

Is the Socio-Economic Justice Still the Aim or Already the Result of the Cooperation Between Business and Society in Developing Synergy? The Case of Lithuania

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Today's business philosophy promotes social responsibility, social self-development and other significant concepts for aspiration of cooperation between business and society in developing synergy; therefore this determines changes in the production, exchange and innovation logic. Socially responsible businesses voluntarily assume obligations in order to meet the interests and needs of society, and take the responsibility for the impact of their activities for all stakeholders. Society understands socio-economic justice as the access to the goods and services, participation in decision-making process, equal employment opportunities, fair wages and other. The results of the national representative survey of Lithuanian residents had shown where major social and economic tensions remain in the country. The respondents critically evaluate the oasis of social responsibility where the principles of corruption, exercising 'proper prevailing circumstances' and other interferences are still present.

Key Words: socio-economic justice, corporate social responsibility, cooperation, synergy

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays the problem of the socio-economic justice is in the centre of attention of the industry, science and policy makers in almost every country. The scientific research relevance of this problem arises

[26] from the changes in business and other organizational philosophical dispositions; from the resulted perception that the companies have to become a public 'exemplary residents' – it means that companies must take greater responsibility for the sustainable business development, social welfare development and so on. This problem is analysed by economists and communication specialists, sociologists and managers, lawyers and politicians in order to ensure sustainable future.

The corporate social responsibility (CSR, also called socially responsible business, corporate citizenship, corporate social opportunity and so on) means the voluntary assumed obligation of companies to meet the interests and needs of society, and to take the responsibility for the impact of their activities for all stakeholders (shareholders, suppliers, employees, customers, communities, government, environment and others). This obligation shows that the organizations must not only implement the local and international legislation but also take the particular initiatives to improve the welfare of their employees and their families as well as for the local community and society at large. It is equally important to improve the psychological climate, to foster the moral values and awareness of human life needs.

Socially responsible business is investing more into intellectual capital, ensuring safe and healthy working conditions for employees, and seeking for more important tasks (Ruževičius and Serafinas 2007). It should be stressed, that it is essential not only to guarantee safe and healthy working conditions for the workforce, possibilities to study and improve themselves, to use the energy sources and materials for the production efficiently, but also to carry out socially responsible marketing, not abusing the weaknesses of different social groups. In such way the organizations comply with the principles of sustainable development in their activities. Implementing socially responsible activities have a positive impact on the employment and loyalty of the staff, operational efficiency, the organization's reputation and sales, which provide more competitive advantages, not only in domestic but also in foreign markets.

According to J. Elkington, the corporate social responsibility is



attained by integration of objectives of three bottom lines (Birch 2003):

- economic prosperity,
- environmental quality and
- social justice.

[27]

This article focuses on ensuring socio-economic justice by the cooperation between socially responsible business and society. The recent data of representative social survey (done in Lithuania on 10–14 April, 2013) showed that the society faces challenges of social and economic justice, which have a major impact on the development of public relations. The scientific research project ‘Socio-Economic Justice Perception for Citizens and Customers Formation Guidelines’ revealed that the relationship between business stakeholders is quite strained.

The matter of socio-economic justice is still complicated. The questions remain: How does the society assess the socio-economic justice? Why should and how could the responsible organizations ensure the socio-economic justice? What barriers appear in ensuring and developing the socio-economic justice? Is the socio-economic justice still the aim or already the result of cooperation between business and society in developing synergy? Due to the limited scope of the article, one of the main aspects of the socio-economic justice is analysed – the concept of equitable redistribution of public goods. However, a need to explore the situation deeply in order to find out solutions and set recommendations, which could be taken into real actions, still remains.

The goal of this article is to reveal the impact of cooperation between responsible organizations and society in order to ensure socio-economic justice. In this research the following research methods were used: review of scientific literature, comparative analysis of statistical data, generalization of the results of the representative survey of Lithuanian residents, formulation of conclusions and proposals. The article is organized as follows: in the first section, the scientific literature review is described, highlighting the role of cooperation between socially responsible organizations and

[28] society and discussion of the main measures of responsible organizations to ensure the socio-economic justice in labour market is represented; in the second section, short methodology of the research is given; in the third section, the Lithuanian situation in ensuring socio-economic justice and the barriers are explored; and finally, main conclusions are listed.

