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Social responsibility: the case of citizens and civil/non-profit organisations

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Nowadays on hearing the word responsibility we associate it with corporate social responsibility (CSR) and there is certainly literature available on this relation. According to my readings, citizens, organizations and also the state can take responsibility. Citizens and organizations (firms, civil organisations, etc.) can also take responsibility for their own lives and actions and also for the events in their surroundings, namely social and economic processes. The state can take responsibility for the latter as well. The study shows the following approaches of responsibility: individual social responsibility and organisational social responsibility. The paper is based on theoretical and empirical information.

INTRODUCTION

The paper focuses on the social responsibility of the citizens and civil/nonprofit organisations. In the literature this topic is often mentioned in accordance with companies, but my study shows that other actors are responsible for the society, too. In accordance with these ideas there is individual responsibility and social/ economic responsibility. Personal interest and personal opinions are the most important when speaking of individual responsibility. Social responsibility is a little more than that: social interest and goals are the most relevant.

In my study I show how can the citizens and civil/nonprofit[2] organisations take responsibility for the society concentrating on the development process, after it based on a citizen (2012/13) and organisation (2013) survey[3] I will show one aspect of social responsibility, namely: Did citizens and organisations participate in the decision-making process of their settlement?

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[2] Under the expression civil/nonprofit organisation I understand such organisational form, which has been established by citizens, and/or national, self-government will in favour of realization individual, community or public purposes voluntary.
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I would like to stress that this study is not about the corporate social responsibility (CSR)[4], it is about the concept that according to my opinion – based on researches – also the citizens and civil/nonprofit organisations have responsibility for the society. Of course this responsibility comes from other goals than the responsibility of the firms. Their main goal is the profit and beside these goals they can have social goals, too. But being a person means that citizens are living in a society and they have to take responsibility for the society because they are part of it. So the motivation of the responsibility is different. This is the same with the civil/nonprofit organisations. Their responsibility comes from the activity in behalf of the public. My goal is to show how citizens and civil/nonprofit organisations[5] can take responsibility, in focus with participation in the development process.

The concept of the study is mainly based on my researches and experience. There is a lot of literature on CSR, but on the responsibility of the citizens and civil/nonprofit organisations there are only a few ones, so most of the theoretical part is own concept[6].

1. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

1.1. DEFINITIONS

At first I would like to show what I mean by responsibility and who can take responsibility for whom.

Responsibility means that a person or other social and economic actors are consciously aware of the consequences of their actions. So taking responsibility means that the actors are aware of the positive and negative effects of their decisions and they do not shift it onto other actors[7].

Who can take responsibility?
• citizens,
• organisations, institutions (firms e.g financial institutions[8], banks[9], civil/

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[4] That's why the study does not show literature on this topic.
[5] The responsibility of the state is not the theme of this study.
[6] Author and Márta Nárai Phd, Széchenyi István University.
[7] Gaskó Krisztina (2010): *Autonómia és felelősségvállalás. (Autonomy and responsibility.)* Oktatáskutató és Fejlesztő Intézet, Budapest.
[8] Borzán Anita – Lentner Csaba – Szigeti Cecília (2011): *Economic and social responsibility of financial audit - in new dimension.* Studia Universitatis „Vasile Goldiş" Arad Seria Ştiinţe Economice Anul. 21. sz. 22–27.
[9] Lentner Csaba – Szigeti Cecília – Borzán Anita (2011): New Dimension of Banks Social Responsibility. In: Szente V. – Szendrő K. – Varga Á. – Barna R. (eds.): *Abstracts of the 3rd International Conference of Economic Sciences: Sustainable Economics - Community Strategies*. Kaposvári Egyetem, Kaposvár.

non-profit organisations, health and education institutions, other public institutions, etc.)
• the state.

Both citizens and organisations can take responsibility for their own lives and actions and also for their environment, namely for the society in which they live and operate. Based on these thoughts I will separate responsibility into two types:
• individual responsibility[10]: only the individual interest counts
• social/economic responsibility (social issues are in the focus of our paper): the goal of the actors is to care about social happenings, so the way of thinking is at a community level, not an individual one.

