Critical Perspectives on Corporate Social Responsibility Reporting: A Study on Workplace Diversity and Circular Economy Disclosures

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I hereby declare that the work submitted is mine and that where I have made use of another’s work, I have attributed the source(s) according to the Regulations set in the Student’s Handbook.

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Abstract

This dissertation was written as part of the MSc in Environmental Management and Sustainability at the International Hellenic University. The aim of this study is to explore two special issues of sustainability management in corporate governance: a) the promotion of diversity in the workplace and b) the promotion of Circular Economy policies. Therefore, this research concentrates on assessing to what extent companies include relevant information on diversity and disability in the workplace, and Circular Economy in their Corporate Social Responsibility reports and also examining their performance on the respective issues. All UK companies publishing CSR report in 2015, 275 in total, have been assessed. The method adopted is content analysis of some relevant indicators of the Global Reporting Initiative guidelines framework. Results demonstrate that current practices in CSR reporting have not been sufficiently developed and there is vast space for improvement.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility reporting, diversity in the workplace, Circular Economy, Global Reporting Initiative, sustainability

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Raphael Antoniou
List of Abbreviations

ADA.................................................. Americans with Disabilities Act
CE.......................................................... Circular Economy
CRPD........................................ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSR........................................................ Corporate Social Responsibility
CSR+D............................................. Corporate Social Responsibility and Disability
DDA..................................................... Disability Discrimination Act
EC.......................................................... European Commission
EU.......................................................... European Union
GDP...................................................... Gross Domestic Product
GRI....................................................... Global Reporting Initiative
LHPAD.............. Longstanding Health Problem and/or a Basic Activity Difficulty
MNE...................................................... Multi-National Enterprise
NGO..................................................... Non-Governmental Organization
OECD...................... Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PWDs.................................................. Persons with Disabilities
SME...................................................... Small or Medium-sized Enterprise
UK........................................................ United Kingdom
UN........................................................ United Nations
USA...................................................... United States of America
WHO..................................................... World Health Organization
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1. Introduction

Nowadays, the interest that is placed on Corporate Social Responsibility is more and more increasing (Carroll, 2008). It appears that corporations are increasingly examining their social responsibilities and taking into account the needs of their stakeholders, the environment and the society in general (Bonsón and Bednárová, 2015, Bouten et al., 2011, Kanji and Chopra, 2010, Kolk, 2004, Siew, 2015, Skouloudis et al., 2009). Moreover, no one can deny the fact that initiatives with orientation and guideline the three pillars of sustainability (environmental, social and economic) offer opportunities for further development.

This growing attention paid to Corporate Social Responsibility plays a vital role in the development of sustainability reporting respectively. As Corporate Social Responsibility procedure focuses on the three dimensions of people, planet and profit, Corporate Social Responsibility reporting constitutes for enterprises a tool of publishing their social, environmental and economic impacts to their stakeholders within and to society (Kanji and Chopra, 2010, Evangelinos et al., 2016, Snider et al., 2003). As a result, in this way, reporting on their sustainability performance and strategy, firms are able to improve their financial and non-financial (social and environmental) performance (Kanji and Chopra, 2010, Evangelinos et al., 2016). Regardless of being considered voluntary or mandatory, the disclosure of non-financial information in Corporate Social Responsibility reporting seems to be an upward trend having gained importance in recent years (Bonsón and Bednárová, 2015).

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate two special issues of sustainability management in corporate governance: a) the promotion of diversity in the workplace, especially disability, and b) the promotion of Circular Economy policies. It tries to prospect whether corporations are conscious, sensitive and interested in diversity and disability in the workplace and in Circular Economy or not. Consequently, this study focuses on evaluating to what extent companies include such information on diversity and disability in workplace, and Circular Economy in their Corporate Social Responsibility reports and also look into their performance on the respective issues.
The methodological approach applied is a descriptive analysis in quantitative terms of some relevant specific indicators based on the Global Reporting Initiative guidelines framework. More specifically, the sample size consists of 275 Corporate Social Responsibility reports in which the inclusion, relevance and significance of the examined indicators are analyzed. The selection was made from the Global Reporting Initiative Sustainability Disclosure Database and concerns all the companies recorded for 2015, with different size (MNEs, large, SMEs), from the three sectors of economy (primary, industrial or secondary, tertiary or service), operating in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The outcomes of this research illustrate the different or cumulative perspectives, attitudes and policies followed by businesses of not the same size, operating in the same country and derived from different sectors, on diversity and disability of the workforce, and Circular Economy issues and also their disclosure in Corporate Social Responsibility reporting. Moreover, efforts are made in order to understand the whole contemporary corporate behavior and stance for Corporate Social Responsibility generally, for diversity/disability in the workplace and Circular Economy as key subjects in their Corporate Social Responsibility reporting and sustainability performance in particular.

As far as the structure of the dissertation is concerned, at first, a comprehensive description of Corporate Social Responsibility, Circular Economy and Diversity and Disability through the respective literature review is made highlighting the research question. In addition, the research methodology adopted is presented and finally, after the exposition of the results derived from the data analysis, the discussion follows trying to reach limitations and opportunities for future research, useful conclusions and recommendations.
2. Literature Review

2.1. Corporate Social Responsibility

2.1.1. Definition of CSR

The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has had an elongate and diverse history (Carroll, 1999)

According to the European Union Commission (2002) “Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis” as they are progressively informed of the significance of responsible behavior for sustainable corporate success. Apart from the abovementioned definition of CSR, the EU Commission formulated a new one in 2011: “CSR is the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society”.

What is more, Corporate Social Responsibility, “also known as corporate social performance, sustainable business, sustainable responsible business, corporate responsibility, corporate citizenship, responsible business”, means that a corporation operates on a socially responsible basis with the aim of voluntarily contributing to community in economic, environmental, social and ethical terms. Consequently, developing right Corporate Social Responsibility, companies are able to generate positive impact for the nature, the society and the companies themselves (Kanji and Chopra, 2010).

2.1.2. Corporate Social Responsibility

These days, it seems that Corporate Social Responsibility is being more and more associated and integrated with the strategic management and corporate governance of many companies. This has comprised firms developing strategies and practices for checking and reporting on their social, environmental and economic performance and policy. Moreover, there has been a growing interest in Corporate Social Responsibility by a wider variety of stakeholders in the last few decades (Carroll, 2008).
Corporate Social Responsibility, having been proposed as a mean towards sustainable development and an important characteristic of the new global governance regime, helps the appropriate circumstances to be created for a company to be able to improve its financial and non-financial (social and environmental) performance. As a result, a Corporate Social Responsibility process focuses on three dimensions: people, planet and profit (Kanji and Chopra, 2010, Evangelinos et al., 2016). Urip (2010) states that the change of business notion has lead companies to alter their goals from just “profit” into “profit, people and planet”, the so-called triple bottom line (social, environmental and economic part). In this way, corporations can gain benefits for themselves, the society and the environment (Kanji and Chopra, 2010). In contrast, Milton Friedman has demonstrated that Corporate Social Responsibility is not in correlation with capitalism and that the only obligation of businesses to society is to maximize profits by legal means (Falck and Heblich, 2007, Kanji and Chopra, 2010, Snider et al., 2003).

