

CORPORATE ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS AND PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOUR AS COMPETITIVENESS FACTORS IN SERBIA: CURRENT STATE OF DEVELOPMENT AND KEY DRIVERS

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Abstract

Environmental awareness was proven to be a significant competitiveness factor among consumers with high environmental awareness levels. Since the latest scientific research has revealed an enviably high environmental awareness level among consumers on the Serbian market, the purpose of this empirical research paper is to provide insight into the current environmental awareness level and pro-environmental behaviour in business organisations in Serbia. Environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour are explored both generally and from the standpoint of the impact of specific managerial and organisational attributes. The sample includes 107 managers interviewed using the Computer Assisted Web Interview technique. Results show a slightly above average corporate environmental awareness level and pro-environmental behaviour in the Serbian business world, with lower rankings received in comparison with Serbian consumers. Additionally, a corporate environmental awareness-behaviour gap was detected, demonstrating that barriers are more dominant than motivators for pro-environmental behaviour in the Serbian business world. The business organisation size appears as the only differing factor influencing environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour in Serbia, showing that larger organisations face larger environmental violations and problems, and consequently develop a higher level of environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour. The results indicate that the Serbian government, as one of the key promoters of corporate environmental responsibility, shares the same environmental awareness level and pro-environmental behaviour as Serbian business organisations, leaving consumers with the task of attempting to influence the Serbian government and Serbian corporations in order to motivate them to start behaving in a more environmentally responsible manner. This research implies that environmental awareness is not sufficiently present in managers' minds and Serbian businesses, and, consequently, corporate pro-environmental behaviour itself, together with the present corporate environmental awareness-behaviour gap, cannot reach higher levels. This means that the opportunities to gain a significant competitive advantage on

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the Serbian market based on environmentally conscious business activities are being missed.

Key words: environmental awareness, pro-environmental behaviour, corporate environmental responsibility, corporate competitiveness, Republic of Serbia

КОРПОРАТИВНА ЕКОЛОШКА СВЕСТ И ПРОЕКОЛОШКО ПОНАШАЊЕ КАО ФАКТОРИ КОНКУРЕНТНОСТИ У СРБИЈИ: ТЕКУЋЕ СТАЊЕ РАЗВОЈА И КЉУЧНИ НОСИОЦИ

Апстракт

Доказано је да је еколошка свест значајан фактор конкурентности међу потрошачима са високим нивоом еколошке свести. Пошто су најновија научна истраживања показала завидно висок ниво еколошке свести потрошача на тржишту Србије, сврха овог емпиријског истраживачког рада је да пружи увид у актуелни ниво еколошке свести и проеколошког понашања у привредним друштвима у Србији. Еколошка свест и проеколошко понашање истражују се са општег аспекта и са аспекта утицаја специфичних менаџерских и организационих атрибута. Укупно 107 менаџера је испитано техником компјутерски потпомогнутог веб интервјуа. Резултати истраживања показују нешто изнад просечног нивоа корпоративне еколошке свести и проеколошког понашања у пословном свету у Србији, са нижим рангом у поређењу са српским потрошачима. Такође, уочен је јаз између корпоративне еколошке свести и понашања, што показује да баријере више доминирају у пословном свету у Србији него мотиватори за проеколошко понашање. Као једини диферентни фактор који утиче на еколошку свест и проеколошко понашање у Србији појављује се величина пословне организације, при чему се веће организације суочавају са озбиљнијим преступима и проблемима у вези са животном средином и, последично, развијају виши ниво еколошке свести и проеколошког понашања. Резултати истраживања показују да Влада Србије, као један од кључних промотера корпоративне еколошке одговорности, дели исти ниво еколошке свести и про-еколошког понашања са пословним организацијама у Србији, што потрошачима оставља задатак да покушају да утичу на Владу Србије и српске корпорације како би их мотивисали да почну да се понашају на еколошки одговорнији начин. Истраживачка импликација је да еколошка свест није довољно присутна у пословном животу Србије и у свести менаџера, па самим тим и само корпоративно проеколошко понашање, заједно са постојећим јазом између корпоративне еколошке свести и проеколошког понашања, не може достићи виши ниво, чиме се пропуштају прилике да се на основу еколошки освешћеног пословања стекне значајна конкурентска предност на тржишту Србије.