REVIEW OF SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE

In the context of economic globalization it is important not to violate the core values of freedom, social and economic justice, security and safety in order to ensure sustainable socio-economic development and efficiency in each country. The specific expression of socio-economic justice in each country depends on the economic situation, living standards, political ideology, traditions and other social and economic causes.

Socio-economic justice is comprehensible as assurance of material goods, which rightfully belong to humans according to fulfilment of its functions and results. Legally, it is treated as a guarantee of certain rights and opportunities arising from a democratic framework (Guogis and Gruževskis 2010). In general, justice is the main social value of society. A variety of social relations causes the identities of interests and their conflicts which are specific for particular societies. Society tends to agree on the advantages that enable everyone to live better than relying solely on their own strength. On the other hand, everyone has their own goals and prefers a larger portion rather than a smaller one. Nowadays the social relations are getting more complex. Justice faces challenges of economic globalization and democratic principles in protecting the public and private interests (Laurinavičius 2013).

It is important to highlight that sometimes the problems of socio-economic justice appear not far in the future, but right away – after one or another political and economic decision or action. However, many issues associated with social justice accentuate in a very long period (Guogis and Gruževskis 2010).

Economic justice is a component of social justice and tackles the individual person, so this term could be defined as an opportunity



for employment and meaningful work, fair wages for productiveness, exchange of goods and services with others and otherwise produces an independent material foundation (The International Forum for Social Development 2006; Center for Economic and Social Justice n. d.). A Theory of Justice tries to tackle the problem of distributive justice by minimizing the possibility to take advantage of the familiar connections in awarding social contracts (Rawls 1999), especially in labour market. The situation in labour market and the problems in distributing public goods in a society will be outlined in the next session discussing the results of national survey.

[29]

Each country must develop its own model of socio-economic justice. Corporate social responsibility is defined as a form of socio-economic justice, which occurs at the workplace as well as in case of withdrawal from the labour market and becoming the recipient of social benefits and the user of social services (Guogis 2006). Socially responsible organizations are beneficial to society's socio-economic development: creating new workplaces, improving working conditions, paying fair wages, developing scientific and technological innovations, and other. It is because, as M. Kitzmueller and J. Shimshack (2012) had stated, the corporate social responsibility stimulates the cooperation between employers and employees. Even D. J. Wood in 1999 stated that the basic idea of CSR is that business and society are interwoven rather than distinct entities (Breitbarth, Harris, and Aitken 2009).

The social contracts express the relationship between society and business. Business regulates its activities within society and, in reply, society expects business to prove responsibility for aspects of its activities. According to the contract, society admits organisations as market players, particularly in the view of the legislation, and authorises them to use environment, natural resources and offer employment. From the business point of view, they improve the quality of life and welfare for the society (Bichta 2003). Consequently, the initiatives of CSR should not be only the campaign of public relations or 'empty business.' To sum up, the business organizations should cooperate with society – voluntarily take part in social initiatives – in developing socio-economic justice, otherwise

they will be recognized as unreliable or even precarious in the public.

[30] The labour market may summon some extra costs for corporate social responsibility. Job-seekers express preferences for organizations with better public images and values similar to their own (Kitzmueller and Shimshack 2012). There are highlighted few socially responsible actions of companies:

- improving working conditions (security and safety at workplace);
- ensuring fair wages (no ‘envelope wages’);
- educating unqualified staff and ensuring possibilities for long-life-learning;
- cooperation with the staff in decision-making process and so on.

Working conditions, occupational safety and social security are the main aspects of CSR. The development of installation of the international standards of Social responsibility ISO 26000, Social Accountability SA 8000 and Occupational Health and Safety Management OHSAS 18001 at the organizations demonstrates that companies are increasingly seeking to provide their employees with a comprehensive job security, and develop a sense of social security too (‘Įmonių socialinės atsakomybės pažangos Lietuvoje šalies lygmeniu 2011 m. vertinimo ataskaita’ 2012). The installed international standards ISO 26000 (iso.org), SA 8000 (www.sa-intl.org) and OHSAS 18001 (www.ohsas-18001-occupational-health-and-safety.com) at the organization ensure:

- 1 activeness of employees (initiative, the efficiency and effectiveness, non-standard solutions, constructive solutions in error and problem-solving process, wish to learn and work in teams);
- 2 satisfaction of employees (proper work conditions and results, safe measures and healthy workplace, positive social and psychological climate);
- 3 organizations investments to:
 - building capacity of employees,



- motivational working environment,
- measures and infrastructure,
- organizational culture and social welfare.