On the one hand, Corporate Social Responsibility may be regarded as a voluntary business commitment to meet the internal and external challenges imposed on a company and derived from community’s expectations of reliable corporate stance (Falck and Heblich, 2007). From a different aspect, there are many factors such as a firm’s self-interest, public pressure, NGOs or legislation that influence the firm to adopt Corporate Social Responsibility practices. In accordance with this perception, some of these factors, like public pressure, drive the enterprise to improve its sustainability performance (social, environmental, financial) voluntarily while at the same time others, including government regulation for example, require from the corporation to be compliant with the legislation by developing specified CSR strategies (Keith, 2010).

On the other hand, Snider et al. (2003) argue that Corporate Social Responsibility can be considered to be the obligation of a company to act with the orientation to benefit society. In order for a firm to fulfill this target, it has to behave ethically, be legally compliant, environmentally responsible and at the same time economically healthy. In addition, Corporate Social Responsibility has been treated as a mandatory and not a voluntary action by companies. Due to the rapid changes taken place globally, the number of companies that engage with
Corporate Social Responsibility is significantly increasing. More and more enterprises are committed to developing tools and methods so as to implement Corporate Social Responsibility principles into their corporate governance. Therefore, writing an annual corporate social responsibility report or sustainability report, firms have the opportunity to publish their Corporate Social Responsibility activity (Berinde and Andreescu, 2015).

According to directives 78/660/EEC and 83/349/EEC (2014), set by European Union in 2014, all large companies which employ more than 500 people, have to report relevant non-financial and diversity information.

2.1.3. CSR Reporting

Corporate Social Responsibility Reporting can be defined as the procedure of making known the social and environmental impacts of organizations’ policies to particular stakeholders within and to society (Snider et al., 2003). As it has already been mentioned, Triple Bottom Line (TBL) reporting is a practice used in business management in order to further inform company’s stakeholders. The main principles are three: “people, planet, and profit”. So, it can be described as an attempt by a company to integrate its economic, environmental and social results with its assessment and decision making procedures (Jackson et al., 2011).

Regardless of the fact that disclosure of non-financial information is not mandatory in the majority of countries, there is an upward trend in which different groups of stakeholders require this kind of reporting (Bonsón and Bednárová, 2015). Subsequently, sustainability reporting has been substantially adopted by companies globally on the grounds that they have tried to deal with rising pressure and demand from internal and external stakeholders for transparent reporting on not only financial but also social and environmental performance (Bonsón and Bednárová, 2015, Bouten et al., 2011, Kolk, 2004, Siew, 2015, Skouloudis et al., 2009). Sustainable responsible business reporting for a firm can be regarded as a useful tool with which to communicate with its interest groups more effectively and cultivate a stronger relationship with them (Bonsón and Bednárová, 2015). However, two vital controversial issues appear: a) whether the current annual Corporate Social Responsibility report is sufficient for the request for
accountability and b) if corporations have actually implemented what they present in their CSR report or there are misinformation and dissemblance (Bouten et al., 2011, Kolk, 2004).

2.1.4. CSR Reporting Frameworks

Current initiatives with the view to setting up frameworks for companies to report on their Corporate Social Responsibility practices and actions by national or international organizations and the tendency by large companies towards instruments like sustainable responsible business reports depict that Corporate Social Responsibility, the reporting process and the reporting frameworks have importantly advanced (Branco, 2013).

As reported by Siew (2015) a review of existing Corporate Social Responsibility reporting frameworks can be provided and ends up with the following: a) Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), b) SIGMA project, c) DPSIR framework, d) The Global Compact, e) Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP), f) World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), g) Greenhouse Gas Protocol (GHG Protocol) and h) Broad principle-based frameworks.

2.1.5. Global Reporting Initiative Guidelines

The Global Reporting Initiative is defined as “an international independent organization that helps businesses, governments and other organizations understand and communicate the impact of business on critical sustainability issues such as climate change, human rights, corruption and many others” (Global Reporting Initiative). Global Reporting Initiative can be considered as a long-term, international procedure affecting a lot of different stakeholders with mission to develop and spread applicable sustainability reporting guidelines worldwide. These guidelines are voluntarily followed by organizations for reporting on the economic, environmental and social dimensions of their strategies, products and services (Skouloudis et al., 2010).
Furthermore, it was established in 1997 by the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES) with the aim of installing a worldwide applicable sustainability reporting framework (Siew, 2015).

As far as the Global Reporting Initiative guidelines requirements are concerned, a typical report should concentrate on the following sections: vision and strategy, company profile, governance structure and management systems, Global Reporting Initiative content index, performance criteria (economic, social and environmental) (Siew, 2015).

Global Reporting Initiative sustainability reporting guidelines have significantly developed over the years and they can be considered as one of the most considerable corporate social responsibility guidelines with a broadened use. Besides this, they provide a widely accepted framework on the way an enterprise can report on its sustainability commitment and performance and not only they have progressed in relation to embodying new issues that have become crucial in the Corporate Social Responsibility era, but also in terms of recommending new indicators regarding aspects of business sustainability (Branco, 2013).

2.2. Circular Economy

2.2.1. Definition of Circular Economy

The goal of sustainability is to try to tackle environmental, social and economic problems of the current and next generations. Sustainable development demands the social, environmental, technological and economic perspectives of an economy, sector, or individual industrial procedure to strike a balance and to promote the interaction among them. Environmental problems such as environmental pollution, biodiversity loss, resource shortage and surplus land use are becoming extremely hazardous for the planet’s support systems and its future. Simultaneously, environmental degradation and resource scarcity tend to be two of the most significant and determinant restrictive factors of sustainable development. Circular economy (CE) is a sustainable development strategy and a relatively new business model that has been suggested and also expected to
address these eco-issues leading to a more sustainable and harmonious society (Ghisellini et al., 2016, Heshmati, 2015, Geissdoerfer et al., 2017, Wang et al., 2014, Witjes and Lozano, 2016).

Therefore, in order to preserve resources and the environment and manage sustainable development, the promotion of a Circular Economy of “low pollution, low emission, reduction, recycling” is considered to be a reasonable option (Wang et al., 2014:488). During the last decade, the concept of Circular Economy is being increasingly received attention globally due to the need for overcoming the current production and consumption model on the basis of constant growth and increasing resource generation. So, Circular Economy makes efforts to provide a better alternative to the dominant economic model of “take, make and dispose” via raising the efficiency of resource use so as to accomplish equilibrium among economy, environment and society (Ghisellini et al., 2016:11).

The idea of Circular Economy, having been firstly proposed in 1966, has become quite mature and widespread and has been applied to the progress of numbers of families, companies and even countries (Wang et al., 2014). After decades of research and study, the concept of Circular Economy has drawn the attention of governments, policymakers, researchers, NGOs and enterprises that are more and more informed of the opportunities derived from its adoption (De los Rios and Charnley, 2016, Geissdoerfer et al., 2017).

Circular Economy is focused on a more environmentally sensible and responsible use and exploitation of resources with a view to implementing a greener economy featured by equity and wellbeing within and among generations in relation to resource use and access. In this way, at the same time, Circular Economy aims to contribute to community and the world at low or even zero material, reduced energy and environmental costs (Ghisellini et al., 2016). The policy line of Circular Economy is followed due to the consideration of raw materials and energy deficiency and the challenge of economic growth (Witjes and Lozano, 2016). Moreover, Circular Economy practice depends on “closing loops” with various kinds and levels of recovery. This entails that waste and materials are transformed to resources or useful goods and services by resource efficiency. It would be beneficial to mention that this called “resource efficiency” within
Circular Economy can be managed through retaining the added value by the conservative use of raw materials and energy consumption during all stages of the value chain (Witjes and Lozano, 2016).