Кључне речи: еколошка свест, проеколошко понашање, корпоративна еколошка одговорност, корпоративна конкурентност, Република Србија

INTRODUCTION

Since its inception in the late 1960s (Roth, 1992), the concept of environmental awareness has been steadily rising, with a sharp increase in interest in the concept near the end of the 20th and at the beginning of the 21st century (Dixon, Mousa & Woodhead, 2005). Nowadays, environmental awareness appears as a universal European value, influencing and directing European business practices, strategies, and policies (Mihajlović, Voza, Milošević & Durkalić, 2016). Environmental awareness, which reflects people's concern for and knowledge of the impacts of their behaviours on the environment, is usually recognised as the first important step in preparing people to solve environmental problems (Ramsey, Hungerford & Volk, 1992), and as a precondition for displaying pro-environmental behaviour. Pro-environmental behaviour is generally used as a synonym for environmentally friendly behaviour, but is more explicitly defined as behaviour that consciously seeks to minimise and eliminate the negative impact of people's actions on the natural and built world, or even benefit from them (Kirk, 2010; Steg & Vlek, 2009; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Environmental behaviours differ by company (Yusof, Abidin, Zailani, Govindan, & Iranmanesh, 2016), and are influenced by government rules (Zhao, Zhao, Zeng, & Zhang, 2015), local residents (Davari & Strutton, 2014), and market competition (Verma & Duggal, 2015). Managerial and organisational features also affect companies' environmental behaviours (Fürst & Oberhofer, 2012; Montalvo, 2008). Moreover, numerous companies are still reluctant to make efforts beyond legal environmental requirements (Ormazabal & Puga-Leal, 2016), or disregard natural environment completely (Epstein & Wisner, 2001), missing the opportunity to increase their competitiveness and harvest better economic-financial results (Zeng, Qin & Zeng, 2019; Li, Cao, Zhang, Chen, Ren & Zhao, 2017).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the importance of environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour as competitiveness factors in the corporate world in the Republic of Serbia. In that sense, the main objectives of the study are: (1) to measure the current levels of managers' environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour in order to evaluate its potential exploitation as a corporate competitiveness factor; (2) to examine the differences in levels of environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour in relation to specific managerial and organisational attributes in order to profile Serbian managers and businesses in this field; and, accordingly, (3) to determine key drivers of environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour in the Republic of Serbia to foster the design of proper environmental policies, strategies and practices.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

As a country that has over the decades undergone numerous socio-political crises, Serbia has paid very little attention to the protection of the natural environment and the development of environmental awareness, as well as to the stimulation of pro-environmental behaviour among its citizens. After the year 2000, the state entered the processes of democratisation, Europeanisation, strengthening of civil society and acceleration of transition, but in the field of environmental protection there is an obvious imbalance between the normative framework and practice (Simeunović-Bajić, Majdarević & Manić, 2013), with elements that clearly indicate that there is a serious crisis of environmental rights and the environment in general (Arsić, Matijašević & Berber, 2011). Despite the fact that environmental and quality of life issues are finally gaining the attention that they had long ago deserved in the Republic of Serbia (Jovanović & Aćimović, 2014), despite the fact that environmental protection and improvement is one of the five priority areas defined by the National Strategy for Sustainable Development of the Republic of Serbia (Milanović & Kovačević, 2015), and despite the fact that a large number of laws have been harmonised with European legislation, which has made the greatest progress in this area (Simeunović-Bajić et al., 2013), the fact of the matter remains that this area is not yet sufficiently explored and applied in both theoretical and practical terms. The significant lag in practice follows a poor historical base and insufficient research. In domestic academic circles, environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour have not been examined or elaborated in any particular detail. Literature in this domain is scarce, and it comes down to only a few articles that deal with this topic in a non-comprehensive way. Currently, a total of 148 electronically available scientific and professional papers citing 'environmental awareness' as a key word have been published in Serbia, but only 12 of them deal with environmental awareness as their main topic, and only 5 of them try to measure the level of environmental awareness among the Serbian population. Regarding the business world of Serbia, there is only one published study related to measuring corporate environmental awareness. It includes only respondents from one organisation, which only hints at the level of environmental awareness in Serbian companies. The study found the environmental awareness of "AXA Insurance" employees to be at a low level due to the poor preparedness of Serbian companies to meet the environmental requirements and standards applicable in developed countries (Kitić, Kostić-Stanković, Cvijović & Lečić-Cvetković, 2015).

