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CSR in Clusters: Cluster Social Responsibility¹

Abstract: The aim of the article is to identify factors promoting and hindering the implementation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in a cluster. The analysis is based on the literature of the subject and desk research on clusters, as well as studies by the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP), the European Commission, selected clusters and the ECCP platform. Factors promoting and hindering the implementation of the CSR concept were analysed at three levels: macro – focusing on the cluster-society relationship; meso – at the level of relations between cluster members; and micro in relation to individual enterprises. The research shows that favourable and unfavourable factors co-exist, which limits the possibilities of implementing the CSR concept in a cluster. Moreover, the concept of CSR at the macro level, in overloaded clusters, requires further elaboration and well-established cooperation of the dominant stakeholders in order to eliminate social problems.

Keywords: industrial clusters, corporate social responsibility, creating shared value, macro analysis, meso and micro analysis

JEL classification codes: L14, M14, O14, R11

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CSR w klastrach – społeczna odpowiedzialność klastra

Streszczenie: Celem artykułu jest identyfikacja czynników sprzyjających i niesprzyjających wdrażaniu koncepcji społecznej odpowiedzialności biznesu (*corporate social responsibility* – CSR) w klastrze. Rozważania nad czynnikami prowadzono na podstawie literatury przedmiotu i danych zastanych (*desk research*) dotyczących klastrów, korzystając z opracowań PARP, Komisji Europejskiej, stron internetowych wybranych klastrów i platformy ECCP. Czynniki sprzyjające i niesprzyjające realizacji koncepcji CSR analizowano na trzech poziomach klastra: makro – w relacji klastr–społeczeństwo, mezo – na poziomie relacji między członkami klastra i mikro – w odniesieniu do indywidualnych przedsiębiorstw. Rozważania prowadzą do wniosku, że czynniki sprzyjające i niesprzyjające współwystępują ze sobą, co ogranicza możliwości wdrażania koncepcji CSR w klastrze. Ponadto koncepcja CSR na poziomie makro w klastrach przeciążonych wymaga dopracowania i przemyślanej współpracy dominujących interesariuszy celem niwelowania problemów społecznych.

Słowa kluczowe: klastry, społeczna odpowiedzialność biznesu, kreowanie wspólnej wartości, analiza makro, analiza mezo i mikro

Kody klasyfikacji JEL: L14, M14, O14, R11

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Introduction

Some business clusters adopt the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and strive to be environmentally conscious from the very beginning of their existence. Examples include the Side-Cluster in Poland's southwestern Lower Silesia region [Cieślak, 2015], which focuses on eco-friendly, energy-saving wooden construction, and Dolina Ekologicznej Żywności (Ecological Food Valley) in the eastern Polish city of Lublin. But many other clusters decide to embrace CSR only after some time – after noticing the negative effects of their activities. For example, a cluster in Germany's Ruhr region that was once redeveloped has started specialising in environmentally friendly technology, and a cluster in Finland has taken steps to protect the environment in response to problems caused by the local metallurgical and chemical industries [Porter, 1998, p. 84]. In the latter case, cluster members are trying to repair the damage, in what should be considered as the minimum level of social responsibility [Campbell, 2007].

The concept of CSR in relation to clusters was first mentioned in a 2006 European Commission document entitled *Opportunity and responsibility: How to help more small businesses to integrate social and environmental issues into what they do* [European Commission, 2006]. In 2020, businesses were encouraged to embrace Porter and Kramer's [2011] idea of creating shared value (CSV) through the European Cluster Collaboration Platform [ECCP, 2020], which supports cooperation between clusters.

Such activities may encourage clusters to implement the CSR/CSV concept. But it should be kept in mind that a lot depends on cluster members themselves as well as entrepreneurs and their values and motivation. Bottom-up projects are usually more successful than those imposed from the top [Knop, 2010: 97].

The implementation of the CSR concept at the local level is fostered by a sense of pride and being a steward in the understanding of the theory of stewardship [Godos-Díez, Fernández-Gago, Martínez-Campillo, 2011]. Local entrepreneurs care about their own reputation. On the other hand, there are many entrepreneurs among cluster members who are sceptical about the idea of CSR, stating that “it’s all nice, but no one has to apply it” [Carrigan, McEachern, Moraes, Bosangit 2017: 690]. In their opinion, CSR is not related to business activities.

Such attitudes may undermine and destroy the efforts of other cluster members to implement the CSR idea. Science should find an answer to the question of how to deal with “free-riders” [von Weltzien Høivik, Shankar, 2011], i.e. individuals who contribute nothing to a common project, but who benefit from it. There may be a risk that such individuals will find followers (*always free-ride*) [Delton, Cosmides, Gremo, Robertson, Tooby, 2012], and thus, scepticism towards the CSR concept in the cluster will increase.