![Circular Economy](Source: European Commission, 2017)

There are many manners to describe the term of Circular Economy (Shi Lei et al., 2006). Being also recognized as a “closed loop” economy, Circular Economy is “an industrial and social evolutionary notion that pursues holistic sustainability goals through a culture of no waste” in which the replacement of the end-of-life stage of products and materials through restoration is regarded as obligatory (De los Rios and Charnley, 2016). Circular Economy is a theory that supports developing economy on the basis of 3R basic rule: reduction of the quantity of resource consumption and emissions of pollution (1R), foster material recycle (2R) and reuse of waste (3R) (Shi Lei et al., 2006). Furthermore, there are some theoretical basements – influences like cradle-to-cradle, laws of ecology, looped and performance economy, regenerative design, industrial ecology, biomimicry and the blue economy. Nevertheless, one of the most respected definition of Circular Economy is, according to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, “Circular Economy is an industrial economy that is restorative or regenerative by intention and design” and being further expanded “a regenerative system in which resource input and waste, emission, and energy leakage are minimized by slowing, closing,
and narrowing material and energy loops. This can be achieved through long-lasting design, maintenance, repair, reuse, remanufacturing, refurbishing, and recycling” (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017:759).

In addition, it appears that Circular Economy can be applied in governmental and governance bodies’ strategies. For instance, the Japanese government introduced the material-cycle society vision in 2000 which has involved several laws based on the 3R (reduce, reuse, recycle) principle. Besides this, European Commission has adopted relevant strategies such as the “Zero waste programme for Europe” and the “Closing the loop action plan for the Circular Economy” (Huysman et al., 2017:46). More specifically, as far as the “Closing the loop - An EU action plan for the Circular Economy” programme is concerned the European Commission adopted a Circular Economy Package which contains revised legislative proposals on waste to prompt the transition of Europe towards a circular economy. The key goals clearly set by the revised legislative proposals on waste involve:

- “A common EU target for recycling 65% of municipal waste by 2030
- A common EU target for recycling 75% of packaging waste by 2030
- A binding landfill target to reduce landfill to maximum of 10% of municipal waste by 2030
- A ban on landfilling of separately collected waste
- Promotion of economic instruments to discourage landfilling
- Simplified and improved definitions and harmonized calculation methods for recycling rates throughout the EU
- Concrete measures to promote re-use and stimulate industrial symbiosis – turning one industry's by-product into another industry's raw material
- Economic incentives for producers to put greener products on the market and support recovery and recycling schemes (e.g. for packaging, batteries, electric and electronic equipments, vehicles)” (European Commission, 2017).
2.2.2. Principles of CE

Environment and economics are inter-correlated. Circular Economy with its 3R principles of reducing, reusing and recycling material depicts this powerful connection (Heshmati, 2015). The principles of CE are to “reduce, reuse and recycle” materials (3R principles). Each of them is considered essential for the successful implementation of CE: a) “Reduce is the principle concerned with input, aiming at reducing the input materials and energy in the production and consumption processes. It can also be called material reduction. In other words, it is essential to turn out the products using as fewer resources as possible, and to minimize waste.” b) “Reuse is the principle concerned with processing which requires the use of natural resources in every possible ways. By reusing raw materials, by-products and used products, the life span of products and services can be prolonged and waste created in production processes can be minimizes” and c) “Recycle is the principle concerned with output. By turning wastes to secondary resources, the waste requiring final disposal can be reduced and the consumption of natural resources can be reduced as well. Producers should try to use secondary resources as much as possible; consumers should buy the products made by secondary resources. This will help to close the economic loop” (Heshmati, 2015:1, Shi Lei et al., 2006:5-6).

Additionally, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation describes four principles of Circular Economy as lines of action to eliminate careless resource running out and revive existing material value in industry:

1) “Optimize the use of resources and energy throughout lifecycles

2) Maintain products and components in use for longer

3) Materials cycle through the system as many times as possible through cascaded uses

4) Utilize pure materials for improving quality of post-life use” (De los Rios and Charnley, 2016:2).
2.2.3. Transition from Linear to Circular Economy

Circular Economy began developing in the 1970s in contrast to the traditional Linear industrial economy (Taranic et al., 2016). Consequently, the tendency towards searching for potential ways for the change from Linear to Circular Economy business models has dominated (Elia et al., 2017). Especially, the traditional Linear growing economy of “high input, high consumption, high pollution and low efficiency” wide manner of economic development relies on the “production – consumption – waste approach” (Kobza and Schuster, 2016:111, Wang et al., 2014:488). This means that the Linear Economy operates on the basis of a linear industrial process, characterized by a going one way material flow in which there is high level of production at relatively low cost, resource extraction, transformation of raw materials into final products (manufacturing), consumption and at the end disposal of products, the also known as “take – make – consume – dispose model” (Elia et al., 2017:2741, Taranic et al., 2016:1-2). Instead, as it has already been discussed above, Circular Economy, embracing the features of “low consumption, low emission and high efficiency”, pursues the target to stay within the limits of the planet and reduce ecological impact by decreasing excessive resource use, minimizing waste and converting the end-of-life goods into resources for the generation of others through reuse, re-manufacture, recycle and other practices (Kobza and Schuster, 2016:111, Taranic et al., 2016:1-2, Wang et al., 2014:488).
Figure 2 illustrates the comparison between the concepts of the Linear and Circular Economy. The economy operates in loop where the planet plays a major role in providing natural resources and absorbing waste and pollution. The model keeps going until the exceedance of planet's carrying capacity. The Linear Economy (left) ignores the environmental impacts that derive from resource consumption and waste disposal, and leads to too much virgin resource extraction, pollution and waste. Moreover, the Linear Economy is in many cases depicted as a line, with a beginning and an end – from extraction to disposal where the potential returns to the Earth are lost via pollution – on the grounds that it stays without being active in the biggest part of the loop. In contrast, the Circular Economy (right) takes into consideration the impact of resource exploitation and waste on the environment. As a result, alternative closed loops are created where resources are in circular moves within a system of production and consumption. The aim of the Circular Economy is to use virgin resources in an optimal way and diminish pollution and waste at each step as much as possible (Sauvé et al., 2016).

Apart from this, the transition to the Circular Economy depends on three pillars: 1) environmental benefits, in particular in terms of decreased impacts and diminished resource use, 2) cost savings from the abatement of natural resource needs and 3) the formulation of new markets, affording additional financial benefits of Circular
Economy mechanisms, i.e. in relation to occupations or wealth creation (Taranic et al., 2016).

2.2.4. Definition of Industrial Ecology

Industrial Ecology is a widely accepted research sector taking into account a systemic aspect, composite types of material and energy flows within and outside of the industrial and technological system (Lieder and Rashid, 2016). As its name indicates its actual meaning, Industrial Ecology is “industrial” because it concentrates on product design and manufacturing procedures. Furthermore, enterprises constitute factors for environmental improvement, as Industrial Ecology receives their technological specialist knowledge and know-how as crucial for the ecologically updated production of products and corporate performance. What is more, it is regarded as an important but not exclusive source of environmental degradation (Ayres and Ayres, 2002).