Moreover, the Human rights perspective must be constructed [31] in every organization (International Labour Organization 2012). Though, there are cases when the responsibility for enterprises in some situations goes beyond respect for human rights (United Nations 2012).

Ensuring fair wages, which are comparable to the industry, general training facilities, and other is a way to retain talented and loyal staff and to establish a cooperative relationship with the workforce, which can lead to higher productivity and higher profit of the organization (Ganuza 2012). 'Envelope wages' are a specific aspect of the supply of undeclared work. This dimension is relevant especially for dependent employees. Receiving 'envelope wages' means that the employer pays part or all of the regular salary and/or the compensation for extra work on a cash-in-hand basis, without declaring the amount to the relevant authorities (European Commission 2007).

According to the results of Eurobarometer survey No. 284 in 2007, on the average 5 percent of all dependent employees in the EU-27 received part of or even the whole salary as 'envelope wages' within the past 12 months. Incidences vary considerably between all member countries: the lowest percentage for about 1 percent of getting 'envelope wages' are in Germany, France, Luxembourg, Malta and the United Kingdom, the highest – 23 percent – is in Romania. High shares are also reported in Latvia (17 percent), Bulgaria (14 percent), Poland and Lithuania (11 percent each). In this situation both parties – the employer as well as the employee – might profit: the employers evade the payment of social security contributions for the all or part of salary; and the employees usually get a salary that is higher than the net salary the person could receive in the case of a formal payment. However, in some cases employees have no choice – either they accept the 'envelope wage' or they do not get the job (European Commission 2007). Unfortunately, this situation might be beneficial to employee only in the short term. This means that

the person claims to lower pension benefits in the future. Moreover, employers are always at a criminal liability risk.

[32] Young and unqualified persons should be educated by the supervisors at practice places or by the first employers. But in this case, especially the first employer does not agree to pay all the costs, arguing that the future employers will reap the benefits for free. This viewpoint may discourage employers from paying the cost to educate their workforce (United Nations Development Programme 1999). It should be noted that in case organizations decide to educate and/or train their staff periodically, it frequently occurs that they pay them lower wages. The United Nations Development Programme (1999) stated that in this situation a solution is that organizations should unite resources to jointly finance education and training for the staff.

Talking about restructuration (especially change of status or relationship of employment) at socially responsible organizations, the following main aspects should be stressed (Blažienė and Gruževskis 2010):

- consultations between employers and employees before starting, during the process and after the restructuration;
- creating favourable conditions for employees affected by restructuration, in order to ensure the continuity of their professional career;
- non-discrimination (age, sex, membership to work union, and so on) policies and practices.

Sometimes the relationship between employees and the company may reflect conflicts of interest related to effort, training, cooperation with other workers, etc. Some of these conflicts can be resolved with incentives and mechanisms for promotion, but imperfectly, because it is quite complicated to measure productivity, especially when working in teams. The fact that the relationship between the employees and the organization is repeated, helps to solve problems without resorting to high-cost controls. The idea is simple: an employee, who perceives that person has better working conditions than those he/she could have in another company of the sector, has



an incentive to behave cooperatively in order to preserve his long-term relationship with the company (Ganuza 2012).

Unfortunately, the mentioned and other measures to ensure socio-economic justice in labour market are well-known in society, but still remain unexploited, as it was shown in the results of the social survey, which are explored in the next section of this article. To sum up, the companies, especially socially responsible ones, should use proper measures in order to ensure the socio-economic justice, as only socially responsible organizations can take advantages of their favourable status and strengthen their attractiveness as a magnetic employer. [33]

METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

To reveal the situation of socio-economic justice in Lithuania the results of representative survey of Lithuanian residents, done from 10–14 April, 2013, are used. The survey was done by Market and Opinion Research Centre ‘Vilmorus Ltd.’ under the order of the Mykolas Romeris University’s scientific group of the scientific research project ‘Socio-Economic Justice Perception for Residents and Customers Formation Guidelines.’ The survey was conducted implementing the national Research Programme ‘Social Challenges for National Security,’ SIN-12005, supported by the Research Council of Lithuania.