Therefore, a combination of factors determines success in the implementation of the CSR concept by cluster members. The aim of this article is to identify factors favouring and inhibiting the implementation of the CSR concept by clusters at the micro level (in relation to entrepreneurs and individual cluster members), the meso level (with regard to relations between cluster members) and the macro level, i.e. with regard to the relationship between a cluster and society. The literature on the subject and existing data were used to analyse these factors, including studies by the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP), documents by the European Commission and the websites of selected clusters.

The article is structured in the following way: first, the essence and characteristics of clusters are discussed, then the essence of the CSR concept is explained as well as concepts similar to CSR. The next section outlines factors favouring and inhibiting the implementation of the CSR concept by clusters at three levels of analysis: macro, meso and micro. The study finishes with conclusions and recommendations for further research directions.

Clusters – the concept and characteristics

Clusters are defined as geographical groups and collections of enterprises, mainly micro, small and medium-sized enterprises [Rabellotti, Carabelli, Hirsch, 2009], with the flow of knowledge and information due to their physical proximity. Porter’s definition is cited most frequently [2001: 246]. According to this definition, a cluster is a group of enterprises in a given geographical area, interconnected, specialised suppliers and units providing ser-

vices, companies operating in related sectors and related institutions (such as universities, industry associations and standardisation bodies), competing but also cooperating with one another. Four basic features of a cluster result from this definition [Główka, 2016: 102]:

- spatial concentration – concentration of entities specialised in a particular sector and related sectors in a particular geographical area, creating “a network of entities concentrated in a certain location” [Gorynia, Jankowska, 2008: 36], therefore, geographical proximity is a cluster attribute,
- connections – i.e. interactions between entities, which are of a competitive nature (fight for customers) and cooperation, which is referred to as co-competition,
- specialisation – the cluster core includes enterprises specialised in a given sector as well as related and supporting sectors,
- the triple helix – participation of entities from outside the business environment, such as universities and public administration. The establishment of a university and vocational schools leads to cluster development [Etzkowitz, 2008: 91].

Clusters have many advantages, such as lower transaction costs [Lund-Thomsen, Lindgreen, Vanhamme, 2016: 10] and higher productivity [Porter, 1998: 88]. Due to their geographic proximity, the information flow between companies is easy, which favours the process of sharing knowledge and the diffusion of know-how [Porter, 2001: 305; Gorynia, Jankowska, 2008: 30]. Thanks to interrelationships between enterprises, clusters promote innovation, help their members become more competitive and build their international reputation [Porter, 1998: 83], which makes it possible to attract foreign partners and establish joint-venture projects. A case in point is a surgical instrument cluster in Sialkot, Pakistan [Nadvi, 1999: 82]. Porter [1998: 77] stated that, paradoxically, a permanent competitive advantage in the global economy is gained thanks to local factors such as knowledge, relations and motivations of entrepreneurs, which cannot be matched by rivals from distant countries. “Globalization (...) increases the importance of the immediate environment of the company for its market success” [Gorynia, Jankowska, 2008: 270].

Clusters favour entrepreneurship, which translates into the creation of jobs in start-up projects [Delgado, Porter, Stern, 2010: 495]. They also generate external profits and benefits by promoting their regions. Moreover, clusters increase the regional economy’s resilience to global financial crises [Pereira, Temouri, Patel, 2020: 769] and contribute to sustainable development [Gerolamo, Ribeiro Carpinetti, Seliger, Cardoza Galdamez, 2008: 457].

Clusters are formed bottom up, sometimes in an unconscious manner when it is difficult to define *ex ante* the factor which initiated the creation of a cluster [Maskell, Malmberg, 2007]. It might be determined *ex post* exclusively [Maskell, Malmberg, 2007: 612]. Clusters can also be created consciously and purposefully thanks to the activities of entrepreneurs, scientific communities, or the government, with the support of local government authorities, which perceive clusters as opportunities for developing their region. Then, we talk about clus-

ter initiatives [Sölvell, Lindqvist, Ketels, 2008: 17]. Their establishment may be inspired by valuable experiences collected during study visits of local government authorities and local entrepreneurs organized abroad [Cieślak, 2015].

As a result of Porter's (1990) paper *Competitive advantage of nations*, clusters attracted interest in the 1990 s. The basis for Porter's concept was industrial districts analysed by Marshall at the end of the 19th century. Until the 1970 s the subject of clusters had not been studied. Only papers by researchers from the so-called the Italian flexible specialization and Californian schools highlighted the importance of industrial districts [Rocha, 2004: 371]. The paper by Krugman [1991] aroused interest in the new economic geography approach and clusters.

In Poland, cluster research gained momentum in the new millennium. The oldest Polish cluster is the Aviation Valley (Polska Dolina Lotnicza), established in 2006 [PARP, 2018]. However, cluster policy began at the central government level in 2010, when the country's first cluster benchmarking study was conducted [PARP, 2018: 11]. It is estimated that there are currently 130 clusters and cluster initiatives in Poland.