“Industrial ecology is the means by which humanity can deliberately approach and maintain sustainability, given continued economic, cultural, and technological evolution. The concept requires that an industrial system be viewed not in isolation from its surrounding systems, but in concert with them. It is a systems’ view in which one seeks to optimize the total materials cycle from virgin material, to finished material, to component, to product, to obsolete product, and to ultimate disposal” (Lieder and Rashid, 2016:44). Industrial ecology acts at three levels: the factory level, the inter-firm level and the regional or global level. As regards the factory level, the center of interest is achieving cleaner production through e.g. environmental conservation or reduction of waste and emissions. Concerning the

Figure 3: Three Pillars Supporting the Transition to the Circular Economy
(Source: Taranic et al., 2016)
inter-firm level, collaboration and synergies make up two important points that are enabled through geographic proximity driving to more effective cooperation among industries and firms including physical exchange of materials, energy, water and by-products with the target to manage competitive advantage as a collective approach. With regard to regional or global level, sociological perspectives are considered. In this way, it would be useful to underline the term of “industrial metabolism” which is interlinked with the material and energy flows through industrial systems and the sources of emissions by integrated physical processes and human activities (Lieder and Rashid, 2016).

Additionally, regarding the movement of industrial activities from traditional and linear to closed loop systems, Industrial Ecology is based on four operational policies:

1) “Closed material cycles – as in the circular economy model

2) Minimize losses throughout the industrial system

3) Dematerialize by promoting functional economy models, eco-design and technology developments

4) Decarbonize by developing renewable energies” (Jendrolovits, 2016).

2.2.5. Circular Economy and Industrial Ecology

The concept of Circular Economy has its conceptual origins in various theoretical backgrounds such as ecological economics, environmental economics and Industrial Ecology (Andersen, 2006, Ghisellini et al., 2016). Constituting an alternative choice to the neoclassical economic model, Circular Economy’s primary goal is to redraw the manufacturing processes and exploit energy and materials as beneficially as possible (Ghisellini et al., 2016). At this point, Industrial Ecology is used to refer to this change. It states that the aim is to make the ecology of industry more like natural ecology in which outputs of one organization act as inputs for another (Nakajima, 2000).

Industrial Ecology promotes a form of material collaboration between different firms and manufacturing procedures. As a consequence, it is implied that
community and economy in general can benefit from a Circular Economy. By one of its vital values inherited from Industrial Ecology, that is the importance of waste management at the end of products and materials life, Circular Economy can contribute to the design of goods in order for the material and energy cycle to close. In doing so, waste use can be minimized, the use of virgin materials can be reduced, the disposal of harmful materials to the nature can be eradicated and cleaner technologies can be developed (Andersen, 2006, Ghisellini et al., 2016).

Circular Economy and Industrial Ecology provide a positive conceptual framework and functioning policy for economic development in a more responsible approach towards the use of natural resources (Jendrolovits, 2016).

2.2.6. To what Extent the Term of CE has been adopted

The transition to Circular Economy has started and although the concept of Circular Economy is considered as new, there is potential for development (Camilleri, 2016, Ghisellini et al., 2016). So, the notion of Circular Economy can be conceived as an effort towards sustainable growth in terms of regulatory pressures oriented to mandatory operational management and environmentally responsible policies. Subsequently, this kind of obligation and legislation can drive companies and countries to develop responsible behaviours and improve their sustainability performance (Camilleri, 2016). An example of improvement can be Corporate Sustainability which involves and requires the participation of many stakeholders in sustainability issues including the control of the entire life cycle of products and services from their production till their disposal. Thus, in this context there is the opportunity for companies to adjust and optimize their business models and improve their performance and profitability (Witjes and Lozano, 2016).

Many enterprises have not been informed of the Circular Economy perspective. The terms used to depict both Linear and Circular Economies are potentially misleading and complicated (Camilleri, 2016). Hence, this phenomenon can account for the Circular Economy disclosure in Corporate Social Responsibility reporting to a small degree till now. However, in spite of being a new and
contemporary idea, Circular Economy’s inclusion in Corporate Social Responsibility reporting is promising and seems to be here to stay.

2.3. Diversity and Disability

2.3.1. Diversity in the workplace

Due to the increasing globalization, more requirements for better and more intense cooperation among people from various civilizations, traditions and attitudes have appeared in the business world than at any point previously. The workplace is developing and diversifying, constituting not an isolated part of people’s life but a contemporary one of a global competitive economy. More organizations (profit and non-profit) make efforts to engage in diversity sphere so as to be able to be more innovative, open-minded and competitively strong (Green et al., 2002).

As a result, the idea of diversity, especially in the workplace, comprises an issue which has been paid a lot of attention to through the last decades (Green et al., 2002, Smith, 2002). “Diversity is generally defined as acknowledging, understanding, accepting, valuing, and celebrating differences among people with respect to age, class, ethnicity, gender, physical and mental ability, race, sexual orientation, spiritual practice, and public assistance status (Green et al., 2002:1).

Nevertheless, there is a tendency in which much of the discussion regarding diversity focuses more on gender and race for instance rather than the topic of disability. Actually, disabled people as a minority group in the workplace have received only limited interest (Smith, 2002).

Moreover, some particular survey data show that 83% of the enterprises which have adopted diversity policies argue that they have observed a better business performance and image. They may mean that, after the implementation of the diversity practices, they are able to employ a wider variety of people, retain better and more effective staff for longer time, enhance their relationships with society and other firms and make their brand better. It would be useful to be mentioned that the results of the respective European Commission survey revealed that
enterprises in the north and west of the EU have more developed use of and engagement in diversity policies whereas there is a necessity for those in south Europe and the new EU Member States to gather more information on how to operate them (European Commission, 2005).

2.3.2. Definition of Disability

Two definitions of disabled people and disability (in general and in employment) respectively are widespread with the most possible relevance to the EU Labor Force Survey:

- “People having a basic activity difficulty (such as sight, hearing, walking, communicating)” and “Difficulties in carrying out basic activities (such as, seeing, hearing, walking, communicating)” (Eurostat, 2005).
- “People limited in work because of a longstanding health problem and/or a basic activity difficulty (LHPAD)” and “Limitation in work caused by health problems or difficulties in basic activities” (Eurostat, 2005).

In addition, according to ILO (in its Code of Practice on Managing Disability in the Workplace) a disabled person can be defined as “an individual whose prospects of securing, returning to, retaining and advancing in suitable employment are substantially reduced as a result of a duly recognized physical, sensory, intellectual or mental impairment” (International Labour Organization, 2001:3).

2.3.3. People with Disabilities and Employment

It is estimated that approximately over a billion people, 15% of the global population, live with a disability. It could be argued that people with disabilities form the world’s largest minority. Even though the size of the disabled group has raised, their respective results in the labour market have significantly decreased over the past decades. Officially, the unemployment rates of people with disabilities in the working age in the majority of the developed countries have been still stated at least twice lower than for those without a disability. Moreover,
according to OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development), the average employment rates for persons with disabilities in OECD countries in the late 2000s have made up just over 40% compared with 75% for people without disability. So, the low rates of people’s with disabilities employment can trigger doubts and causes for further examination on the presence of discrimination and social exclusion of the disabled people in the workplace (Global Reporting Initiative and Fundación ONCE, 2015, Jones, 2008, Kuznetsova, 2012).