Multi-stage sampling method was used, and then the selection of respondents was prepared, so that each resident of Lithuania had equal chance to be interviewed. In twenty cities and thirty nine districts 1050 residents ($n = 1050$) of all ages were surveyed, starting from 16 years, which, according to Strauss-Howe (2000) generational theory, form four generations:

- the *Silent* generation – born in 1919–1947 – 25.6 percent of respondents,
- the *Boom* generation – born in 1948–1967 – 34.8 percent of respondents,
- the *X* generation – born in 1968–1987 – 25.5 percent of respondents;

- the *Y* or *Millennial* generation – born in 1988–2007 – 14.1 percent of respondents.

[34] Questions, which represent the opinion of residents about the socio-economic justice in labour market were selected, emphasizing the income, the reasons on what the income should depend and why it could diverge; and the general socio-economic situation in the country expressing the satisfaction of respondents in redistributing the public goods. The results were presented at the 14th Management International Conference ‘Industry, Science and Policy Makers for Sustainable Future.’

RESULTS OF THE NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE SURVEY OF LITHUANIAN RESIDENTS

Income: Differences and Reasons

The huge amount (84.2 percent) of Lithuanian respondents believe that differences in income between the wealthy residents and others in Lithuania are too big; only 5.7 percent of respondents is satisfied with income differences; while the rest (10.1 percent) do not have a strong position on the question of the differences in income (see figure 1).

By more than half (54.9 percent) of respondents – comparing the answers of different generations – it should be underlined that the *Silent* (65.1 percent of them), the *Boom* (59.4 percent of them) and the *X* (48.0 percent of them) generations have a strong position that the income should not diverge a lot. The rest part (45.1 percent) of respondents – especially the main part (62.2 percent) of the *Millennial* generation – acknowledges the income differences and listed the following reasons:

- almost one third (28.5 percent) of the respondents acknowledge the income divergence because opportunities and talents of every person are too different – this reason was especially vindicated by the *Millennial* generation (36.5 percent of them);
- each twelfth respondent is sure that in the opposite case people will have no motive to work hard;



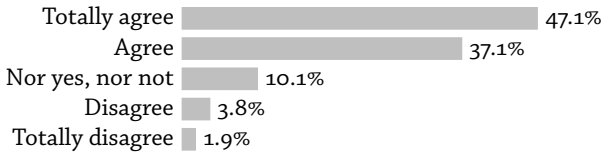


FIGURE 1 Income Differences between the Wealthy Residents and Others in Lithuania are Too Big

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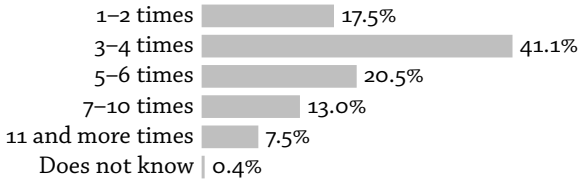


FIGURE 2 Reasonable Income Differences between an Owner of a Huge Factory and Unqualified Worker in the Same Factory

- 3.6 percent of them believe that income differences motivate people to have a dream to become wealthy;
- 2.9 percent – has faith that the state could not develop without large income differences;
- and 1,7 percent believe that small income differences could result in socialism, which can reduce the personal freedom of people.

Only 2 residents (0.2 percent) did not know or have not answered at all.

To find out the opinion of respondents about the reasonable differences in income, the following situation was created: income of an owner of a huge factory compared to unqualified worker in the same factory. The respondents answered as follows to the given situation: the main part (61.6 percent) agreed that the income could diverge by 3 until 6 times. One fifth (20.5 percent) of respondents believe that the income could diverge by 7 and more times and 17.5 percent hoped that it could differ only by 1–2 times. 23.8 percent of all respondents had higher education (see figure 2).