The latest research implemented on a representative sample of respondents demonstrates that environmental awareness among Serbian consumers is developed at an enviably high level (Milić, 2020). Environmental awareness is proven to be a significant factor of competitiveness among consumers with high levels of environmental awareness

(Chuang & Huang, 2018; Iraldo, Testa, Lanzini & Battaglia, 2017; Baptista, Madureira & Guevara, 2016; Stevens, 1998). The question remains of whether environmental awareness is adequately exploited in Serbian business organisations.

METHODS

Research Participants

The survey was conducted on a sample of 107 respondents. The participants of the study were managers of business organisations operating on the territory of the Republic of Serbia. Testing was conducted using quantitative research techniques, via the Internet (Computer Assisted Web Interview - CAWI), with consent from each subject who participated in the study. Publicly available databases of business organisations, public associations, and media in Serbia were used as a sample frame. The research is based on examining the perceptions and attitudes of managers of business organisations operating in the Republic of Serbia in relation to environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour, and their impact on business decisions. In the second step, the research refers to the examination of the conditionality of the degree of influence and the importance of environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour as regards specific respondents' managerial and organisational features.

Research Instrument

For the purpose of this study, a questionnaire was used. The questionnaire was established on the basis of reviewed scientific literature and the recommendations of Mihailović (2012), Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009), Babbie and Mouton (2007), Welman, and Kruger (2005), Boyce (2003), and Dillman (2000). It is, of course, in compliance with the special needs of this research. The questionnaire contains general questions pertaining to the demographic characteristics of the respondents, and data about the organisation, followed by questions pertaining to environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour. The results of Cronbach's alpha test as a measure of the questionnaire's reliability indicate the consistent reliability of the results obtained ($\alpha > 0.7$) (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

Data Analysis

Items of the questionnaire were analysed using the statistical package SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences - SPSS) v23. The data analysis in this study consisted of descriptive statistics. Univariate analysis was used through the individual ranking statistics. The non-parametric

Kruskal-Wallis test was used to test the significance of differences. Results with the value $p < 0.05$ were declared significant.

RESULTS

The evaluation of The Importance of Environmental Awareness and Pro-environmental Behaviour for Managers in the Republic of Serbia

In order to evaluate the importance of environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour for managers in the Republic of Serbia, univariate analysis containing individual ranking statistics was used. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Statistical summary of univariate analysis of the importance of environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour for managers in the Republic of Serbia

Statement	Mean (μ)	Std. Dev.
1. To what extent is environmental awareness embedded in your business decision making?	4.84	1.574
2. Our organisation focuses on protecting the natural environment as a stakeholder.	4.80	1.724
3. To what extent is the organisation you work for involved in environmental activities?	4.56	1.956
4. To what extent are the activities of the organisation in which you work proactive in relation to environmental protection?	4.21	1.831
5. To what extent is there a record of violations of environmental principles in your organisation?	3.16	1.850

The results show that environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour are recognised as important factors of competitiveness in Serbian companies, since they all carry values that are above average ($\mu > 4.00$), ranging from 4.21 to 4.80 for various degrees of pro-environmental behaviour, and 4.84 for the level of significance of environmental awareness in business decision making. There is a slight environmental awareness-behaviour gap, in favour of environmental awareness. In addition to this, the number of business organisations facing ample records of environmental violations is below average ($\mu < 4.00$).