However, in spite of coping with marginalization, people with disabilities are potential employees, consumers, suppliers, investors and members of the local community that businesses operate. As part of the diverse society, they also constitute “a source of untapped talent for employment and for the development of products and services”. This can be obviously a competitive advantage for corporations and give them the opportunity to benefit from including consideration of people with disability needs in their business strategies (Global Reporting Initiative and Fundación ONCE, 2015:6, 11).

Regarding the type of employment undertaken by people with disabilities evidence from relative researches imply that people with disabilities concentrate on non-standard and low-skilled kinds of work, including independent contracting, part-time and temporary employment such as administrative, secretarial, administrative skilled trades and personal services that have relatively lower income. This can be explained by the fact that personnel with a disability have a lower amount of unmeasured skill. Both disabled and non-disabled workers receive lower wages in these jobs with a higher proportion of disabled workers. At this point, the factor that should be examined is whether this phenomenon of job preference is an outcome of discrimination or a willing choice made by the people with disabilities. Consequently, even when personal traits are constrained, it seems that people with disabilities prefer a temporary and part-time employment. The three possible reasons for this are: a) the disability benefit regime, b) the discrimination of employer and c) the flexibility required by the person with disability. Besides this, it appears that people with disabilities tend to employ more part-time with respect to those without a disability on the grounds that the part-time employment offers them accommodating characteristics that make it more accessible and appealing to them. Nonetheless, the occupations taken by
people with disabilities can differentiate to a great extent from country to country, for example between the primary and the tertiary sector of the economy. These differences can depict and depend on the composition of the job market, the structure and development of national economies, and the labour market policies like the form of vocational training or placement opportunities for disabled people (Greve, 2009, Jones, 2008).

Employment can be considered as one of the most significant perspectives of social inclusion. Especially, it is very useful and important for people with disabilities, being socially isolated, because it can give them the possibility to participate actively in and be incorporated into the labour market and the society in large (Kuznetsova, 2012, Vornholt et al., 2013).

A lot of endeavors have recently been made in order for persons with disabilities to be actively involved in the business area and integrated in the job market in particular (Kuznetsova, 2012). In accordance with OECD, about 2.5% of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) is expended on programmes related to disability and this stands for more than double the spending on unemployment compensation. As a consequence, policymakers have been increasingly interested in the people with disabilities and a range of legislative changes and regulations enacted have the target to ensure a development in the position of people with disabilities in the employment. Remarkable examples compose the introduction of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990 in the USA and the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) in 1995 in the UK, whose goal was to upgrade the accessibility of people with disabilities to employment via imposing some rules and obligations on employers to make customizations to their premises and business accommodations (Jones, 2008).

What is more, for the purpose of improving the situation in which people with disabilities live and work, it is vital the perceptions and stances to be modified. People with disabilities have not to be excluded from the labour market. Instead, new market chances have to be created for products, services, frameworks and environments accessible and planned for everyone. Diversity and a more inclusive community with its basis on social equity and justice have to be promoted (Global Reporting Initiative and Fundación ONCE, 2015).
2.3.4. Non-Discrimination of People with Disabilities as a Human Right

Society’s perception of “disablement” as an issue of basic civil rights and behavior on people with disabilities as a minority is attributed to the social standard of disability. This social standard has been enhanced by the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) in 2006 giving people with disabilities the protection of human rights including the right to employment based on the values of equal treatment, accessibility and non-discrimination (Kuznetsova, 2012).

As regards Corporate Social Responsibility and the Guiding Principles promoted, human rights are considered to be the centre of the measures taken by companies to apply their corporate responsibility. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights plays a major role stating, at first, in its Article 1 that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”. In addition, according to Article 2: “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the Universal Declaration without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status”, while Article 4 indicates that “equality of opportunity and treatment for disabled men and women workers shall be respected”. Subsequently, in 2006 the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities after the enactment of those Articles, adopted non-discrimination of people with disabilities as a human right that should be integrated in CSR strategies of all companies, including multinationals. In Article 27, it is stated that “States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.” (Cordero et al., 2014:14, Greve, 2009:6).

Nevertheless, according to the World Report on Disability, scheduled by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank, people with disabilities still confront crucial discrimination in employment: a) in employment rates, as it has already been mentioned, the employment rate of people with disabilities (44%) was just more than half of people without disabilities (75%) in OECD
countries, b) by type of contract, 44% of workers with disabilities in the US are in part-time employment arrangement, compared to 22% of those without disabilities, c) gender discrimination, women with disabilities generally have smaller income than men with disabilities and d) remuneration, the wage differences between men and women with and without disabilities are as big as the gap in employment rates. (Cordero et al., 2014).

Apart from this, in accordance with the World Report on Disability, as Cordero et al. (2014:15) state: “Anti-discrimination laws provide a starting point for promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities in employment. Where employers are required by law to make reasonable accommodations – such as making recruitment and selection procedures accessible, adapting the working environment, modifying working times, and providing assistive technologies – that can reduce employment discrimination, increase access to the workplace, and change perceptions on the ability of people with disabilities to be productive workers. A range of financial measures, such as tax incentives and funding for reasonable accommodations, can be considered to reduce additional costs that would otherwise be incurred by employers and employees”.

2.3.5. Disability and CSR

As people with disabilities have been declared equal members of society by international legislation and authorities and also recognized as a considerable group of human diversity having rights including the right to employment, their incorporation into employment has become a part of the CSR agenda at international and European levels. More enterprises have adopted CSR strategies with the orientation to include people with disabilities because of the better circumstances, education, information, experience and resources available to hire diverse workforce and contribute to society that they operate (Kuznetsova, 2012).

An essential part of the main idea of Corporate Social Responsibility management and a crucial aspect of the workforce diversity is hiring people with disabilities – “disability employment”. Promoting the active participation of people with disabilities and adopting Corporate Social Responsibility policies is very important in order for a company to meet its targets and challenges (Kudo et al.,
2005, Kuznetsova, 2012). There can be many reasons why firms hire people with disabilities and meet their needs in products and services as well as CSR actions. One reason is the business case. The business case describes the advantages of a diverse personnel, included disabled people. It argues simply that:

- “People with disabilities make good, dependable employees. Many cases document comparable productivity, lower accident rates and higher job retention rates between employees with disabilities and a company’s general workforce.

- People with disabilities represent an untapped source of skills and talent, including technical skills if they have access to training, and transferable problem-solving skills developed in daily life. People who develop disabilities while working often have valuable skills and experiences learned on the job, in addition to their formal skills qualifications.

- Disabled people, their families and friends are often an overlooked market segment. Especially in developed countries, many have significant disposable income.

- Hiring people with disabilities can contribute to the overall diversity, creativity and workplace morale and enhance a company’s image among its staff, in the community and among customers” (International Labour Organization, 2010:1).

