LUCIE KAMRÁDOVÁ Marie SCISKALOVÁ¹



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SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF REGIONAL AUTHORITIES WITH A FOCUS ON EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

Abstract

Today's society is increasingly aware of the desirable need to change its approach to the planet and the environment. Social responsibility is one way of involving all citizens in the daily struggle for a better environment. The aim of the paper is to analyse the current state of social responsibility of authorities at the regional level in the environmental field, which is nowadays becoming more than desirable. The paper will work mainly with a qualitative research represented by a document analysis, comparisons and deductions. The results will serve as a basis for a further research and possible further analysis within individual states.

Key words: responsibility, green economy, region, Czech Republic, law, office

1 INTRODUCTION

The political and social situation in Slovakia is currently affected by the ongoingIn today's society, there is an increasing emphasis on international cooperation, the fight against pollution, better education for all, poverty reduction, and many other problems that arise in a turbulent world. It is not only the current corona crisis but also the threat of war conflicts that may threaten democratically functioning systems and organizations, to cause ten years of damage that will affect not only the economic behaviour of the society but also future generations. Despite the above threats, it is important to focus on the lowest links in functioning of democratic societies. At the local and regional level, which affects citizens.

It is the regions that are the decentralized and extended "hands" of democratic governments, which greatly influence the people of individual states. This is a

¹ Ing.Lucie Kamrádová, Ph.D., Ústav veřejné správy a sociální politiky, Fakulta veřejných politik v Opavě, Bezručovo náměstí 14, 746 01 Opava, Česká republika, email: lucie.kamradova@fvp. slu.cz

JUDr.Marie Sciskalová, Ph.D., Ústav veřejné správy a sociální politiky, Fakulta veřejných politik v Opavě, Bezručovo náměstí 14, 746 01 Opava, Česká republika, email: marie.sciskalova@fvp. slu.cz

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key premise for a functioning public administration, as decentralization processes strengthen governance at lower levels of government (Švikruha, 2021). For this reason, too, it is necessary to promote and implement a policy that is beneficial to society at all levels of its civic life. The concept of social responsibility fulfils this issue in all areas of its operation. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has its roots in the 19th century, when Andrew Carnige published his views on business by stating that rich people have a moral obligation to share their wealth with others (Across Social Responsibility, 2004). In recent years, we may come across the idea that this concept has been developing dynamically for several decades. Of course, in this case, we must take, into account developments in individual countries. However, the original concept, which was created primarily for the private sector, has been gradually, with the development of society, applied to the public sector, for example, to the organizations providing services to society, such as regional and municipal authorities, and to the organizations providing mainly education at the primary level. Although this concept was defined much later, the beginnings, although not academically anchored, can be found, for example, on the area of the present-day Czech Republic, in the nineteenth century.

The state and its bodies in a democratic society with an active connection to the above concept can provide great scope for the involvement of citizens and a certain opening of the imaginary scissors of a closed public administration based only on laws. This opens up space for community work and interest in its citizens, to whom they can also present problems that need to be solved together.

The aim of the paper is to focus on and point out the space through which the authorities at the regional level can influence by their social responsibility and by the interest in their citizens. This will demonstrate a higher effectiveness of cooperation of interested groups, which can be, in general, authority, citizen, institution. In its content, the paper will present the functioning in an example of good practice implemented in the Czech Republic. The article will use mainly the method of analysis, comparison, synthesis, deduction, and examples of good practice, which in its essence fill additional space for possible applications to other democratically functioning societies. (Hendl, 2005) Despite the above-mentioned guidelines, which can be seen in the focus on the selected country as an example of good practice, the article is beneficial in terms of comparison. Limitations in terms of resources can be seen in the documents prepared in 2019. Recent contributions on a selected topic were interrupted by the global pandemic Covid-19, which had a relatively significant impact on the full fillment and implementation of other interests, for at least two years. Nevertheless, the document Europe 2030, with which part of the article works, is being implemented in the EU member states, thus opening a space for an imaginary comparison of countries in the area of implementation of this document.

2 THEORETICAL DEFINITION OF THE ISSUE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Public administration in the Czech Republic has undergone a transformation, specifically since 1993, when it became an independent democratic state. Although it has been defined as democratic since 1989, it was still part of the Czechoslovak state. However, this was changed by Constitutional Act No. 1/1993 Coll., The Constitution of the Czech Republic, as amended.