The Evaluation of the Impact of Managerial and Organisational Features on the Importance of Environmental Awareness and Pro-environmental Behaviour for Managers in the Republic of Serbia

In order to determine the drivers of environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour, as well as the profile of the business organ-

isations in which environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour are of special importance, we investigated how the perception of environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour are influenced by certain managerial and organisational characteristics, such as: gender, age, education, type of inhabitancy, economy sector, experience in current managerial position, experience in current organisation, business organisation function, management level, business organisation size, and business organisation ownership structure. The non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was used to examine the significance of differences. Results with the value $p < 0.05$ were declared significant.

Gender. In relation to the importance of environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour for managers of business organisations operating in the Republic of Serbia, the existence of statistically significant differences between males and females was examined. No statistically significant differences were found ($p > 0.05$) (Table 2).

Table 2. Impact of Gender on environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour

Var.	Environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour			p
	Mean Rank			
	Male	Female		
Statement 1	69.09	78.85		0.161
Statement 2	72.27	79.05		0.335
Statement 3	73.49	78.88		0.447
Statement 4	74.49	77.20		0.702
Statement 5	75.01	77.67		0.707

Age. In relation to the importance of environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour for managers of business organisations operating in the Republic of Serbia, the existence of statistically significant differences between respondents from six different age groups was examined. No statistically significant differences were found ($p > 0.05$) (Table 3).

Table 3. Impact of Age on environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour

Var.	Environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour						p
	Mean Rank						
	< 25	26 - 35	36 - 45	46 - 55	56 - 65	> 65	
Statement 1	45.00	62.71	77.11	85.63	59.23	105.75	0.110
Statement 2	63.25	68.38	78.31	80.79	71.42	106.75	0.671
Statement 3	37.50	67.67	80.77	81.59	71.83	71.00	0.593
Statement 4	44.00	70.23	81.23	77.09	67.73	74.50	0.771
Statement 5	103.50	69.55	74.34	77.19	99.09	113.50	0.268

Education. In relation to the importance of environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour for managers in the Republic of Serbia, the existence of statistically significant differences between respondents with various degrees of education was examined. No statistically significant differences were found ($p>0.05$) (Table 4).

Table 4. Impact of Education on environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour

Var.	Environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour							p
	Mean Rank							
	Elementary education	High School	College	BSc	MSc	Magister	PhD	
Statement 1	-	68.10	66.54	77.12	73.85	91.88	76.25	0.817
Statement 2	-	62.97	67.72	81.14	77.47	74.00	63.25	0.582
Statement 3	-	57.60	60.59	82.03	88.12	86.60	71.25	0.095
Statement 4	-	54.27	65.13	80.48	91.00	80.40	57.00	0.113
Statement 5	-	83.79	60.39	79.06	86.03	68.83	71.25	0.356

Type of inhabitancy. In relation to the importance of environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour for managers in the Republic of Serbia, the existence of statistically significant differences between respondents coming from urban and rural areas was examined. No statistically significant differences were found ($p>0.05$) (Table 5).

Table 5. Impact of Type of inhabitancy on environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour

Var.	Environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour		p
	Mean Rank		
	Urban	Rural	
Statement 1	75.70	57.90	0.197
Statement 2	77.15	61.36	0.241
Statement 3	78.10	53.75	0.086
Statement 4	76.32	71.55	0.736
Statement 5	77.15	68.23	0.511

Experience in current managerial position. In relation to the importance of environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour for managers in the Republic of Serbia, the existence of statistically significant differences between respondents with different levels of experience in their current managerial position was examined. No statistically significant differences were found ($p>0.05$) (Table 6).

Table 6. Impact of Experience on current managerial position on environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour

Var.	Environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour						p
	Mean Rank						
	< 1	1 - 4	5 - 9	10 - 19	20 - 29	> 30	
Statement 1	72.78	62.47	77.91	79.94	78.83	85.38	0.500
Statement 2	77.17	70.20	77.46	77.17	79.20	84.40	0.960
Statement 3	77.11	73.58	80.33	72.68	83.59	60.25	0.873
Statement 4	73.56	67.73	80.58	80.58	77.50	53.88	0.636
Statement 5	65.28	70.43	77.57	78.60	89.41	76.25	0.718

Experience in current organisation. In relation to the importance of environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour for managers in the Republic of Serbia, the existence of statistically significant differences between respondents with different levels of experience in the current organisation was examined. No statistically significant differences were found ($p > 0.05$) (Table 7).