Clusters can be found in both industry and the service sector, in traditional and high-technology industries. They operate in large countries such as the United States and in small ones such as New Zealand. Both developed countries [Sölvell, Lindqvist, Ketels, 2008: 10] and developing nations [Lund-Thomsen, Pillay, 2012] are home to clusters.

There are different typologies of clusters. The following types are distinguished: clusters related to industrial districts in northern Italy, *hub and spoke* clusters, and satellite clusters [Markusen, 1996; Brodzicki, Szultka, 2002]. The first type of cluster, best exemplified by the US Silicon Valley, consists mainly of small and medium-sized enterprises, whose relations are based on both mutual competition and trust. *Hub and spoke* clusters are characteristic of large enterprises (international corporations) associated with an extensive network of small and medium-sized enterprises. A satellite cluster is characterised by "a dominant share of small and medium-sized enterprises dependent on external companies, the location advantage of which is usually based on lower costs" [Brodzicki, Szultka, 2002]. In terms of territorial scope, local, regional, national and supranational clusters are distinguished. Clusters are at various stages of advancement, hence it is possible to distinguish clusters in the embryonic, development and maturity phases [Brodzicki, Szultka, 2002; Kępka, Kacperek, 2017]. In terms of the growth rate and absorption capacity, there are static, dynamic and leading clusters [Giuliani, 2005: 282]. A static cluster does not grow over time. One of its characteristic features is weak bonds between cluster members and beyond, which leads to poor ability to improve management practices. A dynamic cluster is characterised by a flow of knowledge both inside and outside the cluster, which translates into improvement of the knowledge base, though it is possible that this does not apply to all cluster enterprises equally [Giuliani, 2005: 283]. Meanwhile, a leading cluster creates new knowledge and introduces technological innovations [Giuliani, 2005:

283]. The special importance of clusters is reflected in creating inter-organisational relations in production, organisational, technical and technological innovations [cf. Porter, 2006].

CSR – the concept and characteristics in terms of small and medium-sized enterprises

The term CSR is defined in various ways. According to Carroll [1979], CSR is about the expectations of society towards a company at a given time, in the economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic dimensions. Of note is that Carroll [2016: 6] was an advocate of a holistic view of CSR, and not of its individual parts. According to McWilliams and Siegel [2001: 117], meanwhile, CSR is an activity that goes beyond the company's self-interest and legal requirements. Campbell [2007: 951] defines CSR as doing no harm to others, and if damage or harm has already been done, the company is responsible for compensation. CSR is manifested in the company strategy and organisational practices, influencing the welfare of key stakeholders and the natural environment [Glavas, Kelley, 2014: 171]. CSR also means responsibility for the behaviour of others doing business with the company, as is the case, e.g., in the supply chain [Blowfield, Frynas, 2005: 503]. It is also a relationship between an enterprise and society [*ibid.* 503]. In this sense, CSR can be referred to a cluster due to the latter's vertical and horizontal links and connections.

Apart from CSR, other terms appear in the literature, such as creating shared value (CSV), as proposed by Porter and Kramer [2011], and sustainability². However, according to Carroll [2016: 6], "CSR will continue to be the centerpiece of these competing and complimentary frameworks".

Research reports on CSR focus mainly on large enterprises and international corporations, while giving less attention and space to small and medium-sized enterprises. However, micro and small enterprises play a dominant role in the economy. According to Poland's Central Statistical Office [2020], micro-enterprises accounted for 96.3% of the total number of businesses in the country in 2019, and the share of small enterprises was 3%. Their impact on the economy is equally important. The SME sector generates nearly half of Poland's GDP (49.2%, according to data for 2017) [PARP, 2020: 15] and creates jobs for 68% of the total number of people working in the enterprise sector [*ibid.* 18]. Small and medium-sized enterprises also undertake socially responsible activities. Although individually their impact is small and limited [Kaźmierczak, 2019: 117], their joint and coordinated action, in line with "Gulliver's rule" [van Luijk, Vleming, 2011: 282], might bring significant benefits to the local community. The principles of operation and formation of groups

² Corporate sustainability is defined as "creating long-term value by adopting a business approach that is equally mindful of economic, social, and environmental implications" [Caprar, Neville, 2012, p. 231].

have been presented in the literature on the subject, and the issue of brand building is of special significance to the creation of social capital in inter-organisational relations networks [cf. Olesiński, 2010].

Because of the word “corporate”, the term CSR may not be appropriate for small and medium-sized enterprises, and hence, other suggestions appeared, such as “small business social responsibility” (SMSR) [Spence, Frynas, Muthuri, Navare, 2019], or “responsible entrepreneurship”. There are many other terms. On the basis of a literature review, Ortiz-Avram, Domnanovich, Kronenberg, Scholz [2018] identified 56 alternative terms for CSR. The term CSR has been adopted here in order not to confuse the concepts. At the same time, the term CSV is identical to CSR, since it in fact focuses on combining economic and social goals³.