The path to modern democratic governance of public affairs has been led through considerable reforms that have taken place in two phases. (Vomlela -Riedel, 2021) The first was the establishment of regions and the transfer of a number of competencies from the central state administration to the territorial self-government. The second meant the abolition of district offices as well as the transfer of competencies to regions and municipalities. (Frederickson et al., 2012) The result of the second phase of reforms was the creation of municipalities with an authorized municipal office and the designation of municipalities with extended powers (Act No. 314/2002 Coll.). These steps have strengthened the decision-making power within local self-government, but also increased pressure on the decision-making powers of officials. It can therefore be stated that in the current democratic Czech Republic there is a so-called two-tier system of territorial self-government. It consists of municipalities, which are basic territorial self-governing units, and regions, which are higher territorial self-governing units (including the capital city of Prague). Within the independent competence of municipalities and regions, it is a self-government within which they manage their affairs independently, while they are bound by laws and other legal regulations. The principle of subordination does not apply here (Kamrádová & Sciskalová, 2019). The delegated competence is the performance of state administration, which the state does not carry out directly, through its own bodies, but indirectly, through the local self-government bodies. The principle of subordination applies here.

In the Czech Republic, the so-called combined model of public administration was chosen, i.e., that municipalities and regions perform not only self-governing powers but also state administration in delegated powers (Pavlík at all, 2014). There are also state administration bodies in the territory (e.g. financial administration, social security administration), but these have the nature of specialized bodies for individual fields or their parts, the state administration body with general competence in the territory does not operate in the combined model. Even in the combined model, the performance of self-government is based on the principle of decentralization, i.e. self-government is not subordinate to the state, and self-government is not subordinated to higher self-government. (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, 2018)

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There are many views on the issue of social responsibility as such. The concept has met with positive reviews, but also with criticism from well-known economists such as Milton Friedman. It is independently dealt with not only by the government (governments) and the entrepreneurs themselves but also by a number of other global and domestic organizations. First of all, the European Union, which is an example of good practice for the member countries to which the Czech Republic belongs, and a guide on how to solve problems and use the opportunities that have arisen. (Beer, Clowr, 2019) CSR is strongly supported by international organizations such as the aforementioned European Union, OECD, UN, or the World Business Council for Sustainable Development. However, the European Union has been systematically addressing the area of responsibility since 1995, when Commission President Jacque Delores initiated the establishment of the European CSR headquarters - CSR Europe (Trnková 2005, p. 31).

From the point of view of the Czech Republic, the outcome of the socalled European Multistakeholders Forum, which, as an advisory forum of the European Union in 2004, reached important conclusions on the principles of social responsibility of companies and organizations, is an important guideline in this area. The basic idea is the declared principle of voluntary integration of social and environmental obligations of the company into their business and other activities, which are implemented beyond the applicable legislation and business agreements (Jahn 2005, p. 10). However, before the Consultative Forum, the European Commission issued a Green Paper in 2001, which promotes a European framework for corporate social responsibility and calls on all member states to incorporate CSR principles into their national strategies. It deals with all areas of CSR. According to the European Commission, CSR is defined as "the voluntary integration of social and environmental aspects into day-to-day business operations and interactions with corporate stakeholders" (Green Paper, 2001). These and other aspects give the company the opportunity to differentiate itself from the competition and thus create a certain advantage.

Other European CSR documents include the Lisbon Summit (2000), the CSR Business Marathon (2001), the Commission Communication "A Business Contribution to Sustainable Development" (2002), the Commission Communication "Implementing the partnership for growth and jobs: making Europe a pole of excellence on corporate social responsibility" (2006), European Alliance for CSR (2006).

In the Czech Republic, a corporate social responsibility strategy is presented and, to a certain extent, implemented within the framework of the National programme of conformity assessment of social responsibility management system and is also an integral part of the National Quality Policy Strategy in the Czech Republic. The concept includes, for example, intentions in the area of improving the quality of life in the whole society, business ethics, employee care and the environment. As part of the implementation of these plans, the Quality Council of the Czech Republic created a section on Corporate Social Responsibility. Following the European Commission's document, it is not only our government that can actively respond to the goals that have been set and thus create new documents that relate to the CSR strategy.