The respondents believe that the divergence in income between an owner of a huge factory and unqualified worker in the same fac-

TABLE 1 Reasonable Income Differences between an Owner of a Huge Factory and Unqualified Worker in the Same Factory: By Respondents' Activities

Activities	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
[36] Businessman	10.0	60.0	10.0	15.0	5.0	—
Senior or middle manager	5.9	35.3	23.5	20.6	14.7	—
Skilled worker	11.2	43.8	22.2	13.5	9.0	0.3
Unskilled worker	20.5	40.9	20.5	9.1	9.1	—
Farmer	14.3	28.6	28.6	—	28.6	—
Pensioner	22.7	38.7	19.9	13.2	4.8	0.8
Unemployed	21.5	40.8	18.0	11.8	7.9	—

NOTES Column headings are as follows: (1) 1–2 times, (2) 3–4 times, (3) 5–6 times, (4) 7–10 times, (5) 11 and more times, (6) does not know/not answered.

tory could only amount to 1–2 times. Moreover, in this divergence the biggest gap in opinions of respondents with and without higher education was mentioned.

It is surprising that 11.4 percent of the surveyed X generation had nothing against the presumption that the income of the owner of a huge factory would be by 11 or even more times higher than the income of unqualified worker in the same factory. It could be assumed that the X generation associates the socio-economic justice with the persons competence and their ability to create significant added value.

Under the variety of responses it is interesting to examine the answers according to the respondents' activities. Analysing answers about reasonable divergences in income according to respondents' activities it was noticed that even businessmen have taken a strong position that the divergence should amount to 3–4 times (see table 1).

About 60 percent of businessmen do not to oppose that the income between the owner of huge factory and the unqualified worker in that factory could diverge by 3–4 times and only 5.0 percent believe that it could diverge by 11 or even more times. Senior and middle managers (14.7 percent of them) vindicate such huge divergence too. Interviews with the leaders and managers show that they are



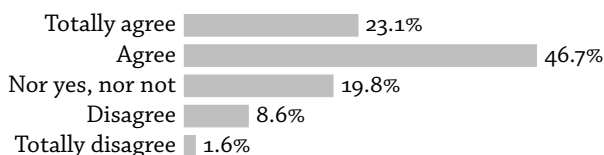
not satisfied with their entrepreneurship and abilities to apply innovative management and other technologies smoothly. Nevertheless, it is more noticeable upon inspection that farmers had no clear opinion about reasonable income differences (this was also because the number of farmers in the sample was too small). Moreover, by farmers we are faced with staff with notably low or even without qualifications. Such personnel require special supervision and control. These assumptions were based on the analysis of the survey data and interviews about individual opinions of respondents were confirmed by the following data. It was also important to find out 'what should the person's income depend on?' Distribution of respondents' answers is as follows. [37]

Every fourth respondent – and 38.5 percent of the *Millennial* generation – believes that the income should depend on the effort of the person to improve his skills and qualifications. That is corroborated: majority of the elder generation (especially uneducated) work physically more than intellectually; young and educated people wish to perform intellectual work. Not without reason, young persons with higher education consider themselves being good specialists, even professionals, having strong merits. Young people believe that they must earn what they are entitled itself, as a result they dream to earn more than the fixed minimum wage. Unfortunately, market principles are difficult to reconcile with the practice in distribution and redistribution of public goods.

The *Silent* (33.8 percent of them), the *Boom* (41.2 percent of them) and the *X* (39.1 percent of them) generations stressed the reason 'how hard and how much the person works' the most.

A relatively small number (18.4 percent) of respondents still expects 'communitistic' equality and privileges in redistribution of public goods and each tenth wish that the income could depend on how many dependents (children, persons with disabilities) are in the family. But still the question remains why even 37.5 percent of respondents are oriented to extensive development (how hard and how much/long the person works) and this needs separate study.

The least attention (8 percent of respondents) was paid to the reason 'practical experience (seniority).' This is why it became usual



[38]

FIGURE 3 Public Goods Should Be Redistributed to Satisfy Basic Needs Not Only of Society with Well-Earnings, But Also for Other People

to get increment to basic salary for accumulated seniority. Only 5 residents (0.5 percent) did not know or did not want to answer at all.