Disability can be assessed from two different dimensions in management: the one is of setting up inclusive companies as element of Corporate Social Responsibility practice among others through the incorporation of people with disabilities and the other is the so-called “disability management” coping with the reincorporation of the long-term sick workers into the workplace. However, the respective results in relation to the inclusion of people with disabilities are sometimes underestimated due to the fact that there is misperception and the equalization of people with disabilities with people using wheelchair. Furthermore, with regard to hiring and employing people with disabilities, the cost of accommodation has to be taken into account for management (Idowu et al., 2015).
At the same time, companies develop specific Corporate Social Responsibility policies (e.g., diversity strategies) so as to fulfill their performance goals whereas there are various particularities in many situations. Having different angles, disabilities may influence each individual’s workplace facilitation to be formulated by the company according to the person’s needs. For instance, it can be easy for an individual in a wheelchair who needs no accommodations such as assistive technology and irregular work schedule to work in a contemporary, business office job in which the furniture and building structure like doorways, restrooms and elevator are already accessible to wheelchair users. In contrast, another individual who applies for the same kind of job in an older and not so synchronous building may find many difficulties and obstacles in order to be able to function there. So, it can be necessary for the applicant—potential employee to negotiate a number of facilitations and adjustments in the workplace to be able to successfully perform job tasks. There are different necessities in accommodation even for people with the “same” disability owing to the intensity of disability (Markel and Barclay, 2009). Moreover, there is the implication that a company can benefit from the integration of people with disabilities into its Corporate Social Responsibility program apart from socially, economically. As people with disabilities may require some degree of accommodation in the workplace adapted for their needs, these improvements and upgrades can enhance the work procedure of the rest staff. Consequently, this can increase the productivity of the entire personnel and the financial results of the firm. In addition, the proactive incorporation of people with disabilities and the provision of the appropriate and helpful working environment by the corporations can save money via reducing cost in four ways: 1) Returning employees with temporary difficulties and disabilities to work in less time and effectively, 2) Decreasing turnover costs, 3) Reducing litigation costs and 4) Acquiring tax exemptions (Markel and Barclay, 2009). Besides this, the assistance service program for disability employment constitutes another way in which companies can promote CSR with direction to people with disabilities. The respective actions and services include: a) informing job seekers and assisting firms find potential candidates, b) providing input and instructions to train new employees and develop their vocational abilities, c) providing technical information and practical mechanisms with regard to employment management for disabled employees, d) granting subsidies to
compensate additional costs for disability employment management and e) providing social resources available for employers (Kudo et al., 2005).

The European Network for Corporate Social Responsibility and Disability (CSR+D) is “a European multi-stakeholder initiative that aims to raise awareness and promote the integration of disability into corporate social responsibility (CSR) and business agendas” (European Network for Corporate Social Responsibility and Disability, 2012:3).

According to the European Network for Corporate Social Responsibility and Disability, a widespread disclosure of disability issues in sustainability reports could play a crucial role in promoting social inclusion of people with disabilities. This means that people with disabilities can be examined and treated as valid stakeholders from several aspects such as employees, suppliers, users or potential customers of goods and services, investors and members of the community. Therefore, covering disability issues in a broader way in Corporate Social Responsibility reporting could provide companies with assistance to:

- “Integrate people with disabilities into the labour market; as part of a diverse society, they are increasingly seen as a source of talent, creativity and innovation.
- Enhance the importance of accessibility and design for all environments, goods and services as business opportunities. People with disabilities and their families are a very important from a commercial point of view, especially in the EU’s ageing society.
- Create employment for people with disabilities in company value chains by including sheltered work centers among usual suppliers and contractors.
- Meet and overcome the increasing legislation on non-discrimination, equal opportunities and human rights related issues.
- Achieve a greater engagement with organizations representing people with disabilities as key stakeholders to reinforce the mainstreaming of disability in company strategy, awareness of regulations and compliance with standards, and reporting of disability-related issues” (European Network for Corporate Social Responsibility and Disability, 2012:3-4).
2.3.6. Disability Disclosure in CSR Reporting

Concerning the development of the bidirectional relationship between disability and Corporate Social Responsibility reporting, unique agreed framework has been provided and commitment to support broader coverage of disability issues in Corporate Social Responsibility reports has been called by initiatives taken by the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 adopted by the European Commission (EC) and the EU’s ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the inclusion of disability as an issue to be considered in the CSR agenda (European Network for Corporate Social Responsibility and Disability, 2012). Simultaneously, for example the only compulsory reporting requirements are related to the employment of people with disabilities. In accordance with the Companies Act 1985 (Schedule 7, Paragraph 9): “All organizations with more than 250 employees are required to disclose, in the Directors Report, their policy with respect to applications from disabled persons, continuing employment of, and appropriate training for, persons who become disabled during employment; and, the training, career development and promotion of disabled persons” (Adams et al., 1995).

Disability issues seem to have been to a small extent illustrated in Corporate Social Responsibility reporting but from the aspect of Corporate Social Responsibility management there is the tendency for their inclusion to be increasingly valuable on the center of the decision-making. Many companies, being active in tackling disability, begin to include a number of angles of disability in their sustainability reports. However, either the information they publish does not correspond to special indicators and there is not an accepted uniform, or they do not report on the initiatives taken. As a consequence, this does not mean that strategies and policies on disability are not followed by anyone. The absence of Global Reporting Initiative indicators on disability might explain these “barriers” for enterprises, since GRI guidelines are one of the most widely used reporting standards globally. The Board of Directors of the Global Reporting Initiative, being willing to move a further step forward and improve the disclosure of disability in reporting, has decided to extend and include in next versions
specific indicators on disability. This movement is expected to promote the inclusion of disability issues in the strategy, policies and practices of companies (European Network for Corporate Social Responsibility and Disability, Cordero et al., 2014, Kudo et al., 2005).

Finally, nevertheless, there are additional barriers – challenges on disability disclosure in Corporate Social Responsibility reporting by the firms at the moment. It is estimated that the deficiency of knowledge on how to manage disability from an employment perspective comprises a notable factor of not reporting respective issues at the end. Moreover, the inadequacy of expertise on disability, depicted, among other subjects, in the inappropriate use of the language and the terminology, plays equally a vital role (Cordero et al., 2014). The concept of materiality composes another important element. The structure of a Corporate Social Responsibility policy implies an analysis to identify the most relevant and essential issues, for the organization and its stakeholders where the attention of Corporate Social Responsibility and reporting should be paid to. Disability is not frequently admitted as a principal issue by the organization in the interaction with its interest groups, and hence, is excluded from reporting. Apart from the aforementioned causes why disability might not be accepted as a material issue like the lack of national or international reporting standards on disability and poor compliance with existing regulations, it would be useful to underline that there is also the perception according to which disability is not a priority for the target audience of Corporate Social Responsibility reports. Thus, reports largely concentrate on reporting needs of stakeholders and shareholders, who for now do not require information on disability (Cordero et al., 2014). Global Reporting Initiative places the notion of materiality at the center of sustainability reporting. This means advocating reporting organizations to only provide information on the issues that are really crucial to allow interest groups to obtain an understanding of the organization’s impacts on the economy, the environment and society and its ability to come up against, minimize or eliminate these impacts.

Companies should determine whether disability is a principal topic by evaluating whether:
➢ “The organization has significant impacts (whether positive or negative) on the rights of people with disabilities, through either its operations, products, services and/or business relationships

➢ The topic of disability may substantively influence the assessments and decisions of stakeholders” (Global Reporting Initiative and Fundación ONCE, 2015:23).

3. Methodology

As it has already been mentioned, the purpose of this study is to explore two special issues of sustainability management in corporate governance: first, the promotion of diversity and disability in the workplace and second, the promotion of Circular Economy policies. As a consequence, this research focuses on assessing to what extent companies include relevant information on diversity and disability, and Circular Economy in their Corporate Social Responsibility reports and also examining their performance on the respective issues.