Table 7. Impact of Experience in current organisation on environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour

Var.	Environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour						p
	Mean Rank						
	< 1	1 - 4	5 - 9	10 - 19	20 - 29	> 30	
Statement 1	61.75	65.74	78.88	76.47	80.89	67.50	0.595
Statement 2	68.11	69.61	81.95	79.07	66.44	84.38	0.652
Statement 3	52.22	70.17	82.65	79.50	76.36	75.00	0.436
Statement 4	59.56	66.97	84.33	82.13	70.47	61.67	0.288
Statement 5	59.00	71.03	82.44	76.44	73.14	96.67	0.582

Business organisation function. In relation to the importance of environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour for managers in the Republic of Serbia, the existence of statistically significant differences between respondents coming from different business organisation functions was examined. No statistically significant differences were found ($p > 0.05$) (Table 8).

Table 8. Impact of Business organisation function on environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour

Var.	Environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour									p
	Mean Rank									
	Sales	HR	Marketing	Manufacturing	Administration	R&D	IT	Logistics	Finance	
Statement 1	55.29	73.00	43.84	72.13	72.72	74.70	50.60	76.75	62.05	0.301
Statement 2	64.40	74.41	53.97	63.75	82.00	71.80	64.83	66.83	53.43	0.493
Statement 3	59.87	73.95	51.37	56.90	76.72	72.70	69.67	56.00	62.16	0.720
Statement 4	62.40	76.20	45.40	59.75	78.63	80.40	59.83	51.00	59.27	0.358
Statement 5	57.46	79.71	73.79	63.63	67.09	53.30	32.83	65.50	59.57	0.393

Management level. In relation to the importance of environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour for managers in the Republic of Serbia, the existence of statistically significant differences between respondents from different management levels was examined. No statistically significant differences were found ($p > 0.05$) (Table 9).

Table 9. Impact of Management level on environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour

Var.	Environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour				p
	Mean Rank				
	TML	MML	FML	NML	
Statement 1	63.37	67.07	74.63	66.27	0.782
Statement 2	65.28	64.76	71.33	71.97	0.807
Statement 3	58.33	69.72	82.67	72.51	0.132
Statement 4	61.15	65.92	88.83	68.49	0.112
Statement 5	67.37	73.16	73.74	62.68	0.638

Business organisation size. In relation to the importance of environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour for managers of business organisations operating in the Republic of Serbia, we examined the existence of statistically significant differences between respondents coming from business organisations of three different sizes in terms of the number of employees: (1) up to 100 employees, (2) between 100 and 500 employees, and (3) more than 500 employees. The results reveal that respondents working in smaller business organisations found embedding environmental awareness in business decision making less significant than the respondents working in larger business organisations, while middle-sized business organisations found this issue to be the most significant (59.37 vs. 87.80 vs. 85.22; $p < 0.000$, Kruskal-Wallis test). Additionally, according to the research results, respondents working in smaller business organisations found the focus on protecting the natural environment as a stakeholder to be less significant than the respondents working in middle-sized and larger business organisations (61.81 vs. 85.62 vs. 90.32; $p < 0.001$, Kruskal-Wallis test). Furthermore, research findings suggest that respondents working in smaller business organisations attached less importance to actual environmental involvement, as compared to middle-sized and larger business organisations (58.77 vs. 90.29 vs. 92.05; $p < 0.000$, Kruskal-Wallis test). Similarly, respondents working in smaller business organisations attached less importance to proactive environmental behaviour (59.60 vs. 87.44 vs. 92.84; $p < 0.000$, Kruskal-Wallis test). Regarding the record of violations of environmental principles in business organisations in the Republic of Serbia, research results conclude that smaller business organisations break less environmental principles as compared to middle-sized and larger business organisations (64.67 vs. 78.08 vs. 101.37; $p < 0.001$, Kruskal-Wallis test) (Table 10).