The main organizations that deal with CSR in the Czech Republic are, for example, the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the Ministry of the Environment, the platforms such as Business for Society and the Business Leaders Forum. Business for Society is the largest professional platform of companies for sharing and disseminating the principles of CSR and sustainable business in the Czech Republic. The definition which sets out on its website is based on the European Commission's Green Paper "CSR is a way of doing business that meets or goes beyond ethical, legal, commercial and societal expectations". "Social responsibility is the voluntary integration of social and environmental considerations into dayto-day corporate operations and stakeholder interactions." (Business for Society 2014). The Business Leaders Forum characterizes CSR on its website as a "voluntary commitment of companies to behave responsibly in the environment and the society in which they operate", which is basically based on the basic idea of the definition, which is given by The European Commission and is essentially similar to the definition of Business for Social Responsibility organization, which defines that "corporate social responsibility is a way of doing business that meets or goes beyond ethical, legal, commercial and societal expectations" (BSR 2014).

The sphere of social responsibility lacks a uniform definition that is internationally recognized. Each author or organization essentially captures the definition of CSR on the basis of the organization's voluntary and commitment to improving the situation in areas that directly affect the society and its operation in it. They set the right direction and, if necessary, an advantage over the competition. However, the main purpose is to go beyond the responsibilities of entrepreneurs, institutions and organizations and to create voluntary benefits for society and life in it.

Many authors not only abroad, but also in the Czech Republic, deal with the issue of defining social responsibility. In general, the concept is divided into three basic areas of operation. Economic, social and environmental spheres. Some authors supplement these three basic spheres of activity with a fourth area, which is an area of responsibility towards the local community (Mikavcová, Kulhanová 2005, pp. 55 - 62). All three spheres in the literature are also found under the designation 3P (Profit, Planet, People).

2.1 Responsibility as a basis

In September 2015, common goals for sustainable development to be achieved by 2030 were adopted within the world community at the General Assembly of the United Nations. It is an ambitious long-term program in all areas of human action. (Dühr, 2018)

It includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 specific sub-objectives. These targets entered into force on 1 January 2016 and are expected to be met by all member states of the UN by 2030. The goal of the 2030 Agenda is to achieve sustainable development in the following areas.

- People: The priority is to eradicate poverty and hunger in all its forms and dimensions and to enable all the people of the world to fulfill their potential in dignity, equality, and a healthy environment.

- Planet: Protecting the planet from damage, including sustainable consumption and the production and use of natural resources, and taking urgent action on climate change.

- Prosperity: In this area, it is a matter of ensuring prosperity and life fulfillment for all, including that economic, social, and technological development go hand in hand with nature.

– Peace: That is, ensuring peaceful, just, and inclusive societies that are free from fear and violence.

- Partnership: Which entails the creation of a "global partnership for sustainable development" based on enhanced global solidarity, focusing on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable people, involving all countries, actors, and people. (Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic, 2020)

The central motto of the 2030 Agenda is "Leave no one behind". The process of creating the 2030 Agenda began at the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro. The UN summit linked economic and social development goals to environmental issues and strategies for the first time, and the debate on the future of the post-2015 development strategy began. Then a series of intensive negotiations and meetings of high-level politicians with civil society, academic community, and business sphere began, which resulted in the creation of the 2030 Agenda. (Bába, 2021) The 2030 Agenda differs from previous UN development strategies, mainly in that it is the broadest and most comprehensive development strategy in which UN member states participate together with the representatives of civil society, business, academic communities, and citizens on all continents, which to a certain extent very clearly fulfils the cooperation in the field of social responsibility by connecting stakeholders. The agenda is based on three pillars: economic, social, and environmental, which are interconnected and complementary. The individual goals of sustainable development do not work on their own. Each objective, falls into two or three pillars (for example, SDG² 13, Climate Action refers to the economic and environmental pillars). Agenda 2030 emphasizes clear data and regular monitoring of its implementation. Each July, the representatives of the states meet at the High-Level Political Forum, which serves as a platform for the presentation of so-called national voluntary reports. They share experiences from the implementation and fulfilment of the SDGs in individual countries. A set of indicators is being negotiated and refined at the UN to measure progress in meeting the SDGs. Among the most notable publications that analyse progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda at the national level in an international comparison are the SDG Index and Dashboard and the OECD Measuring Distance to SDGs Targets (SGDIndex, 2021; OECD, 2018).

