

Perceptions and Understandings of the Roles of Businesses
as Corporate Citizens in a Post-Conflict Society: The Bosnia
and Herzegovina Case

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Abstract

This research seeks to expand the field of Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Citizenship by investigating the expected social roles of companies in Bosnian and Herzegovina, and what context specific conditions have helped shape these expectations. Traditional investigations within this field of study have largely focused on the roles that corporations undertake in relatively stable contexts. By challenging these boundaries, academics and practitioners can start to develop a clearer view of the expected social roles of companies and the factors that affect these expectations.

This research uses a case study strategy, using Bosnia and Herzegovina as the case boundary, informed by semi-structured interviews with actors of various responsibility levels in different sectors. These interviewees were selected due to their level of interaction with the phenomenon of corporate social responsibility and to triangulate data from different sectors in the society. Field notes of social observations and CSR networking meetings were also compiled in the data set. The data were analysed using a template analysis coding method.

This research found that that instability in the Bosnian society has impacted expectations of the social roles of businesses. These impacts come from the transition from socialism to free market capitalism, the ethnic tensions and distrust, the damaged physical and economic infrastructures, the political modus operandi, and the lack of pressure for actors to be socially responsible. Companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina generally follow an ad hoc approach, and they are only beginning to incorporate strategy into their CSR activities. This is opposed to the ‘western’ expectations that CSR should be a strategic approach. Stakeholder participation is still limited, providing few chances for dialogue on expectations and defining corporate social citizenship. This research has helped highlight how abandoning the assumption of stability in a society can affect the understandings of development and expectations of corporate social roles. The factors impacting these expectations can change the fundamental premises of the business social contract in ways that are not accounted for in extant literature.

Key Words: corporate social responsibility, citizenship, post-conflict, Bosnia and Herzegovina

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