Table 10. Impact of Business organisation size on environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour

Var.	Environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour			p
	Mean Rank			
	< 100	100 - 499	500 - 999	
Statement 1	59.37	87.80	85.22	0.000
Statement 2	61.81	85.62	90.32	0.001
Statement 3	58.77	90.29	92.05	0.000
Statement 4	59.60	87.44	92.84	0.000
Statement 5	64.67	78.08	101.37	0.001

Economy sector. In relation to the importance of environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour for managers in the Republic of Serbia, the existence of statistically significant differences between respondents from different economy sectors was examined. No statistically significant differences were found ($p > 0.05$) (Table 11).

Table 11. Impact of Economy sector on environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour

Var.	Environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour			p
	Mean Rank			
	Manufacturing organization	Commercial organization	Service organization	
Statement 1	71.35	62.86	62.79	0.433
Statement 2	71.89	54.65	68.06	0.182
Statement 3	72.68	58.26	66.91	0.303
Statement 4	70.74	56.30	68.78	0.296
Statement 5	70.59	76.61	63.87	0.388

Business organisation ownership structure. In relation to the importance of environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour for managers of business organisations operating in the Republic of Serbia, we examined the existence of statistically significant differences between respondents coming from government-owned, public, and private-owned organisations. No statistically significant differences were found ($p > 0.05$) (Table 12).

Table 12. Impact of Business organisation ownership structure on environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour

Var.	Environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour			p
	Mean Rank			
	Government organisation	Public organisation	Private organisation	
Statement 1	70.42	67.11	67.91	0.971
Statement 2	74.73	79.78	66.37	0.327
Statement 3	72.55	82.16	66.53	0.231
Statement 4	75.73	82.27	65.48	0.159
Statement 5	69.92	72.11	69.57	0.963

DISCUSSION

Environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour in Serbian companies are slightly above average, confirming the findings of Milanović and Kovačević (2015), and Jovanović and Aćimović (2014) which state that environment and environmental issues are gaining importance in Serbia. However, compared to the Serbian consumers' environmental awareness value of 6.32, determined in previous research conducted by Milić (2020) on a representative sample, the results of this study suggest that business organisations have room to put in more effort in this field of business in order to gain a long-term sustainable competitive advantage and win Serbian consumers. On the positive side, this study's results are contrary to the research results previously obtained by Kitić et al. (2015). This can be due to the larger sample of organisations included in this research, which makes this study more relevant, and/or due to the time elapsed between the two studies, which allowed for changes to occur in corporate environmental awareness, as indicated by Dixon et al. (2005).

According to our research results, there does not seem to be a general understanding that an organisation in Serbia should be run with environmental awareness in mind. This demonstrates that there is a significant number of companies which have not yet embraced and embedded environmental awareness in their business decision making, which is in opposition to the results of Mihajlović et al. (2016).

Regarding the organisational focus on protecting the natural environment as a stakeholder, which represents the first step towards environmentally responsible corporate behaviour, this research analysis demonstrates that the natural environment is still neglected by many companies. This confirms the findings of a study conducted by Epstein and Wisner (2001). Corporate attention on natural environment in the form of corporate environmental responsibility is still in a transitional stage and no adequate natural environment focus currently exists.

Research analysis demonstrates that actual pro-environmental behaviour lags behind environmental awareness in the business world in the Republic of Serbia, pointing towards the presence of potential barriers to pro-environmental behaviour. As a result, the least number of business organisations operating in the Republic of Serbia is involved in proactive environmental protection activities, as demonstration of the highest level of environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour. These results are in line with Ormazabal and Puga-Leal (2016), and Simeunović-Bajić et al. (2013).

Finally, regarding the extent of the organisations' violations of environmental principles, the results of our research reveal that some Serbian organisations, in a display of behaviour opposite to pro-environmental behaviour, hold the record for violations of environmental principles.