The Government of the Czech Republic is also committed to fulfilling the globally valid and recognized 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. They are transferred to the conditions of the Czech Republic by the Strategic Framework Czech Republic 2030 adopted by the Government in 2017. In October 2018, the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Czech Republic was approved. It serves as a converter of the fulfilment of individual Sustainable Development Goals for state administration, including the identification of links to the Strategic Framework Czech Republic 2030 itself and the gaps between the sub-objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which the Czech Republic 2030 does not cover.

Based on the evaluation of the importance of individual goals of 2030 Agenda, the material selects those relevant to the Czech Republic, including the transition to a low-carbon economy and development of renewable and decentralized energy sources, balanced regional development, improving air quality or reducing gender inequalities, and supporting domestic SMEs companies, the creation of an effective social housing system, climate and soil protection, or the promotion of knowledge transfer between the public and private sectors and academic sphere. For each goal, it sets basic tasks at the domestic and foreign levels. A significant part of this area is also held by social responsibility, which has an irreplaceable place in public administration in connection with the aforementioned 2030 Agenda. In the following part of the text, the authors selected the most interesting results of the implementation of 2030 Agenda in relation to the population and social responsibility in the environmental field for the Czech Republic.

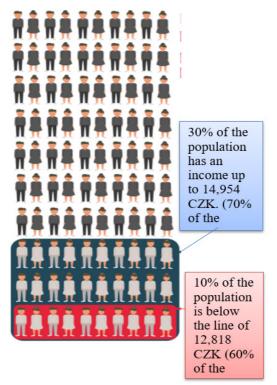
To begin with, we have only a few basic current data, which are also related to the current pandemic situation of Covid-19. Within the framework of this pandemic, a large number of problems which were not sufficiently pointed out emerged. One of them is poverty (subjective and relative), health care or

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education (Václavíková, Kamrádová, 2021). It is these areas that are highly desirable for the development of social responsibility, in all areas of activity for which they have a long-term impact. In general, we can state that the Czech system of basic social protection covers all vulnerable groups of the population, but especially the previous success given by the low risk of poverty can be very shaky. The situation is relatively satisfactory, mainly due to the social transfers provided by law. The problem seems to be related to the environment, that is, the Czech Republic has failed, on a long-term basis, to meet its obligations to official development assistance and to contribute to poverty reduction in the world. Czech citizens do not suffer from hunger; however, they have limits in healthy eating. But let us get back to the issue of poverty. As already mentioned in the case of the Czech Republic, the number of people at risk of poverty is low and we have been showing relatively good results in the long run, even in comparison with EU and OECD countries. In 2019, (Within the EU, the income poverty line is set at 60% of the median of national equivalised disposable income, according to Eurostat. In 2019, this limit in the Czech Republic was 12,818 CZK for individuals) 10.1% of the population in the Czech Republic was at risk of income poverty.

Figure 1 Proportion of population living below the national poverty line.



Source: Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic, 2020.

A closer look at the given issue shows the above figure in a slightly less encouraging view. First of all, absolute numbers give the human dimension to the data in this case: almost one million people are at risk of income poverty. According to the 2019 Income and Living Conditions Survey, most households manage their income quite easily or only with minor difficulties, but for 14.3%, this is a big problem. Single women with children and women over 65 years of age who live alone have difficulty managing an income.

Another interesting area that also concerns the environmental strategy and development in connection with the Czech Republic is, for example, the intensity of emission. Unfortunately, the intensity of the emission of value added according to CO2 emissions is 22.5 kg / thousand CZK as of 2018 (ind. 9.4.1 - p. 210) despite a significant long-term decline in the Czech Republic still one of the highest in Europe and, for example, more than double compared to Germany, despite a long-term reduction in material and energy intensity of the economy. This is mainly due to the strong dependence on fossil fuels in the Czech energy sector. It is shown in more detail in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Emission intensity of the economy. CO2 emissions per unit of gross value added.



[22,5 kg CO2 / thousand CZK] Source: Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Re-public, 2020

Despite all of the above, however, the Czech Republic has set itself the goal of modernizing its infrastructure and improving the equipment of industrial enterprises by 2030 so that they are sustainable and use resources more efficiently. It also plans to use cleaner and environmentally friendly technologies and production processes, and hopes that all countries will be involved as much as possible.