I believe that these two types can be utilised for all of the actors, so we can speak about the following categories of responsibility.
• self-personal responsibility
• individual social responsibility – ISR
• corporate responsibility
• corporate social responsibility – CSR
• civil/non-profit responsibility
• civil/non-profit social responsibility
• institutional responsibility
• institutional social responsibility

1.2. INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

When we speak about individual responsibility we can distinguish between self-personal and individual social responsibility (ISR). Self-personal responsibility means that people take responsibility for their own lives in the following four contexts:
1) The citizens' basic responsibility is to live their life as is good for them: both their physiological and intellectual needs should be satisfied. By this it is meant that people have to live healthily and to be balanced emotionally.
2) The second level is when people care about their environment if they are asked to do so (external intentions).
3) In this level people care about their environment because of internal intentions.
4) The highest level is when people also take responsibility for their close environment, for example: taking care of siblings or animals, etc.

[10] Bénabou, Roland – Tirole, Jean (2010): *Individual and Corporate Social Responsibility*. Economica. 1. 1–19.; Brown, Alexander (2009): *Personal Responsibility – Why it matters*. Continuum.

In these four cases responsibility refers only to the citizens' own and family lives. I believe that if a person has no serious psychological problems then they can take responsibility for their lives, and sum up the consequences of their actions.

If a citizen cares about both their close and wider environment, we can speak about individual social responsibility. This means that citizens are involved in the life of the community where they live. It means that people solve problems together, look after the environment (for example they do not litter, etc.) and care about not just their own lives, but also about the community.

I think that citizens can take responsibility in the following ways:
• for other people: caring about other people (for example behaving in a way that causes no negative consequences for others), helping poor people, donating to charity, helping people suffering from the negative effects of disasters, etc.
• for local public issues (public services),
• for development of the settlement or a region: participation in the development process
• for the environment: people are aware of the environmental issues
• for civil/non-profit organisations in the following ways:
  → establish an organisation
  → membership in an organisation
  → donations
  → one per cent donation of personal income tax
  → as an employment
  → as a volunteer

With these actions citizens can take responsibility for all members of society in the following two ways:
• at an individual level,
• at an organisational level, when citizens join a civil/non-profit organisation and help other people through their activity in the organisation.

It is very important to mention that citizens will only be able to take responsibility for each other if they are able to do this in their own life. And even the other social and economic actors will be able to this, if their members, leaders are aware of it in their own life. So I think that every activity at a social level depends on how the people can take responsibility for each other.

The aim of the study to concentrate on the participation in the development processes, the following chapter shows the theoretical background of it.

1.3. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CIVIL/NONP-ROFIT ORGANISATIONS

At an individual level organisations have to operate in a balanced way; in that case they can take responsibility for their environment. What do I mean by balanced operation? Effective operation of organisations has internal and external factors. The external factors are determined by the state and by the economic situation of a country. These factors are the followings: laws, political environment, economic aspects, etc. Organisations have to accept these factors, and have to adjust to the situation of a country. Contrarily, internal factors are dependent from the organisations: proper income structure, effective leadership, motivated employees, widespread relationship, clear view about the future, flexibility, etc.

If the organisations face financial and leadership problems, they cannot concentrate on their goals and tasks, so they are not able to take responsibility for their own actions. In this case they cannot take responsibility for their environment and society either. So I think that being socially responsible has the requirement of acting effectively. If organisations cannot satisfy the needs of their members and the actors who are affected by the activity of the organisations they are not able to take responsibility for society[11]. But it just would be the basic role of a civil/non-profit organisation. Vidal et al.[12] noted, that taking responsibility for society by firms is a voluntary task, but in the case of civil/non-profit organisations it is an integral part of their existence.

In everyday life civil/non-profit organisations can take responsibility for society in the following ways:
• organising programs for the members and for other actors,
• publishing brochures, books,
• being involved in the decision-making process of a local government → civil control
• activity in public issues,
• offering special services,
• maintaining institutions,
• employing well-trained people,
• having active participation in the settlement development.

[11] This idea has a lot of similarity with the responsibility at individual level.
[12] Vidal, Paul – Torres, Domingo – Guix, Bárbara – Rodríguez, María Peña (2005): *The Social Responsibility of Non-Profit Organisations*. Observatori del Tercer Sector, Barcelona. Elérhető: www.observatoritersecter.org. Letöltve: 2013. február 17.