This analysis demonstrates that negative environmental behaviour is present in some business organisations in the Republic of Serbia, which supports the claims of Arsić et al. (2011).

Regarding the influence of managerial and organisational features, research results in Serbia detected that only Business organisation size makes a difference, which is partially in line with previous research conducted by Fürst and Oberhofer (2012), and Montalvo (2008), who detected ownership as an influential feature as well. On the other hand, this is not in line with Casalo and Escario (2018), who indicated that demographic factors, such as gender, age, and education appear as predictors of environmental awareness and behaviour. The reason for this may be cultural differences, or the level of the country's development in various fields, such as technology, law, economy, politics, society, etc. This notion was previously partially confirmed by Mikula, Raczkowska and Utzig (2021), Çarkoğlu and Kentmen-Çin (2015), and Montalvo (2008). Environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour in Serbia are, according to the results of this research, especially appreciated by larger organisations due to the fact that the larger a business organisation is, the more serious the environmental issues it has, as previously indicated by Hill, Kelley, Agle, Hitt & Hoskisson (1992). Consequently, such organisations have to keep developing and embedding environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour into everyday business activities. Furthermore, our research results confirm that, wishing to increase their competitiveness with the aim of growing and prospering, middle-sized businesses place more value on environmental awareness as compared to large organisations, but are behind large organisations in the domain of pro-environmental behaviour, probably due to the lack of capital to finance it to the extent large organisations do. This was previously determined by Montalvo (2008). The lack of influence other investigated managerial and organisational characteristics have on this issue indicates that environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour in the Serbian business world are determined and polished by the corporate and State environmental policies.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATION

These research results have several important implications for managers and policy makers. First, lagging behind Serbian consumers, Serbian managers should focus more on developing and implementing environmentally based business activities, as this is an unexploited source of a sustainable competitive advantage on the domestic market. Environmental training programmes could be of use in this stage, in order to increase the necessary environmental knowledge. Second, the uncovered environmental awareness-behaviour gap points towards the necessity of

determining and eliminating the existing barriers to environmentally conscious business behaviour in the Republic of Serbia. Third, since environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour in the Serbian business world are determined and polished by the corporate and State environmental policies, there exists a necessity to create an environmental campaign on the state level, with the goal of enabling an environmentally conscious operation of businesses in the Republic of Serbia. Drawing on the experiences of other countries, this can be done by implementing 'hard' and 'soft' policies initiated by the government or by the market, depending on the ratio and degree of compulsion. Hard policies are generally compulsory, direct regulations, such as the adoption of an integrated reporting system where companies also include environmental elements in their corporate reports instead of focusing solely on the financial, or economic, elements (Lynch, 2010; Frost & Seamer, 2002; Cormier & Gordon, 2001). Soft policies use economic incentives to motivate voluntary pro-environmental behaviour change. Government donations, and the results of this and similar research are examples of such policies. But, for this to be possible, it is necessary for the government and/or market to have a higher level of environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour as compared to the rest of the business world. This brings us to the fourth and last implication of this research. Since the Government shares the same level of environmental consciousness as business organisations, the role and impact of the Government in Serbia are not significant. Having this situation in mind, it is up to consumers to make a stronger impact on both the Serbian Government and Serbian corporations, so as to motivate them start behaving in a more environmentally responsible manner.

CONCLUSION

This empirical research paper gives an overview of corporate environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour in the Republic of Serbia. The issues of corporate environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour were considered generally from the point of view of managers. Additionally, these issues were examined from the standpoint of the influence of specific managerial and organisational features. The obtained results show that corporate environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour have, in the business world of Serbia, not reached the level of importance they have for Serbian consumers. Also, a slight corporate environmental awareness-behaviour gap was detected, in favour of environmental awareness. This gap demonstrates the presence of some barriers which are more dominant than motivators in corporate environmental strategy development and deployment. Serbian business organisations have a developed environmental awareness, a de-

veloped focus on protecting the natural environment as a stakeholder, and are actively involved in environmental activities, yet not in a sufficiently proactive manner. On the positive side, a low rate of violations of environmental principles in Serbian business organisations was detected. Some business organisations, however, still do not follow environmental principles in their business dealings. Corporate environmental responsibility is, so far and especially in the domain of pro-environmental behaviour, especially appreciated by large organisations, followed by middle-sized organisations, and, finally, small organisations. On the other hand, environmental awareness is the most developed in middle-sized organisations, followed by large organisations and, finally, small organisations. There is no difference in the level of corporate environmental responsibility between the Government and the business world.

