all universities are able/willing to meet those requirements – in 2019, 18 universities were delisted for failure of Sharing Information on Progress Report (PRME, 2020).

Each country has its own accreditation regulations. In Poland, all fields of study are subject to mandatory assessment which is carried out by the Polish Accreditation Committee. As part of the assessment, the activities carried out by the entity belonging to the area of socially responsible activities are not taken into account. This area of evaluation in Polish accreditation does not occur at all. The only reference to social responsibility is found in the records pointing to good practices (precisely how to recognize them) in which ethics ranked fifth, as “compliance with ethical norms and values and the principles of social responsibility”.<sup>2</sup> This means that Polish universities may not achieve the goals related to social responsibility as long as they do not apply for international accreditation.

This literature review allowed us to develop a model of supporting CSRS education at HEIs. It comprises three components: Socially Responsible University (SRU), Responsible Managerial Education (RME), and Awareness raising Education (ARE) (Figure 1), pointing out the crucial elements of CSR education within the tertiary educational context. In our model, ARE describes this “less advanced” form, supposing that CSR-related content might be included in completely disconnected, sometimes even vocational subjects, especially in the case of engineering education. RME refers to the education of future leaders, in particular managers, which in the case of technology-oriented universities relates to management and economics departments, offering managerial education which supposes the natural inclusion of CSR content, often as stand-alone courses. Finally, Socially Responsible University (SRU) embraces the role of HEIs as not only educating generations of the future but also as giving a good example, behaving responsibly towards their main stakeholders.

In the following sections, we would to confront this model with available data on CSRS education from four European technical universities. This confrontation includes a review of the universities available in our sample and curricula, in particular in terms of the content related to CSR. We have also examined the educational needs based on the knowledge of the CSR concept.

Four research questions were raised:

1. Do young people coming to universities know what CSR means?
2. Is the CSR knowledge of students intending to become entrepreneurs higher?

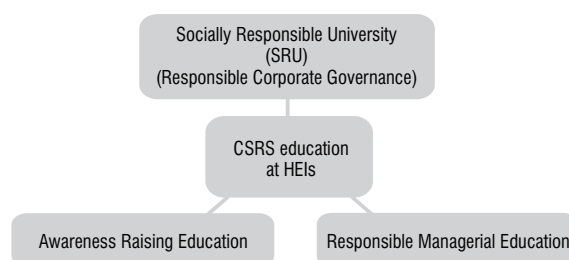




3. Do the programs created at universities take into account Awareness Raising Education?
4. Are there any classes in business programs introducing young people to responsible management?

We will try to answer these questions in the following sections.

Figure 1  
Model supporting CSRS education at HEIs



Source: Own elaboration.

### 3. Methodology

Educational needs were diagnosed based on the analysis of research among students of four European technical universities: Gdansk Technical University (Poland); Riga Technical University (Latvia), Vilnius Gediminas Technical University (Lithuania); Lviv Polytechnic National University (Ukraine) in 2019. The study was a part of the SEAS Project (Survey on Entrepreneurial Attitudes of Students) which has been an ongoing project on the Faculty of Management and Economics GUT since 2008. The year 2019 edition, for the first time, became an international edition. The data used in this study was collected during the first semester of participants' studies. The main objective of the project is to study broadly understood entrepreneurship among the academic youth. The research questionnaire consists of a record and questions on the entrepreneurial attitude, entrepreneurial intentions, and perceived possibilities. Each edition also includes additional questions from outside the pool of basic ones listed above. The 2009 edition included, inter alia, CSR-related questions.

These questions were aimed at diagnosing the awareness of young people regarding this issue, which diagnosis may be the basis for the implementation of appropriate content into educational programs. Therefore, it was decided to conduct research among students starting their studies.

To formulate the question about the knowledge of CSR, we used the first, initial level of determining cognitive skills according to the Boom taxonomy (2003). We assumed that at this stage of research, we are only



interested in factual knowledge about CSR, in the form of knowledge of terminology (2002). Moreover, we assumed that no ordinal scale should be introduced, the student knows or does not know the term CSR.

The question about the entrepreneurial intentions of students was included in the basic part of the questionnaire and it is repeated in all editions of the SEAS project. The answers include the following options: *I am already an entrepreneur, I will be an entrepreneur in the future, I do not intend to become a trader and no answer.*

In total, 7,982 students were enrolled in selected fields of study at four universities. Paper questionnaires were delivered during the classes, a total of 3,424 questionnaires were completed. All students present at the day of questioning filled in the questionnaire. We cannot evaluate the overall response rate, because during the first year of study, some of students quit university, and the number enrolled is higher than the real number of those effectively studying. Most of respondents were from Vilnius TU: 1,279, then from Gdansk TU: 1,027, Lviv TU: 746 and Riga TU: 372.