This chapter highlights the relationship between social responsibility and sustainable development, the interweaving of all areas of the concepts, and as

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an example of good practice presents two current topics that are part of 2030 Agenda. In connection with the above, there is space for further discussions and actions not only in society or in the field of individual governments but mainly in the academic community, which should be the so-called link between all areas of life of individual citizens of modern democracies.

2.2 Social responsibility of authorities as an example of good practice

As mentioned above, the definition of social responsibility is based on the private sector, and, as it has gradually expanded, its concept has been applied to various non-profit and public sector organizations. One of these sectors is public administration. It is in the field of public administration that we can find the foundations of social responsibility in concepts such as New Public Management, which prefers individual client approach, decentralization of the system, non-discrimination, erudite and experienced employees, etc. In the Czech Republic, the concept of social responsibility was introduced by international organizations and companies only after 1993, when a new state was practically created, namely the Czech Republic.

In connection with the above-mentioned, among other documents, a handbook for social responsibility for public administration was also created in the Czech Republic. Specifically, the document states that the "CSR Handbook for Public Administration, which was created as a result of cooperation between the Quality Council of the Czech Republic, the Ministry of the Interior, and several local authorities, which are active in the field of social responsibility and are interested in inspiring others to similar practices." This proves not only the application of the concept, but also the interest in its promotion as such. (NSPK, 2016)

The specifics of public administration in the Czech Republic have already been defined in Chapter 1, but one of the areas related to this issue has not been mentioned, namely quality management in public administration. It is quality in public administration that is mainly associated with the organizations' efforts to do the right things correctly, i.e. well, efficiently, and on time. Some authorities in the Czech Republic use self-assessment according to the CAF model to manage quality, implement the requirements of the international standard ISO 9001, apply local Agenda 21 (hereinafter MA21), the EFQM excellence mode, etc. In recent years, attention has been increasingly focused on social responsibility and sustainable development. Some of the above activities are defined by legislative requirements (e.g. safety and health at work, environmental care), most of which still fall within the voluntary interests of public administration entities. In general, we can say that the support of quality management in public administration falls under the Ministry of the Interior, which cooperates with other entities:

Despite the fact that most activities aimed at social responsibility are carried out by the private sector, in the last decade there has also been an interest in territorial public administration in activities related to social responsibility and sustainable development. The expansion of the awareness of social responsibility by foreign companies and the academic community is also a great credit for this. These are mainly offices that have been dedicated, over a long period, to quality management and are searching for opportunities for further improvement in the field of organization management, the use of risk and opportunity management, development activities in the field of social and environmental, respectively, focus their activities in accordance with the needs of stakeholders. In practice, this means that the use of any of the quality management approaches depends on the decision of the secretary of the municipal office / director of the regional office. Activities are formalized, e.g., in the form of a resolution of the council (approval of strategic documents of the municipality / region / office). Likewise, the subsequent implementation is more "bound" by the decisions of the council. The greater degree of formalization of procedures compared to the private sector also requires greater time to enforce the activities that the public administration implements beyond the legislative requirements, also on the grounds that it follows, for example, the principle of constitutionality. (Halász, 2021) In the Czech Republic, quality management and the promotion of social responsibility are mainly associated with private companies. Unlike the private sector, there is no direct competitive environment between the various authorities. Public administration bodies manage public resources, their activities are subject to public control, and their responsibilities include dealing with externalities, i.e., addressing the impacts of decisions / activities implemented by another entity. Other specifics include the obligation of public administration entities to act in the public interest. This obligation is related to the prohibition of discrimination and the need to ensure equal attitude to all in the actions of the public administration; it makes it impossible to carry out activities that prefer or disadvantage a certain group of citizens at the expense of other entities. By adopting the concept of social responsibility, public administration organizations voluntarily declare their responsibility for the impacts of the implemented activities both within the organization itself and towards the environment. The application of CSR and

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sustainable development procedures, in addition to complying with legislative requirements, helps the authorities to be open to citizens, seeks to mitigate environmental impacts, and actively cooperates with stakeholders. A typical feature of voluntary public administration activities aimed at stakeholders is the authorities' effort of the representatives of the authorities to share good practice and the willingness to communicate the results achieved both in the field of quality management and social responsibility and sustainable development with other organizations in public administration. For the sake of interest, the authors present the basic specific stakeholders related to social responsibility and public administration. They can be divided into external stakeholders and internal stakeholders.