CSR in clusters – the beginnings of research interest

In the context of clusters, CSR has recently attracted some attention among researchers. A search of the EBSCO database using the keywords “corporate social responsibility” and “industrial cluster” provided 37 results from peer-reviewed scientific journals from 2008 to 2020 (as of February 22, 2021). A search for the keywords “small business social responsibility” and “industrial cluster” brought no more significant results: 41 scientifically peer-reviewed articles from 2008 to 2020. The use of the keywords “responsible entrepreneurship” and “industrial cluster” yielded 1 result. The publications largely focus on clusters in developing countries [Lund Thomsen, Pillay, 2012; Knorrington, Nadvi, 2012; Puppim de Oliveira, Jabbour, 2017]. There are slightly fewer publications on clusters in Europe [Daddi, Tessitore, Frey, 2012; Hojnik, Ruzzier, Lipnik, 2014; Daddi, Ceglia, Bianchi, Barcellos, 2019]. CSR in the context of clusters is at an early stage. In Poland, issues related to CSR in clusters have been discussed by Bojar, Bojar and Pylak [2008], Kroik and Bechowska-Gebhardt [2009], Ociczek, Lis and Nowacki [2014], Matel [2016], Mendel [2016], and Horzela [2020].

Clusters come in various forms depending on their depth and sophistication. However, most of them include companies manufacturing end-products or providing services, financial institutions, and companies in related sectors. They often consist of companies active in sectors further down the value chain (distribution channels or customers), producers of finished goods, units creating specialised infrastructure, governmental and non-governmental institutions providing specific training, education, information, vocational training units and mentoring groups. Government agencies that exert a significant influence on a given cluster may be considered as its part. Finally,

³ According to Porter and Kramer [2011], the term CSV is not equivalent to CSR. The study adopts Carroll’s [2016] point of view that CSR is a central element of competing and complementary concepts.

many groups include industry associations and other collective private institutions that assist members (cf. Porter, 2001; Predygiel 2020). This definition is a key element of the CSR theory analysed below as it refers to the role and importance of clusters as determinants of changes in social awareness and inter-organisational culture.

CSR in clusters – the concept's essence

SMEs with similar productive processes operating in clusters need an integrated CSR management system. A network approach to CSR means that “all the local actors (public and private ones, business and non-business ones) are stimulated to cooperate in order to manage the responsibility of the whole productive system towards the workers in the cluster, the local community, the customers, the environment, etc.” [Battaglia, Campi, Frey, Iraldo, 2006: 2].

A CSR's feature in a cluster includes joint actions taken for the sake of the stakeholders and aimed at solving social and ecological problems e.g. activities aimed at reducing waste generation and introducing a circular economy [Daddi *et al.*, 2019], limiting food waste, as in the case of the SIFooD cluster (Science and Innovation Food District) in Italy [Alberti, Belfanti, 2019: 39]. The scope of a cluster's social responsibility also includes assistance provided for stakeholders abroad. One example is the FrieslandCampina cluster in the Netherlands, which helps farmers in Asia and Africa to increase their income and develop competences in providing safe products to society [Remmé, 2015: 117].

In Poland, clusters are also encouraged to follow the principles of corporate social responsibility and carry out pro-environmental activities, especially at the stage of their development and maturity [Kępka, Kacperek, 2017: 37–39].

According to Carroll [2016], who was an advocate of a holistic view of CSR, economic factors should be taken into account, in addition to environmental and social aspects. The very fact that a cluster is created in order to improve the productivity of enterprises shows that common value is created in the understanding of Porter and Kramer [Alberti, Belfanti, 2019: 40]. A cluster's ability to develop despite unfavourable environmental conditions can also be viewed as an aspect of economic security [Bembenek, 2017: 13].

Factors favouring the implementation of CSR in a cluster

Cluster organisation facilitates CSR actions by cluster entities thanks to an active role of the cluster coordinator [Sölvell *et al.*, 2008: 14] as well as the support offered by cluster initiators [Alberti, Belfanti, 2019] and institutions such as the European Union and Poland's PARP. It is also worth considering factors that favour the implementation of the CSR concept in clusters at the macro, meso and micro levels. At each level of cluster analysis, several such factors can be identified. Table 1 presents a list of factors within the system

of the three levels of analysis (macro, meso and micro), i.e. with regard to the relationship between a cluster and society (macro level), relations within the cluster (meso level) and with regard to individual cluster members (micro level).

Table 1. Benefits of undertaking CSR activities by cluster

Analysis level	Description
Macro level	Developing a common brand image Increased negotiating power in the international arena Increased trust of the local community towards the cluster (licence to operate) Solving social problems Investors' trust in the cluster Business incubator (including eco-entrepreneurship)
Meso level	Commonly shared vision, values and goals of cluster Consensus regarding CSR within the cluster Joint initiatives which are financially beneficial for cluster members (SMEs) Research consortia to improve the product range
Micro level	Improving the range of products/services offered Greater awareness among entrepreneurs in terms of responsible business Values of company owners/managers, the role of steward

Source: own study based on: von Weltzien Hoivik, Shankar [2011], European Commission [2019], <http://www.klasterkotlarski.pl/kotly-klastra> [access: 11.02.2021].