For the purposes of this article, an analysis of the curricula at four HEIs was carried out. Due to linguistic limitations, only study programs in English were analyzed. In order to ensure the homogeneity of the research protocol, only English-language programs were taken into account also in Gdansk TU. In each field of study, we looked for courses with names indicating a relationship with issues related to corporate social responsibility or sustainable development (CSRS) or descriptions of the fields of study themselves indicating that such content was raised during studies. To describe the desired content, the following keywords were specified: *CSR; responsibility; environment; reuse; ecology; recycling; climate*, also in combination with *engineering; management; protection, etc.*

## 4. Results

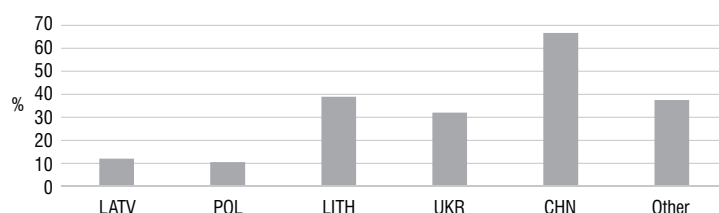
### CSR Knowledge

Young people entering the university are already shaped to a large extent by secondary schools. There is a widespread belief that at this level they become sensitive to the problems of the modern world. Certainly, young people participate in social life and are familiar with various relevant concepts. This is particularly true for those who decide to undertake further education. Therefore, we assumed that a concept such as CSR should be familiar to them. Meanwhile, the results of our study indicate that the knowledge of CSR is small and accounts for 26% on average. The share of young people who came across the concept of CSR depends on the country of origin. In the described research, the country of origin was taken into account, not the country of study; therefore, the sample includes also students from China. The highest knowledge was demonstrated by students from China (66%),



and the lowest from Poland (11%) (Figure 2). Such large differences in the knowledge of CSR should be the subject of further analysis, mainly regarding educational programs at the secondary school level in individual countries.

Figure 2  
*Nationality and CSR knowledge*

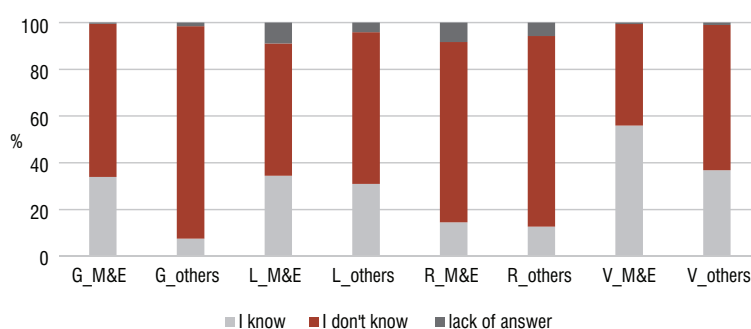


Note: Does not include 284 students who did not declare any nationality. N=3 140.

Source: Own calculations based on the survey.

Students' responses were analyzed according to the field of study and divided into two groups – students of management or economics (regardless of whether these were engineering or bachelor studies) and students of other fields (mostly engineering studies). Significant differences between management/economics and other students occurred at two universities: Gdansk TU and Vilnius TU (Figure 3). In the case of Riga TU and Lviv TU, no clear differences were noted. As the surveyed students were just starting their academic education, these differences were certainly not influenced by the studied field, but rather by the interest (knowledge) they had had before they were enrolled at the university.

Figure 3  
*Field of study and CSR knowledge, university comparison*



Note: N=3 424. G – Gdansk TU, L – Lviv TU, R – Riga TU, V – Vilnius TU. M&E – management and economics.

Source: Own calculations based on the survey.

Regardless of the field of study, young people plan to start an entrepreneurial business, or they already run their own businesses. Of the entire group surveyed, 4% are active entrepreneurs, another 83% are people who do not exclude that they will start a business. About 12% definitely do not plan such a move. Lithuanian and Ukrainian students excel in the participation of entrepreneurs in their community. The lowest share was recorded among students of GTU (Table 1). However, it is more important how individual groups (entrepreneurs, potential entrepreneurs and the rest) answered the question about the knowledge of CSR.