The methodological approach followed is a content analysis, a descriptive analysis in quantitative terms of some relevant specific indicators depending on the Global Reporting Initiative guidelines framework. So, 275 Corporate Social Responsibility reports were initially selected as a sample for a potential survey. The selection was made from the Global Reporting Initiative Sustainability Disclosure Database and concerns all the companies recorded for 2015, with different size (MNEs, large, SMEs), from the three sectors of economy (primary, industrial or secondary, tertiary or service), operating in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It has to be remarked that one out of 275 companies had not available report, so actually the research refers to a real sample of 274 Corporate Social Responsibility reports.

More specifically, having access to the sustainability 2015 reports of each company, it was possible then for an assessment to be made. The content of the assessment (the scoring and its justification) is placed on the Appendices in an attached file of Excel. It would be useful to point out here that there were many
types and names of reports such as: Corporate Social Responsibility reports, Sustainability reports, Annual Reports and Accounts, Sustainability Performance reports, Sustainable Development reviews, Sustainability Summary reports and CSR Annual reports. The evaluation of the relevant indicators was based on a grading scale 0 – 4 depicted in the Table 1. Therefore, taking into account the scoring system 0 – 4, an assessment – grading was carried out so as to estimate selected enterprises’ performance on Circular Economy and diversity and disability in the workplace disclosure in Corporate Social Responsibility reporting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Rating Qualifications/Requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>The report does not include any information relevant to the specific GRI topic. No coverage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The report provides generic or brief statements, without specific information on the organization’s approach to the topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The report includes valuable information on the topic but there are still major gaps in coverage. The organization identifies the assessed issue, but fails to present it sufficiently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The provided information is adequate and clear. It is evident that the reporting organization has developed the necessary systems and processes for data collection on the assessed topic and attempts to present it in a consistent manner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Coverage of the specific issue can be characterized as &quot;full&quot; in the report. It provides the organization’s policy, procedures/programs and relevant monitoring results for addressing the issue. The organization meets the GRI requirements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Criteria for grading scale 0 – 4 (Source: Adapted from Skouloudis et al., 2009)

The indicators from GRI index examined in this research are 7 in total, 5 of them concerning Circular Economy and 2 of them regarding diversity and disability in the workplace. These are the following: 1) G4-DMA_ENV: Disclosures on Management Approach on the environment - Circular Economy that examines if a
company reports on the development of strategies and policies to identify its positive or negative impacts concerning the Circular Economy; 2) G4-EN1: Materials used by weight or volume which checks whether a firm reports on the total weight or volume of materials that are used to produce and package the organization’s primary products and services during the reporting period by non-renewable materials and renewable materials used; 3) G4-EN2: Percentage of materials used that are recycled input materials that essays whether an enterprise reports on the percentage of recycled input materials used to manufacture the organization’s primary products and services; 4) G4-EN23: Total weight of waste by type and disposal method that investigates if a corporation reports on the total weight of hazardous and non-hazardous waste, by various disposal methods like reuse, recycling, composting recovery (including energy recovery), incineration (mass burn), deep well injection, landfill on-site storage etc. and on how the waste disposal method has been determined; 5) G4-EN28: Percentage of products sold and their packaging materials that are reclaimed by category which controls if an organization reports on the percentage of reclaimed products and their packaging materials for each product category and how the data for this indicator has been collected; 6) G4-DMA_LA: Disclosures on Management Approach on diversity, disability and equal opportunity that questions whether a company reports on the adoption of strategies and policies to identify its positive or negative impacts regarding diversity and disability in the workplace and 7) G4-LA12: Composition of governance bodies and breakdown of employees per employee category according to minority group membership, disability and other indicators of diversity which explores if a firm reports on the percentage of individuals and the percentage of employees that have a disability (Global Reporting Initiative, 2015).
4. Results

Concerning the sector of economy, it would be useful to highlight that the primary one from the database contains only one company which operates in the business sector of agriculture. Hence, two out of the three sectors of economy (the secondary and tertiary) are examined on the grounds that the outcomes about the primary one produced would not be safe.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circular Economy</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secondary Sector</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14,67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tertiary Sector</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9,85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2:** CE Disclosure in CSR reporting-Sectors of Economy (Source: Author’s own)

Table 2 shows the scoring for the performance of companies that belong to two out of the three sectors of economy, secondary and tertiary, on Circular Economy disclosure in CSR reporting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diversity and Disability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secondary Sector</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7,06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tertiary Sector</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,07%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3:** Diversity and Disability Disclosure in CSR reporting-Sectors of Economy (Source: Author’s own)

Table 3 depicts the grading for the performance of enterprises that belong to two out of the three sectors of economy, secondary and tertiary, on diversity and disability disclosure in CSR reporting.
Figures 4 and 5 present the scoring for the performance of firms of the industrial and service sector on information, related to the indicator G4_EN23, disclosure in CSR reporting respectively.

**Figure 4**: G4_EN23 Indicator-Secondary Sector (Source: Author’s own)

**Figure 5**: G4_EN23 Indicator-Tertiary Sector (Source: Author’s own)
Table 4: G4_EN23 Indicator Point: 3-Business Sector (Source: Author’s own)

Table 4 outlines the business sectors where it is observed that most of the corporations operating in them have been graded point 3. Thus, it indicates the business sectors whose companies have the highest proportions of their grading for the indicator G4_EN23 as 3 points. More specifically, for instance, 7 out of the 16 enterprises that belong to the construction sector (7/16=43,75%) have been scored 3 points for the assessment of their performance on information, related to the indicator G4_EN23, disclosure in CSR reporting.

Table 5: Highest Scoring-Circular Economy (Source: Author’s own)
Table 5 illustrates the business sectors that have received the highest scoring for the performance of their companies on Circular Economy disclosure in CSR reporting.

Table 6: Lowest Scoring-Circular Economy (Source: Author’s own)

Table 6 represents the business sectors that have received the lowest scoring for the performance of their enterprises on Circular Economy disclosure in CSR reporting.

Table 7: Highest Scoring-Diversity and Disability (Source: Author’s own)
Table 7 shows the business sectors that have been graded the highest points for the performance of their firms on diversity and disability disclosure in CSR reporting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lowest Scoring-Diversity and Disability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automotive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemicals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Utilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 8**: Lowest Scoring-Diversity and Disability (Source: Author’s own)

Table 8 depicts the business sectors that have been graded the lowest points for the performance of their corporations on diversity and disability disclosure in CSR reporting.

Regarding the size of companies, they are recorded and categorized into multinational (MNE), large and small or medium-sized (SME).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circular Economy</th>
<th>MNEs</th>
<th>Large</th>
<th>SMEs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.50%</td>
<td>10.73%</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 9**: CE Disclosure in CSR reporting-Size of Companies (Source: Author’s own)

Table 9 presents the scoring for the performance of companies in relation to their size on Circular Economy disclosure in CSR reporting.
Table 10: Diversity and Disability Disclosure in CSR reporting-Size of Companies (Source: Author’s own)

Table 10 outlines the scoring for the performance of enterprises in relation to their size on diversity and disability disclosure in CSR reporting.