1.4. PARTICIPATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESSP

In my opinion every concerned actors (citizens, civil/nonprofit organisations, firms, etc.) in a settlement is responsible for shaping their environment, namely it can be stated that all of the social and economic actors and the decision-makers are together responsible for the development of a territorial unit. If citizens and other actors take responsibility for society, it means that they participate in the everyday life of a settlement or in the development of a territorial unit.

Participation in the development policy[13] means that actors have the opportunity to communicate their ideas and opinions about what is going on in their settlement, region or country. This is the form of appearance of social responsibility. If these actors take responsibility for their environment they will participate in those forums, etc. where they can express their willingness to care for other people. In my opinion, there are two main aspects of this participation:

1) With local or regional decision-makers: mainly participating in the development of a settlement or a region; making laws.

2) Citizens themselves through individual or civil/non-profit organisation actions: issues which do not need local authorities are mainly local affairs which affect people living in a certain settlement or village.

Both decision-makers and citizens have to know that the society where they live and operate will be more effective when the actors can formulate their willingness that they are able to give opinions on social and economic issues and on development.

All these things can be come true only when local governments give the people the opportunity to speak about their opinions of their lives and their settlement. To do this, the local governments have to change their way of thinking about managing a settlement and its development. The tasks of the local governments in this case are not only to ensure local services, but also to give sphere for the local actors to participate in. This kind of approach is the new way of operation of local governments. The following table shows the old and new tasks of local governments. The new one is called local governance, where the citizens and other actors have the main role in a settlement. The local decision-makers provide only the framework to social participation, and if needed they coordinate the process.

[13] Ploštajner, Zlata – Mendeš, Ivona (2005): *Citizens Participation. – How to Improve Development on Local Level?* Fridrich Ebert Stiftung, Zagreb Office, Zagreb. 97–113. Pike, Andy – Rodríguez-Pose, Andrés – Tomaney, John (2006): *Local and Regional Development*. Routledge, London and New York.

Table 1: **The old and new tasks of local governments**

Old view (20th century model)	New view (21st century model)
local governments are in focus	citizens and their organisations are in focus
local governments are responsible for the central government	local governments are responsible for citizens
closed and slow model	opened and flexible model
try to avoid risk	innovative and risk taker
totally dependent form the central government	has own decision-right in everything
bureaucratic	has participatory approach
centralized	glocalized

Source: Shah, A. (2006) A Comparative Institutional Framework for Responsive, Responsible and Accountable Local Governance. – Shah, Anwar (ed.) Local Governance in Industrial Countries. The World Bank, Washington D. C., 2006. 1–40.

I think that the base of the development of a settlement or a region is social responsibility. The question is why? If people are asked what they would like to develop in a settlement, it has a positive effect on the budget of the settlement and people will feel better because their opinions are taken into consideration. Projects – supported by the local actors – can be profitable not only in the short but also in the long term, and can serve not only the interests of politicians but also the interests of other actors. In this case local actors accept the results of the development also, so protests against the development processes will not occur. This type of development can save a lot of money for the settlement and also for the country, because the development plans are harmonized, so projects with no future will not be realized.

2. QUESTIONNAIRE RESEARCH

2.1. METHODOLOGY

The goal of the <u>citizen</u> survey was to get information from the citizens about their opinion and actions regarding social responsibility[14]. The national questionnaire survey was paper and on-line based, and it was carried out between April 2012 and March 2013. It must be noted that as 1 071 people filled in the questionnaires and our sample does not represent the Hungarian citizens, so I draw up my results only about those who participated.

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[14] There have been no researches about this topic in Hungary yet.

About half of the sample is under the age of 30 (above 18), so there are a lot of students (35%). The ratio of women to men is 65%. The ratio of people who have a higher education degree is about 37%, much higher than the average in society. About ¾ of our sample live in a town or city.

I made analyses using demographic factors, but the age and the territorial unit were the most important ones in the following way:
• age: above and under the age of 30;
• territorial aspect: living in the North-Transdanubian Region and in the other part of the country.

My hypothesis is that local governments involve only small part of the citizens into decision-making process, if they do it; they ask citizens' idea mainly by questionnaire or phone. I supposed that there are no differences between the two groups of place of living, but citizens above the age of 30 are involved more often than the younger generation.

The goal of the <u>organisation</u> survey was to get information from the civil/nonprofit organisations about their opinion and actions regarding social responsibility. The research area was the North-Transdanubian Region (5 counties), we sent the questionnaires to 3 800 organisations by e-mail, about 7,7% of them answered. Our sample does not represent the organisations in the region (but the ratio of the organisations by activity and form is quite the same as in the region), so I draw up my results only about those who participated.