At the **macro level**, one of the factors is the perception of social problems that require innovative solutions. For example, Italy's SCIFooD cluster was created to prevent food waste in the supply chain [Alberti, Belfanti, 2019]. The cluster initiator (the Whirlpool company) spared no funds to finance projects such as modern packaging and efforts to increase the durability and freshness of products. Another example is the Dutch water technology cluster WaterCampus Leeuwarden, whose members are responsible for providing solutions to reduce water consumption in industry and for producing clean energy [European Commission, 2019: 49].

Another factor is the idea of noticing the negative consequences of doing business in a given region. For example, in Finland, an environmental cluster was created as a result of recognising pollution problems caused by local production plants in the metallurgical, chemical and energy industries [Porter, 1998, p. 84].

EU regulations on air quality, for example, may encourage socially responsible activities in a cluster. The requirements laid down in EU directives encourage cluster entrepreneurs to seek innovative solutions and introduce product innovations. A case in point is a boiler cluster in the west-central Polish town of Pleszew, where entrepreneurs, in cooperation with a research centre, have developed some of the country's most environmentally-friendly heating boilers.

Similarly, the restructuring of two cement mills in Poland's south-central Świętokrzyskie province involved the introduction of technological innovations to improve environmental protection. One of these mills, based in the town

of Małogoszcz, was acquired by France's Lafarge, while the other, in Nowiny, was bought by Germany's Dyckerhoff. Both cement plants purchased filters for their chimneys, which ultimately led to better protection of the environment. Social activities involve promoting partnerships with commercial organisations to implement important ecological changes. Clusters promote important changes in the awareness of European societies, as exemplified by Poland's *Odlewnie Polskie* and the *ComCast Association*, which was established in the 1990s to bring together SMEs in the metallurgical and casting industries in the country's Świętokrzyskie, Podkarpacie and Łódzkie provinces. The region's metallurgical and casting traditions risked being wiped out because they were seen as an environmental threat in the EU. The adoption of a strategy seeking to eliminate the metallurgical industry from Poland's Świętokrzyskie province had led to increased unemployment and a decline in the SME sector in the region. It also resulted in the economic exclusion and decline of entire towns, such as Starachowice, Skarżysko, Stąporków and Końskie. The regional cluster took a series of protective measures, which included the signing of an agreement with the Kielce University of Technology to use its research potential in introducing major eco-friendly technological changes. Thanks to these changes, the region's metallurgical industry was saved, and the local population and research institutions benefited from the team-up.

In addition to EU directives, a platform for communication with ECCP clusters comes in handy whereby cluster members have recently been encouraged to implement Porter and Kramer's CSV concepts. In Poland, modern cluster management standards are promoted by the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP). These standards include compliance with CSR principles and dissemination of environmental activities [Kępką, Kacperek, 2017: 37–39].

One factor contributing to the implementation of the CSR concept is the possibility of achieving positive results. Educational activities by cluster companies about ecological products lead to an increased public awareness and attract new customers. With its educational activities on ecological wooden construction, the Side-Cluster in southwestern Poland contributes to shaping positive attitudes among potential customers [Cieślak, 2015]. Thus, the cluster gains the trust of local communities and legitimacy for its activities. Thanks to CSR activities, a cluster strengthens its image and brand. One example is the boiler cluster whose entrepreneurs can label their products with the TOPTEN Polska 2018 label.

Thanks to socially responsible activities, clusters can gain the trust of investors and increase their negotiating power abroad, which in turn makes it possible for them to maintain their growth [von Weltzien Høivik and Shankar, 2011: 186]. Being aware of such benefits should encourage cluster members.

At the **meso level**, one of the important factors is the active role of the coordinator, who should promote and initiate the implementation of modern cluster management standards [Kępką, Kacperek, 2017]. Another important

factor is the role of the organisers, who set up the cluster initiative and outline the framework for its operations. In Italy, such an example is the Whirpool corporation. It is one of the initiators of the SCIFooD cluster which provides financial and professional support, including access to the research community for innovative projects implemented by start-ups [Alberti, Belfanti, 2019].

The driving force behind the activities of cluster members is a shared vision and values [von Weltzien Høivik, Shankar, 2011]. In the industrial centre of Birmingham, an area that specialised in the production of jewellery and which today could be called a cluster, a code of values was established in the 19th century that obliged entrepreneurs to observe the principle of fair competition and provide high-quality products. These rules were established by two highly esteemed entrepreneurs, Jacob Jacobs and Charles Green, who were able to influence others in their role as members of the city council [Carnovali, 2004: 541]. Today great importance is given to the role of cluster leader, who can be either an individual or institution introducing innovations. Cluster leaders help create modern relations with high intellectual and social capital, integrate and create social ties that translate into the emergence of multi-level inter-organisational relations [compare: Bojar, Bis, 2006].