If we summarise, a positive trend should be acknowledged compared with the situation revealed by surveys on similar studies done a decade ago or earlier. Both social levels – employees and employers – realise much more that the socio-economic justice is created by their own hands and intellect.

The problem should be examined in terms of social relations to foresee further direction of changes. Sociality is one of the features of a democratic society, which is relevant to socio-economic justice. The prosperity of community and society largely depends on the redistribution of public goods.

Redistribution of Public Goods

To find out the general opinion about the socio-economic situation in the country, a statement was given that ‘the public goods should be redistributed to satisfy the basic needs not only of society with well-earnings, but also for other people.’ More than a half (69.8 percent) of respondents agreed with this statement. However, 10.2 percent of respondents disagreed with it and one fifth (20.0 percent) doubted this statement (figure 3).

To conclude, less than one-third of respondents is satisfied with the current socio-economic situation in Lithuania. The recent data of survey compared with previous studies, revealing the situation of socio-economic justice perceptions, suggest that the Lithuanian society, entrepreneurs, professionals and ordinary workers realise the essence of a welfare state. To sum up, the synergy development is the common goal.



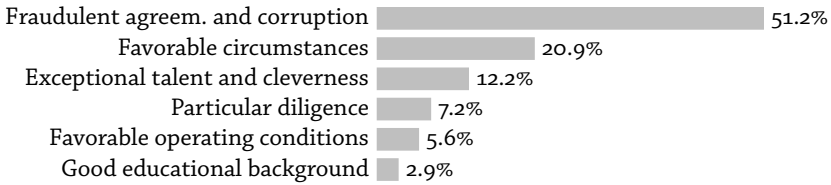


FIGURE 4 Circumstances Determining Welfare of the Lithuanian Residents

Corruption

Another important problem – distorting democratic relations and insulting the self-esteem of every member and the society as a whole – is corruption. More than 70 percent of respondents claim that good income derives from illegal deals, corruption and ability to seize the opportunities under certain circumstances. In other words, the criteria of welfare include neither extraordinary skills nor good educational background (only about 3 percent of respondents believe in this) (see figure 4).

To demonstrate how the residents evaluate the transparency of public relations and the current social justice, the corruption perception index (CPI) is annually measured by the global civil society organisation Transparency International. The leading global indicator of public sector corruption scores countries with a scale from 0 (perceived to be highly corrupted) to 100 (perceived to be very clean) points. The countries are ranked according the points received (Transparency International 2013). The experts highlighted that by assessing the perception of the country’s corruption, the number of collected CPI points is more important than the occupied ranking on the list.

The problem of corruption is similar in most post-communistic countries. Lithuania took the 48th place out of the 176 countries, the CPI was 54 points in 2012. In 2013, the country collected 57 points and was the 43rd out of 177 countries.

It should be noted that a positive improvement is seen. However, to assess whether it is already sufficient compared to our Scandinavian neighbours, which we seek to align and develop cooperation with, with the CPI about 90 points.

Moreover, the corruption should be examined on the interna-

tional level more drastically. Only industry, science and policy makers working together can solve corruption, which is not the reason, but the result of unsuccessful management of public relations.

[40]

CONCLUSION

The results of a national survey showed that the concept of socio-economic justice in Lithuanian society changes – it formulates a realistic approach to social relations influenced by market conditions. The self-critical approach to business development and career opportunities promotes the improvement and the interest in innovations. A large part of the surveyed social groups links the socio-economic justice with the individual features and abilities to create added value.

The measures to increase socio-economic justice are well-known in society, but are still unexploited. The results of the national survey showed that less than one-third of respondents is satisfied with current socio-economic situation in Lithuania. The question remains why even 37.5 percent of respondents are still oriented to extensive development – hard and long work – and this question needs a separate study.

The problem of corruption should be examined on the international level, as this problem is similar in most post-communistic countries. Only industry, science and policy makers working together can solve corruption, which is not the reason, but the result of unsuccessful management of public relations.

Unfortunately, the synergy development – is still the goal of society and business. Companies, especially socially responsible ones, should voluntarily take part in social initiatives to increase socio-economic justice, as only responsible organizations can take advantages of their favourable status and strengthen their attractiveness as an employer and get recognized as reliable in the public.

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