Based on these research results, several recommendations can be made: (1) Serbian managers should focus more on developing and implementing environmentally based business activities; (2) it is necessary to reveal the key barriers, motivators, and actors related to corporate environmental responsibility; (3) it would be preferable to introduce new legal instruments in the field of environmental protection; and (4) as they are a key driver of corporate environmental responsibility, consumers should strive to have a stronger impact on both the Serbian Government and Serbian corporations.

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КОРПОРАТИВНА ЕКОЛОШКА СВЕСТ И ПРОЕКОЛОШКО ПОНАШАЊЕ КАО ФАКТОРИ КОНКУРЕНТНОСТИ У СРБИЈИ: ТЕКУЋЕ СТАЊЕ РАЗВОЈА И КЉУЧНИ НОСИОЦИ

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Резиме

Овај емпиријски истраживачки рад даје преглед еколошке свести и проеколошког понашања као фактора конкурентности предузећа са аспекта менаџера који живе и раде у Републици Србији. Питање еколошке свести и проеколошког понашања разматрано је, осим са општег становишта менаџера, и са становишта утицаја специфичних менаџерских и организационих карактеристика испитаника, као што су пол, старост, образовање, тип насеља, сектор привреде, искуство на тренутној руководећој позицији, искуство у тренутној организацији, функција пословне организације, ниво управљања, величина пословне организације и власничка структура пословне организације.

Учесници у истраживању били су руководиоци привредних друштава која послују на територији Републике Србије. Истраживање је спроведено на узорку од 107 испитаника. Тестирање менаџера пословних организација спроведено је коришћењем квантитативних истраживачких техника путем Интернета, уз претходно добијену сагласност сваког учесника у истраживању.

Добијени резултати показују да корпоративна еколошка свест и проеколошко понашање у пословном свету Републике Србије нису достигли ниво еколошке свести српских потрошача иако су изнад просечних вредности. Ово има практичне импликације за српске менаџере, и указује на то да би менаџери требало да се фокусирају на развој и имплементацију пословних активности заснованих на принципу еколошке свести, будући да је она неискоришћени извор одрживе конкурентске предности на домаћем тржишту. Свест о животној средини и проеколошко понашање су до сада посебно цењене у већим организацијама, због чињенице да се веће пословне организације суочавају са озбиљнијим еколошким питањима, па самим тим морају да унапређују еколошку свест и проеколошко понашање у свакодневним пословним активностима. Остале истраживане управљачке и организационе карактеристике немају утицаја на ово питање.

Откривени јаз између еколошке свести и понашања сведочи о неопходности утврђивања и елиминисања баријера еколошки свесном пословном понашању у Републици Србији.

Тржиште и Влада, са својим политикама и законским обавезама, се појављују као важни покретачи промоције корпоративне еколошке одговорности. За сада је у Србији највећи промотер еколошки одговорног пословања тржиште, пошто држава и пословне организације имају исти ниво еколошке свести, па стога улога и утицај Владе у Србији нису значајни. Имајући на уму ову ситуацију, остаје на потрошачима да снажније утичу и на Владу Србије и на компаније како би их мотивисали да се понашају на еколошки одговорнији начин. Истраживачка импликација је да еколошка свест није довољно присутна у пословном животу Србије и у свести менаџера, па самим тим и само корпоративно проеколошко понашање, заједно са постојећим јазом између корпоративне еколошке свести и проеколошког понашања, не може достићи виши ниво. Овим се пропуштају прилике да се на основу еколошки освешћеног пословања стекне значајна конкурентска предност на тржишту Србије, а самим тим и да се остваре бољи резултати пословања.