Economic reasons may also encourage the adoption of the CSR concept by cluster members. It is easier for small and medium-sized enterprises to bear the burden of investing in infrastructure (e.g. building a waste treatment plant) together than if they had to act and operate individually. As a cluster, small and medium-sized enterprises can access specialist knowledge by hiring CSR experts [Puppim de Oliveira, Jabbour, 2017: 145]. The same applies to the possibility of establishing research consortia. The joint effort of small and medium-sized enterprises and research centres leads to the development of innovative solutions and the creation of a range of product innovations, as in the case of the boiler cluster in Poland's Pleszew. It not only helped improve the products on offer, but also won a competition for best eco-friendly heating boilers in Poland. Joint initiatives allow for a synergy effect whereby individual members acting together create the key competences of the cluster [von Weltzien Hoivik, Shankar, 2011: 187].

Geographical proximity as well as a strong social and cultural environment are inherent features of clusters [Rabelotti, Carabelli, Hirsch, 2009]. Peer pressure, a sense of pride and a desire to be positively perceived by others may encourage individual cluster members to engage in socially responsible activities [compare: Porter, 1998].

Sometimes strong cluster members exert pressure on others, as in the case of global supply chains. Driven by a desire to avoid consumer boycotts and out of concern for their image, international companies impose Western business standards on local entrepreneurs in Asia, such as prohibiting the use of child labour. The fear of losing access to foreign markets prompts small and medium-sized enterprises to adopt CSR principles.

Peer pressure should be discussed not only in the context of global supply chains. It also takes place on the local market. Research on microenterprises in Poland's Świętokrzyskie province showed that local companies are willing to promote each other, share work, become subcontractors while being guided by mutual trust, knowledge about local suppliers, producers and competitors, and recommend each other to clients. Due to the tendency to support local companies, the idea of creating a common vision, cooperation, fair competition (elimination of losers and bunglers from their orders) is embraced by creating a new quality of management in accordance with the definition of cluster as a collection of entities that compete and support each other at the same time.

Another factor encouraging the use of the CSR concept within a cluster is cooperation with similar clusters combined with a desire to gain knowledge and experience in the field of CSR. One example is the ecological construction Side-Cluster, which drew patterns and experience from cooperation with other clusters abroad [Cieślak, 2015]. A higher stage in the development of clusters is their tendency to form clusters in order to achieve a synergistic effect and obtain added value in brands [cf. Predygier, 2020].

Factors at the **micro level** include an awareness of socially responsible business and appropriate action taken towards internal stakeholders, such as providing training to employees and offering fair remuneration for a job done. Often, such actions result from the beliefs and values of SME owners/managers, who are driven by internal motivation and use personal power to influence others. In the theory of servitude, such people can be described as stewards [Godos-Díez et al., 2011]. SMEs are often family businesses. Such companies are considered to be more socially responsible than non-family businesses due to the need to protect their image and reputation [Gibb Dyer, Whetten, 2006: 785].

Factors inhibiting the implementation of the CSR concept in a cluster: macro, meso and micro analysis

It is tacitly assumed that cluster members will be willing to implement CSR activities. Meanwhile, the attitudes of managers/owners towards the CSR concept may vary, as some undertake socially responsible activities guided by their own beliefs, motivation and values; others, on the other hand, do not see a relationship between CSR and their business activities [Carrigan et al., 2017]. Factors inhibiting the implementation of the CSR concept in a cluster are evaluated at the macro, meso and micro levels (Table 2).

Customer attitudes might be indicated as factors at the **macro level**. The reluctance of entrepreneurs to implement the CSR concept may result from their own observations regarding customer behaviours. In the case study focusing on the Birmingham jewellery cluster, entrepreneurs found that customers expressed only superficial interest in ethical consumerism [Carrigan et al.,

2017]. When buying diamonds, customers often ask questions about their origin. They do not want these to come from areas affected by armed conflicts, as depicted in the 2006 film *Blood Diamonds* starring Leonardo DiCaprio. However, with other gemstones, customers do not ask about their origin.

Table 2. Barriers and impediments in implementing the CSR concept in a cluster

Analysis level	Description
Macro level	Superficial ethical consumerism Priority given to economic factors No cooperation or insufficient cooperation of dominant stakeholders in solving social problems
Meso level	No vision or strategy for cluster development No involvement by cluster coordinator No understanding of the CSR concept by cluster members The problem of free-riding No trust between cluster members and no trust in the cluster idea itself
Micro level	Noticing no relationship between CSR and activity conducted Reluctance towards CSR

Source: own study based on Battaglia et al. [2006]

Table 3. Poles' attitude towards the alternative between environmental protection, on the one hand, and economic development and job creation, on the other

Alternatives	Research issue		
	1994–1998	2005–2009	2010–2014
Environmental protection	41%	37%	38%
Economic development	40%	48%	51%

Source: own study based on [World Values Survey].