Table 1  
*Entrepreneurial intentions*

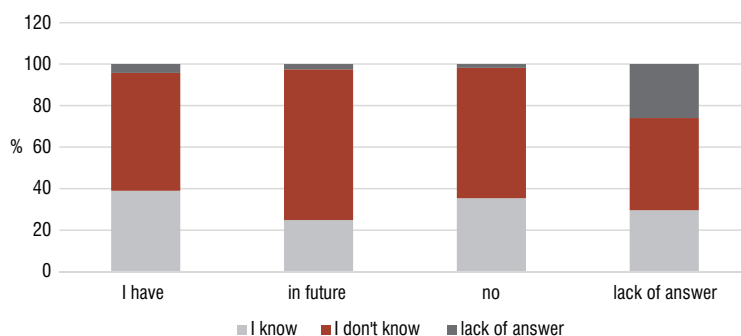
University	I am an entrepreneur	I will be in the future	No intention	Lack of answer
GTU	1.3%	89.8%	8.6%	0.3%
LTU	5.8%	88.1%	4.3%	1.9%
RTU	3.0%	85.5%	10.5%	1.1%
VTU	5.8%	74.9%	18.8%	0.5%

Note: N=3 424.

Source: Own calculation.

Less than half of students running their own business feel familiar with the concept of CSR, but their share (39%) is not much greater than that of people who do not intend to set up their company (38%) (Figure 4).

Figure 4  
*Knowledge of the CSR concept and entrepreneurial intentions*



Note: N=3 424.

Source: Own calculations based on research.

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### Curricula Analysis

An analysis of the curriculum available on the university's website revealed significant differences. At Gdansk TU, three fields of study with such subjects have been identified for a total of six fields of study conducted in English. At Lviv TU, there is no obligatory courses related to CSR or sustainability education. Students can choose sustainable development or ecology from a long list of elective subjects. This list is valid for all fields of study in English. At Riga TU, 5 out of 18 are related to such education and in Vilnius TU, 8 out of 18. A detailed analysis is presented in the table below (Table 2).

Table 2  
*Subjects related to sustainability or CSR concepts*

University	Field of study	Subject	
Gdansk TU	Mechanical engineering	Environmental management and ecology	
	Power engineering	Environmental protection in energy savings	
	Green technology	Several items	
Lviv TU	Construction and civil engineering	Compulsory: Historical, cultural heritage and society sustainable development ensuring Ecology	
	Applied mechanics		
	Industrial engineering		
	Computer science		
	Management		
Riga TU	Public management and administration	Environmental engineering	
	Chemistry and chemical technology		
	Entrepreneurship and management		Corporate social responsibility
	Environmental engineering		Several subjects
	Materials engineering		Environment and climate roadmap
Vilnius TU	Smart power systems	Saving energy	
	Automotive engineering	Environment protection in transport	
	Building energy	Waste management and reuse technologies	
	Environmental protection engineering	Sustainable environment	
	Mechanical engineering	Ecological design	
	Landscape architecture	Sustainable entrepreneurship for local change	

*Source:* Own research, based on the materials provided on the universities' websites.



The analysis of study programs shows that students gain knowledge mainly about goals related to sustainability, primarily in the area of environmental protection. However, they do not learn much about CSR, unless the lecturer addresses these issues in his/her subject. This, together with the low knowledge about CSR among young generation, may result in the lack of awareness in the future work of what benefits CSR brings to the society, employees and the company itself.

The analysis of the programs in English at four technical universities showed that around 30% of the courses offered contain courses related to CSRS. CSR as a separate subject was offered in only one business program at only one university – Riga TU. Probably, in other business fields of study, the content related to CSR is integrated into the content provided during lectures on other subjects, this is the case at Gdansk TU in business programs. However, this approach does not allow for the full message needed by future managers, including the knowledge of possible benefits of responsible behavior as a new societal paradigm.

## 5. Discussion

Research among more than three thousand undergraduate students from four technical universities shows that young people, beginning their university education, are not familiar with the concept of CSR. This is true for both engineering and management & economic students. To our surprise, also people running their own companies or planning to start an entrepreneurial activity did not show a high level of knowledge of the concept of responsible business. This means a great responsibility incumbent on universities, whose goal is not only to transfer knowledge, but also to shape future members of society. They must therefore undertake a number of activities, both at the level of educating future managers and raising the awareness of young people studying in nonmanagerial faculties. However, our research shows that this is not the case, little knowledge is provided about CSR – only one CSR course has been identified, out of a total of 36 analyzed programs, also among typical business ones. This poor offer of CSRS-related courses in business fields was also brought to the attention by Slavova and Bankova (2015), based on the analysis of educational programs at Bulgarian universities. On the other hand, content related to environmental protection has appeared in programs, mainly in engineering.