External stakeholders can be considered, for example: clients – direct customers of public administration who deal with their life situations within the agendas, entrepreneurs, citizens of the municipality - decision-makers in self-government (elections, referendum), citizens of surrounding municipalities/ regions, contributory organizations, customers of established organizations within their independent competence (schools, social services facilities, technical services etc.), other public administration entities, service providers, partners, media and others. We then consider internal stakeholders as employees, office management, elected representatives of the municipality / region.

Like private sector organizations, public administration organizations have the opportunity to practice CSR in their activities, but in addition they have the power to create appropriate conditions for the development of this concept, its popularization and promotion. Organizations can thus act in a passive, active and pro-active role. The passive role is basically a situation where the PA body participates in CSR activities, which are implemented voluntarily by someone else beyond the legislative requirements. It acts as "user" of these activities. An active role means the voluntary implementation of CSR activities, the public administration practices CSR in its activities and functioning (it is an example for others). A pro-active role creates or participates in creating a favourable environment and supportive conditions for the development of voluntary activities that aim to improve the conditions of society, environmental protection.

3 CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to present social responsibility in public administration, focusing on the areas and opportunities that public administration has within its competencies. The introductory part was devoted to the basic theoretical definitions of public administration, social responsibility and the related relationship between them. The second part then dealt with specific documents and results, which were presented as part of an example of good practice in connection with the Czech Republic. The final part deals with the specific application of the concept of social responsibility in public administration and the interesting facts that appear within the application of the concept in public administration. It is clear that social responsibility, self-responsibility and the related rights and obligations of entities are among the aspects that are relevant non-only currently. The economic, social and, last but not least, environmental areas are undoubtedly those that affect social responsibility and society in the countries concerned. It goes without saying that the issue of social responsibility is also addressed by legislation and standards. Among the basic ones in the Czech Republic, one can also consider, for example, Government Regulation No. 275/2016 Coll., On the Educational Areas in Higher Education, which deals with the issue of social responsibility in block C:

" 'Framework profile of the graduate' letter a) paragraph 6 stipulates: With regard to the type of study program, graduates demonstrate in an appropriate breadth and level of detail: knowledge of the principles of investment and financial decision-making in relation to the social responsibility of economic legal entities." The reference can also be found in Act No. 563/1991 Coll., On Accounting, as amended, in Part Eight, the provision of Section 32g entitled Non-Financial Information, paragraph 3, provides, inter alia: "Accounting unit stating non-financial disclosures may use methodologies that govern the disclosure of corporate social responsibility reports and, if they do so, shall disclose which methodologies they have used."

What conclusions can we specify from the above?

-In today's globalized society, it is impossible for individual governments not to respond to the economic, social and environmental needs of the society.

-In addition to national and international regulations, there are also concepts and recommendations on how society should behave (EU and individual government regulations).

-One of these concepts is also social responsibility, which should not replace measures in the above areas but should provide space for further involvement of all stakeholders, not only in the private but also in the public sphere.

-Although this concept is based on voluntariness, it is not limited by actors who can promote and apply it in both the private and public spheres in everyday work and personal life.

However, the above conclusions contain recommendations for the primary group that the article focused on, which is public administration, which has unlimited possibilities to con-tribute to the introduction and implementation of the concept of social responsibility. The authors consider the following recommendations:

-Introduction of the concept of social responsibility into the public sector.

-Raising awareness of social responsibility in education systems from the lowest to the highest.

-Adherence to the principles of the eco-nomic, social and environmental spheres of action from top to bottom (from political elites to citizens).

-Create space for the implementation and acknowledgment of this approach in cooperation at the municipal level.

The paper used mainly qualitative research methods to present the above and, of course, also examples of the presentation of good practices, which can always be used for further research, either in relation to the method of comparison or analysis. From the above, it is clear that not everyone has to identify with the presented results, however, in their opinion, it is desirable to open new topics and space for further discussions in the field of social responsibility, which should be part of every modern democratic state.

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