The attitude of the public to environmental protection may be a factor that discourages cluster members from applying the CSR concept. In Poland, as shown by the World Values Survey data included in Table 3, people, faced with the choice between “environmental protection” and “economic development and job creation,” tend to choose the latter. This trend has been in place since the start of the previous decade. Meanwhile, in some other countries, residents put environmental protection first⁴. In addition, when searching for a job, potential candidates expect benefits for themselves, such as equal opportunities in terms of remuneration and promotions, and support in the education process, rather than pro-environmental activities. [Kupczyk, Wasilewski, Mackiewicz, 2018: 138; Zaleśna, 2018: 49]. This points to a lack of balance

⁴ According to the latest edition of the World Values Survey (2017-2020), the choice of environmental protection (Q111: environmental protection vs. economic development) is supported by 57.3% of respondents in Britain, 59.8% in Italy, 63.4% in Germany, and 61.2% in Finland [World Values Survey].

between economic, social and environmental goals in activities conducted by cluster members.

At the macro level, i.e. the cluster-society relationship, attention should be paid to the problem of overloaded clusters. An attractive cluster location attracts many businesses and individuals. As a result, the costs of real estate and labour (input markets) rise. Increased costs in the input markets, as well as in the product markets, negatively affect the economic performance of enterprises. They also have a negative impact on the life of the inhabitants of a given region, leading to higher costs of living [Rocha, 2004: 381]. Cluster location may be not only an advantage, but also a disadvantage [Lis, 2018]. Therefore, CSR activities undertaken within a given enterprise may not be sufficient. This is especially visible in Silicon Valley in the United States, where companies such as Google, Apple, Microsoft and Facebook have their headquarters. Google undertakes CSR activities in the field of environmental protection, drawing 100% of its energy from renewable sources. However, some of its other activities have caused social protests and deepened social inequalities, including the problem of homelessness. Google plans to build an office complex in San Jose for 20,000 employees. However, that does not entail increasing and widening the availability of housing. The corporation's plans sparked protests among residents in 2018, who were afraid of increased property prices and costs of living [Reese, 2021].

This proves that CSR activities exclusively focused on ecology are not enough if other activities undertaken by the company lead to increased social divisions. In order to solve social problems, the cooperation of enterprises and local authorities is required [cf. Olesiński, Predygiel, Leśniewski, Rzepka, 2009]. Meanwhile, no cooperation or insufficient cooperation of the dominant stakeholders [Mitchell, Agle, Wood, 1997] only deepens social inequalities. It also raises doubts as to whether it is possible to implement the CSR concept at the cluster level.

At the **meso level**, i.e. the relationship between cluster members, there are also a number of factors that hinder or impede the implementation of the CSR concept in the cluster. One of the reasons is a lack of vision and strategy for cluster development. Insufficient managerial skills of the coordinator are also an obstacle in some clusters, especially those that do not have an up-to-date database of members, projects and events organised by them [Buczyńska, Frączek, Kryjom, 2016: 61]. This may point to a low level of involvement among some cluster coordinators. Therefore, they are unlikely to provide activities encouraging cluster members to implement the CSR idea.

Another factor may be that some cluster members do not understand the CSR/CSV concept. In Austria, only a third of the collaborative networks can be described as clusters that create shared value [Collazzo Yelpo, Kubelka, 2019: 61]. In such a situation, the problem of free-riding may also appear. Not all cluster members are equally interested in sharing CSR investment costs [Lund Thomsen, Pillay, 2012] or adopting the EMAS (EcoManagement

and Audit Scheme) eco-management system [Battaglia et al., 2006]. A cluster's possibilities to apply a network approach to the CSR concept are thus limited.

No trust between members, as well as no trust with regard to a potential cluster initiative, can also hinder the implementation of the CSR concept based on a network approach. Not all entrepreneurs are convinced about the idea of clustering. The findings of Dyba [2017: 49] show that less than 1% of entrepreneurs in the furniture industry form a cluster. As a result, it is difficult to take the initiative of creating a sustainable supply chain.

Existing clusters in Poland exhibit weak commitment to cooperation in the value chain. A study conducted by PARP [2018: 25] shows that no more than two stages of the value chain are usually implemented. More often than not it concerns common distribution channels and marketing activities, and less frequently supply and production processes. Therefore, it is not possible to create an ecological and responsible supply chain in every cluster.

A similar problem exists with the jewellery cluster in Birmingham, UK [Carrigan et al., 2017]. The surveyed entrepreneurs admitted that it was not possible to verify the sources of the raw materials taken from their suppliers, relying only on trust in the supplier and the formula included in the invoice that the diamonds sold do not come from areas affected by armed conflicts [Carrigan et al., 2017: 690]. In that way, there is a temptation for some sorts of abuses by opportunistic contractors. The inability to trace the sources of raw materials and materials from suppliers hinders the implementation of the CSR concept by the cluster in a full manner.