A 2014 UNESCO report suggested a curriculum reform to integrate sustainable development education into all study programs (Buckler & Creech, 2014). The report also indicated the need to develop an appropriate potential of academic staff in this area. The analysis shows that it is not that simple and, without appropriate motivators, universities/program directors will be reluctant to introduce CSRS-related content into the education of students. There may be several reasons for this. One of them, and probably



the most important, is the resistance of lecturers conducting classes: they try to keep their topics in the program at all costs and, as the introduction of mandatory CSR courses into the program may cause the necessity to remove the already existing ones, they are very reluctant.

As stated in the second section, education related to CSR can take various forms and volumes, starting with the extension of individual major subjects existing in the curriculum and finishing with stand-alone subjects. We propose two approaches to shaping the curriculum: built in and bolted on (Snelson-Powell et al., 2016). In the case of business programs, it is necessary to introduce the entire subject of CSR/CSRS where all information on taking CSR activities in the enterprise will be provided, along with an analysis of the costs and benefits of such activities. Ideally, however, both of these approaches should be implemented simultaneously – the introduction of CSR as a separate subject, and then its elements as a complement to the basic subjects implemented as part of the studies, like e.g. strategic management, marketing, business law, etc.

For non-business programs, it is enough to introduce CSRS content into individual subjects taught in the faculty. For example, in engineering subjects, the issues related to ethics, environmental protection, social responsibility should be implemented. One can also weave this content by lecturing on city development, car design, creating medicines, etc.

One of the possibilities of making universities aware of the need for responsible management education is the accreditation process. Among universities participating in this research, only two of their units joined the PRME initiative. These are the Faculty of Management and Economics from Gdansk TU and the Faculty of Engineering and Management from Riga TU. In total, over 800 universities have joined PRME in the world, of which four in Lithuania, 8 in Latvia, 16 in Poland and 3 in Ukraine. For an organization that has been operating since 2007, the number of participants is not very large.

Such an approach, together with the CSR activities carried out by the university, constituting an example for students, will raise their awareness. Undertaking social responsibility activities by a university is a very important element of raising students' awareness in these areas. The value is therefore found not only in the activities themselves, but also in their organization and promotion. In 2019, The Times Higher Education published for the first time the Impact Ranking<sup>3</sup> that assesses universities against the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The ranking includes 1,118 universities from 94 countries/regions. In the 2021 edition, three from the observed universities were included. The highest position is held by Riga TU, then Lviv TU, and finally Gdansk TU. The latter also holds the first position in Poland along with three other Polish universities.



## 6. Conclusions and Limitations

Our paper was aimed at conceptualizing on the CSR agenda within HEIs context, in particular in business and engineering studies, by using quantitative and qualitative research tools. We were interested in the level of knowledge of this concept among students as well as the presence and place of CSRS education and the way it is delivered to them. Our findings confirm that this education is somehow present; however, its role in educating future leaders is underestimated. The surveyed students in great majority are ignorant about CSR. We suggest therefore that stand-alone CSRS education is only one of possible pillars of preparing leaders of the future, the other two, specifically including CSRS content in other subjects and setting an example as a responsible university, are equally important. The picture resulting from our analysis of four cases seems to confirm these findings. Therefore, referring to the title of the article: *CSR and HEIs: Between Ignorance, Awareness and Knowledge*, it should be stated that according to our quantitative study, students seem to ignore the importance of the CSR concept, HEIs are aware of the need to provide CSR education (mainly thanks to accreditations, etc.), but they do not sufficiently use the available knowledge of how to do it.

At the same time, it must be admitted that this research has some limitations. Due to the language barrier, the elaborated model was only partially verified at selected universities. Therefore, for the further research, to enlarge its scope, we plan to include curricula provided in native languages. We are also aware that the described situation may be one-sided due to the choice of universities for the survey study. The four cases presented in this study are homogeneous as they represent technical universities. In addition, the conducted research covered students and universities from Central and Eastern Europe, which may also have an impact on the obtained results. To actually check whether the proposed model is relevant, a study dedicated only to CSRS should be conducted. In addition, it would be worth checking the same students on the exit to understand whether the educational and real-life activities of the university in the field of CSRS translated into the knowledge, awareness, and empathy of their graduates.

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### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=URISERV:c00019&from=PL>
- <sup>2</sup> From annex no. 4 to the Statute of the Polish Accreditation Committee, section 3 point 2.
- <sup>3</sup> [https://www.timeshighereducation.com/impactrankings#!/page/0/length/25/sort\\_by/rank/sort\\_order/asc/cols/undefined](https://www.timeshighereducation.com/impactrankings#!/page/0/length/25/sort_by/rank/sort_order/asc/cols/undefined)

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