My hypothesis is that organisations are asked by the local governments at a higher rate than citizens, and the methods of asking are different.

2.2. ARE PEOPLE ASKED FOR THEIR OPINIONS BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENTS?

Only 28,2% of the sample said that the local governments had asked them about the development or local issues in the settlement (Table 2). The ratio was not influenced by the territorial dimension, but was by the age: above the age of 30 people were asked in a bigger ratio than younger people. The background of the difference can be the following: older people have been living more ages, so the chance to be asked is higher.

There are no strong connections, but I can say that the following demographic characteristics significantly determined the positive answer:
• above the age of 30,
• high qualifications,
• living in a village,
• working as employee or retired,
• married,
• high income.

Based on these results I deduct that in a small settlement people have more opportunities to voice their opinions, some former researches also had the same results (e.g.: Márta Nárai[15], Adrienn Reisinger[16]). Not surprisingly people who have a higher income and qualifications said that they had been asked, as they are more interested in local issues, so local governments find them more easily. About 55,7% of them said that they had filled in a questionnaire in the settlement issues, also forums were mentioned quite often (39,2%). Other methods (for example: interviews, phone, personal survey) were rarely mentioned. In point of the methods there are differences between groups: the citizen forums were mentioned in a lower ration among the younger people. Furthermore asking by phone is not at all typical among the older generation and beyond the North-Transdanubian Region, whilst the interviews and the roundtables were used more often.

It is very good that 81,8% of these people said they took advantage of the opportunity, so they gave their opinions on a certain issue. 12,5% of those people who were asked were uninterested and 5,7% of them rejected the opportunity. These ratios are not so high, but show that people can be uninterested in these issues even if being asked. I think that the 81,8% is very positive; it let me conclude that if people are asked, they mostly tell their ideas. This can be an important message for the local governments: they have to be intent on asking more and more citizens with a various methods namely they are open to it.

[15] Nárai Márta (2008): *A nonprofit szervezetek helye és szerepe a helyi társadalmak életében – A nyugat-dunántúli nonprofit szektor helyzetfeltárása. (The role of the non-profit organisations in local societies – Characteristics of the non-profit organisations in West-Transdanubia).* Doktori disszertáció. ELTE Társadalomtudományi Kar, Szociológiai Doktori Iskola, Győr–Budapest.
[16] Reisinger Adrienn (2010): *Társadalmi részvétel a helyi fejlesztéspolitikában – különös tekintettel a civil/nonprofit szervezetek szerepére. (Social participation in the local development policy – with the focus on civil/nonprofit organisations.)* Doktori értekezés. Széchenyi István Egyetem, Győr.

Table 2: **Citizen participation in the decision-making process of the local governments**

		Whole sample	Territorial dimension		Age	
			North-Trandan-ubian Region	The rest of the country	under 30	30 or older
Are people asked for their opin-ions?	**Yes**	28,2%	28,2%	28,4%	**17,9%**	**38,5%**
If yes, in what way?	*Question-naire*	*54,7%*	*55,8%*	*56,1%*	*59,6%*	*53,7%*
	Phone	15,5%	15,2%	**1,5%**	19,1%	**0,5%**
	In person	21,3%	22,3%	19,7%	14,9%	24,9%
	Interview	2,0%	0,9%	**6,1%**	1,1%	2,5%
	Citizen forum	*39,2%*	*37,5%*	*45,5%*	***24,5%***	*46,3%*
	Roundtable	8,8%	10,3%	**19,7%**	6,4%	10,4%
Did people take opportunity to tell their ideas?	**Yes**	82,3%	82,5%	79,1%	77,9%	83,5%
	Reject	5,4%	5,4%	6,0%	**9,5%**	4,0%
	Uncon-cerned	12,2%	12,1%	14,9%	12,6%	12,5%

Source: Own table based on questionnaire research.

2.3. ARE CIVIL/NON-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS ASKED FOR THEIR OPINIONS BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENTS?

Half of the sample said that local governments have been asked them so far to tell their ideas about the development of the settlement or about other issues in the settlement. This ratio is much higher than in the case of the citizens (about twice as much). The reasons can be the followings:
• Citizens can voice their ideas more effectively in organisations; so local governments consider peoples' ideas in organisations rather than of their own.
• According to the local government act the ideas of the local actors have to show up in the decision-making process, that's why local governments have to involve citizens into the process.