At the **micro level**, barriers and difficulties in the implementation of the CSR concept are related to the owners/managers of small and medium-sized enterprises. Not all of them understand the concept of CSR. Some people do not see its connection with their business activities [Carrigan et al., 2017]. Various studies show that some managers are sceptical about the concept or have a limited view of CSR issues [Quazi, O'Brien, 2000: 33]. This is also visible in family companies [Déniz, Suárez, 2005: 27]. Moreover, only some cluster members strive to internationalise their activities, while others are not so proactive [Gancarczyk, Gancarczyk, 2018]. It can be assumed that they do not feel pressure from other members along the supply chain to raise and improve management standards within the cluster.

Co-existence of factors favouring and inhibiting the implementation of the CSR concept in a cluster. Conclusions and recommendations for further research

Individual factors in the context of the implementation of the CSR concept in a cluster were evaluated at the macro, meso and micro levels. However, it should be borne in mind that these factors – both favourable and unfavourable to the implementation of the CSR concept – co-exist.

The problem of free-riding, which is a factor at the meso level, results from the attitudes of owner/managers of enterprises who are reluctant to embrace the idea of CSR (a micro factor). Observations by entrepreneurs show that clients do not show an interest in the company's socially responsible activities, and if even they do, this interest is superficial (a macro factor) [Carrigan et al., 2017]. Such experiences may strengthen the conviction of entrepreneurs that the idea of CSR is not related to business activities. Therefore, it will be difficult to mobilise them and encourage the CSR concept based on a network approach in the cluster.

In order to implement the CSR concept in a cluster, it is necessary to involve the cluster coordinator and develop a consensus on this issue (meso factors). The benefits of implementing modern cluster management standards, such as building the brand of the cluster and gaining investor confidence (macro factors), are encouraging. These arguments will be convincing for those cluster members who take account of the well-being of stakeholders on their own (a micro factor), both internal (employees) and external, i.e. customers, suppliers, local community, etc.

In conclusion, the problem of free-riding may appear in clusters that are just implementing the CSR concept. Some cluster members will be favourable to the idea of CSR and ready to make investments in this direction by joint efforts, while others will be sceptical. This problem requires research [von Weltzien Høivik, Shankar, 2011] to provide more insight into the motives of free riders' behaviour and methods of dealing with this problem.

The concept of CSR in a cluster at the macro level, i.e. the cluster-society relationship, requires further elaboration. This problem is especially visible in the case of congested and overloaded clusters, the location of which becomes a disadvantage [Lis, 2018]. In Silicon Valley in the US state of California, the high cost of living means that some people are just "one salary away from being homeless" [Kołodziej, 2017]. Without well thought-out cooperation of the dominant stakeholders within the cluster, the problem of social inequalities may deepen. Therefore, research is needed to counteract growing social inequalities.

This paper presents a list of factors that favour and disfavour the implementation of the CSR concept in clusters, based on a literature review and the desk research method. The study provides many examples of clusters, including those from different eras. An exploratory study by Carrigan *et al.* [2017] focusing on a jewellery cluster shows that some factors both favour and hinder the CSR implementation at the same time. Future research should use the multiple case study method to examine the intertwining of these factors and determine how clusters deal with them at the macro, meso and micro levels.

Conclusions

In the literature, researchers have been concerned with the concept of CSR in relation to clusters for a relatively short period of time. The concept of CSR takes account of the expectations of society towards companies in economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic terms. CSR is also responsible for the behaviour of entities cooperating with the company, including in the supply chain. Therefore, the concept of CSR can be examined in relation to cluster members with vertical and horizontal relations.

The aim of this article was to identify factors favourable and unfavourable for the implementation of the CSR concept by a cluster. The study was based on three levels of analysis: (1) macro, i.e. with regard to the cluster-society relationship, (2) meso, i.e. with regard to the relationship between cluster members, and (3) micro, i.e. with regard to individual cluster members, mainly small and medium-sized enterprises.

Factors contributing to the implementation of the CSR concept in a cluster include building the cluster brand, gaining investors' trust, and increasing the negotiating power of the cluster abroad. On the other hand, factors that do not favour the implementation of the CSR concept include the scepticism of owners/managers and unwillingness to cooperate in joint efforts and invest in CSR.

The analysed factors co-exist with one another, which may limit the implementation of the CSR concept by a cluster. The study shows that an inherent problem in the context of the implementation of the CSR concept by a cluster is "free-riding" whereby some cluster members, guided by their own values, are positive about this concept, while others do not show an understanding for the idea or – based on their own experiences and observations – doubt whether it makes sense. The problem of free-riding requires further investigation in order to indicate practical implications for cluster coordinators.

Another research problem involves the rules of cooperation for the dominant stakeholders. The concept of CSR at the macro level, i.e. the cluster-society relationship, requires further elaboration. It is necessary to provide recommendations in terms of cooperation between dominant stakeholders so as not to deepen, but to eliminate, social differences. This especially applies to clusters in which the problem of overload is in evidence.

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