![Diversity and Disability](image)

**Table 10:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MNEs</th>
<th>Large</th>
<th>SMEs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.33%</td>
<td>8.87%</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6: G4_EN23 Indicator-MNEs (Source: Author’s own)

Figures 6, 7 and 8 illustrate the scoring for the performance of companies in relation to their size (MNEs, large and SMEs) on information, relevant to the indicator G4_EN23, disclosure in CSR reporting.
Figure 7: G4_EN23 Indicator-Large (Source: Author’s own)

Figure 8: G4_EN23 Indicator-SMEs (Source: Author’s own)
5. Discussion and Conclusions

5.1. Discussion

As it has already been pointed out, the aim of this study was to assess to what extent companies disclose relevant information on diversity and disability, and Circular Economy in their CSR reports and also investigate their performance on the respective issues. Consequently, 7 specific indicators were examined in total, 5 regarding Circular Economy and 2 concerning diversity and disability in the workplace.

As far as the sector of economy is concerned, it seems that the secondary is more responsible than the tertiary one for including information on Circular Economy in CSR reporting. As shown in Table 2, the performance of companies that belong in the industrial sector of the economy has been scored 14.67% while at the same time the respective performance of enterprises operating in the service sector of economy has been graded 9.85%. This means that firms of the secondary sector are more active or have disclosed more information in their CSR reports on resource management or use of recycling raw materials, waste management and total weight of waste by type and disposal method than corporations of the tertiary one have done. More specifically, as illustrated in Figures 4 and 5, the performance of the industrial sector of economy on information, related to the indicator G4_EN23, disclosure in CSR reporting (52.98%) is higher than the respective one of the service sector of economy (40.64%). At this point, it would be useful to be mentioned that the indicator G4_EN23 has been selected for further investigation because it was noticed that it had been an indicator with the highest scoring out of all the indicators related to Circular Economy. On the contrary, from Table 3 it can be observed that the performance of companies operating in the tertiary sector of economy on diversity and disability disclosure in CSR reporting (10.07%) is higher than the enterprises’ one of the secondary sector (7.06%). So, it can be indicated that firms of the service sector of economy have included more information on equal opportunities or accessibility in the workplace for people with disabilities, policies for customers and employees with disability and participation in charities/donations about people with disabilities. This result can also be supported from the literature review conducted. As for the preferences
of people with disabilities for the employment, it is reported that they concentrate on jobs such as administrative, secretarial, administrative skilled trades and personal services, the majority of which may belong to the service sector of economy (Greve, 2009, Jones, 2008).

Furthermore, the higher performance of the secondary sector of economy on Circular Economy coverage in CSR reporting than the tertiary one is demonstrated again by the fact that most of the companies with the highest scoring on Circular Economy belong to the industrial sector of economy. As presented in Tables 4, 5 and 6, for instance, automotive (27%), construction (17,50%) and food & beverage products (16,92%), being industrial business sectors, have the best grading in contrast to, for example, telecommunications (6%), healthcare services (6,67%) and non-profit services (7,50%), belonging to the service sector of economy, which have the lowest scoring on Circular Economy. Respectively, the better performance of the tertiary sector of economy on diversity and disability inclusion in CSR reporting than the secondary one is also confirmed by the fact that most of the enterprises with the highest scoring on diversity and disability are services. As depicted in Tables 7 and 8, for example, telecommunications (20%) and railroad (18,75%), being considered as services, have the highest scoring in contrast to, for instance, energy (2,50%), automotive (5%) and chemicals (5%), being industrial business sectors, which have the lowest grading on diversity and disability.

Regarding the size of firms, MNEs seem to be more responsible than large and SMEs for including information on Circular Economy in CSR reporting. As outlined in Table 9, the performance of MNEs has been graded 13,50% whereas simultaneously the performance of large and SMEs have been scored 10,73% and 6,25% respectively. More specific information on Circular Economy and the indicator G4_EN23 in relation to the size of corporations is represented in Figures 6, 7 and 8. Additionally, from Table 10 it can be noticed that the performance of large (8,87%) and MNEs (9,33%) on diversity and disability disclosure in CSR reporting is also clearly better than the one of SMEs (6,25%). This outcome proves to be compatible with the Companies Act 1985 (Schedule 7, Paragraph 9) that states: “All organizations with more than 250 employees are required to disclose, in the Directors Report, their policy with respect to applications from
disabled persons, continuing employment of, and appropriate training for, persons who become disabled during employment; and, the training, career development and promotion of disabled persons” (Adams, Coutts and Harte, 1995).

5.2. Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

First of all, it has to be highlighted the fact that considerable effort and time was needed to gather all the information required for the conduct of this research. The collection of the data was based on the GRI Sustainability Disclosure Database and it could be characterized as impossible for interviews or face-to-face discussions to be arranged with representatives from the 275 companies that constitute the sample data. If so, there would be the opportunity to obtain more accurate and completed information and view of the enterprises on the issues examined.

Moreover, previous research has demonstrated the importance of the degree of subjectivity as a factor in a report evaluation under a numerical system (Skouloudis et al., 2009). Therefore, a content analysis can always be subjective in order for the assessor to be able to recognize the quantity and quality features of disclosure and achieve reliable data collection and method adopted (Guthrie and Abeysekera, 2006). However, this can be addressed by more than one assessor scoring a report and further investigating any intense variations among individual scores (Skouloudis et al., 2009). As a consequence, there is the potential for the assessment carried out under this study requirements to be reevaluated to greater extent so as for even more precise information and conclusions to be drawn.

Finally, this dissertation could be used by organizations (profit or non-profit) regardless of their size, the sector of economy in which they operate and their geographical location as a benchmark and useful tool in order to focus on the outcomes of this paper and to extract their own. This may be a smart way and a good opportunity for them to be able to improve their performance on the specific issues of Circular Economy and diversity and disability in the workplace. In addition, this can be combined with the raise of awareness of these issues, the broadening of their horizons, the development of their CSR reporting procedures
and the increase of their sustainability (social, environmental and economic) performance in general.

5.3. Conclusions and Recommendations

In a nutshell, the aim of this study was to explore two special issues of sustainability management in corporate governance: a) the promotion of diversity in the workplace and b) the promotion of Circular Economy policies. As a consequence, this research focused on assessing to what extent companies include relevant information on diversity and disability in the workplace, and Circular Economy in their Corporate Social Responsibility reports and also examining their performance on the respective issues.

Based on the results, taking everything into consideration, it would be safe to be concluded that it appears that not many companies have covered the examined issues. Enterprises’ performance on Circular Economy and diversity and disability in workplace issues disclosure in Corporate Social Responsibility reporting seems to be poor and relatively low. In addition, it can be demonstrated that current corporate strategies in Corporate Social Responsibility reporting have not been adequately developed and there is plenty of space for improvement.

As one of the main concerns of this paper was to examine and highlight the significance of Circular Economy and diversity and disability in workplace issues in Corporate Social Responsibility reporting, it would be worthwhile some recommendations to be proposed in order for the investigated issues to be further developed. Firstly, states and governments have the power and the capability to offer some incentives to firms so as for those to integrate Circular Economy and diversity and disability in workplace indicators into their Corporate Social Responsibility reports and to develop respective policies. Secondly, industries associations can play a vital role for this development or the larger corporations can help the smaller ones by offering the know-how that is more grown in them. Last but not least, NGOs can constitute another key factor of the development of the respective issues of Circular Economy and diversity and disability in workplace through pressing and encouraging towards this direction.
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Appendices

Appendix – Grading of Indicators is attached in an Excel file (.xlsx).

Appendix: Grading of Indicators.xlsx