The most popular methods were the personal way and the roundtable coming into contact with the organisations (71,8% and 51% of them said they have been asked in these ways). The methods were different from the citizens, among them the questionnaire was the most popular, and among organisations it was not often mentioned. The reason of the difference can be that that the way of asking is different between citizens and organisations. There are maximum several hundred organisations in a settlement, it is easier to reach them, and so it is more practical to choose the personal way.

Organisations were asked did they tell their opinion to the local governments, except three organisations all of them said „yes", that means the involving of the organisations were successful (I do not have any information about the future of the ideas, so I do not know if the local governments did they use it or not).

3. SUMMARY

The aim of the paper is to show that the social responsibility is more than the voluntary task of the companies; also other social and economic actors are responsible for the society and for the happening in their settlement. If citizens and other local actors can take responsibility for their own lives, they will be able to do the same for the society too. It means that actors feel that they have to do something for the society where they live through voicing their opinions about the settlement. In this approach the participation in the development process is one type of social responsibility. It is very important that local governments have to be open to this type of development; namely they have to give the opportunity to citizens and other actors to speak about their goals, opinions and ideas about the community. I believe if actors have this opportunity it will benefit the settlement, because they also accept every action, which is realised, resulting in a higher level of satisfaction among people. In my paper I concentrated on the social responsibility of citizens and civil/nonprofit organisations.

In my research I tried to find out whether local governments give the opportunity to citizens and civil/nonprofit organisations to voice their ideas. Two pieces of questionnaire-based research were done in 2012 and 2013. My first hypothesis was that local governments involve only a small part of the citizens into the decision-making process; if they do so then they ask for the citizens' ideas mainly by questionnaire or telephone. I supposed that there are no differences between the two groups of place of living, but citizens above the age of 30 are involved more often than the younger generation. I can accept my hypothesis: only 28.2% of the sample said that they were asked by the local government about the settlement's development and local issues, and the older citizens were asked in a higher ratio. Based on these results I can say that local governments are not active in asking people about their ideas. Of course that there are occasions when there is no room for the local actors, because the local MPs are the

experts in terms of local issues, but I think that there lots of issues when citizens and other actors have to have a voice (e.g. building new buildings, roads, bridges, discussing local problems, shaping the future plans, etc.). I think both the local decision-makers and the citizens have to be open to take part in these kinds of actions; the first step should be if somebody has an opinion, it has to be listened to. For example, if citizens indicate that there are problems in their surroundings to the local MPs, decision-makers have to deal with the problem and not neglect it. In this case people will feel that they are important and can have a voice. It is also important that the young generation as well has to be taken into consideration; most of them learn about the form of democracies and about the civil/nonprofit sector, so if they have the opportunity, they are able to voice their ideas. The most important thing is that there is someone who listens to them.

My second hypothesis was that organisations are asked by the local governments at a higher rate than citizens, and the methods of asking are different. My research verified the statement: half of the organisations were asked and the methods were different. Citizens were asked mainly by questionnaires and in forums, but the organisations in person. From these answers I can conclude that local governments regard organisations as a partner in the development process rather than the citizens on their own. It is important to stress that organisations were more active; almost all of them voiced their ideas, whereas about 20% of the citizens were passive.

What is the solution? I believe that politicians and also the citizens and other actors themselves have to be open to the opportunity to speak about the future of a settlement. It is true that the any decision-making process will take longer in this case, but it will be more successful and ultimately a communal process, which benefits both society and the economy in the long term.

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HUNGARIAN SUMMARY

Manapság a társadalmi részvétel fogalmát hallva gyakran a vállalati-társadalmi felelősségvállalásra asszociálunk, szakirodalom is elsősorban e témában található. Úgy gondolom, hogy az állampolgároknak, a különböző szervezeteknek, intézményeknek és az államnak is van felelőssége. Az állampolgárok és a szervezetek felelősséget tudnak vállalni saját életükért, működésükért, a társadalmi folyamatokért és a településük fejlesztéséért. A tanulmány az állampolgárok és a civil/non-profit szervezetek társadalmi felelősségvállalására fókuszál egyrészt szakirodalmi, másrészt empirikus bázis alapján.