

*Gábor L. Mélypataki*  
*University of Miskolc*  
*Faculty of Law*  
*jogmega@uni-miskolc.hu*  
*ORCID ID: 0000-0002-0359-6538*

## LINKING ECOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY – SOCIAL PLASTIC AS A POSSIBLE SOLUTION?

**Abstract:** *Sustainable economy is a complex issue that requires active or even proactive behaviour from all actors. The state must use its own instruments to coordinate market processes, fight against socio-political problems and try to enforce certain human rights in parallel. In this way, it is natural that the state would also like to be relieved of its burdens of liability. The question is to what extent it can do so. Especially on such issues as environment and the fight against poverty? To what extent can CSR (corporate social responsibility) activities by businesses or PSR (public social responsibility) activities by public authorities be enforced, and within what social and legal framework? Who is responsible and to what extent? In our study, we will examine this at the level of theory and practice. To illustrate practice, we would like to present the Social Plastic project as a good practice.*

**Keywords:** *social benefits, social plastic, social policy, waste management.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Our current economy, as it is highlighted by the information leaflet of the European Parliament as well, is an economy building on mainly one-direction linear processes.<sup>1</sup> This also means that most of the products are made for single use. This results in two things. One is the development of an enormous amount

---

<sup>1</sup> Circular economy: definition, importance and benefits, European Parliament, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/economy/20151201STO05603/circular-economy-definition-importance-and-benefits>, 27. Dec. 2021

of unnecessary waste. The development of waste comes to the fore as a result that is completely inevitable in this market perception. It has significant negative impact on the nature. The ecological footprint of these factories is huge.

Partly related to the environmental effects, these production processes have effects on the market, including labour market as well. Linear economy has created the currently known manufacturing technologies and processes which determine the content of jobs necessary for the effective production. These production processes give the basis of the currently known capitalist production systems which have significant effect on the economy of certain countries, the economy of the European Union and, in a wider context, a significant part of the global economy. A significant part of the products and services originating from linear production processes circulate on the globalized market and the labour market within that, which has been significantly damaged, but not destroyed completely by the current pandemic.<sup>2</sup> There are interruptions in the system, and there will be so until the virus will have its current activity. It is worth to talk about such obstacles as the chip crisis, or the dependence of a significant part of the globalized market on China and the South-east Asian countries. Most products are made in these countries, or if not the product itself, but some of its ingredients or components. Its effect could be felt mostly during the first wave of the pandemic, and its effects can still be felt today. Besides the exposure of the market, one of the dangers of these globalized markets is the environmental load.<sup>3</sup> However, this latest effect has been discussed much less than other problems. One part of the problem, compared to the phenomenon, is a global problem, while another part is the liability of the individuals or certain actors of the market.

It is well-known that the farther a product comes from, the more it travels. The length of the journey and the choice of the delivery method determine the environmental load accompanied by the delivery of the certain product. This determines a product's ecological footprint and the level of the environmental load caused by the product besides certain parameters. This is important to be highlighted because a product's effect on the environment does not cease by reaching the finish line. Namely, the product usually arrives in a package. The package mostly becomes waste. However, often not just the package, but mostly the product itself may become waste after a while. So, taking the ecological aspects in view as well, a certain product means multiple load on the environment. Despite cost efficacy, we must count with a huge amount of loss in the classic for-profit model. And it occurs not necessarily in the company's budget, but in its scope.

---

<sup>2</sup> Magdolna Vallasek, (2021). "Munkajog a világjárvány idején. Régi dilemmák, új megoldások?" In M. Bak, & J. Gagy (ed.), *Minden másképp...?*, Scientia, Kolozsvár, 161-170

<sup>3</sup> Bulat Z. Akhmetzhanov – Serik R. Egizbaev, S., "Opportunities and Prospects for the Transition to Post-COVID Circular Economy". In : Osipov, V.S. (eds) *Post-COVID Economic Revival, Volume II Sectors, Institutions, and Policy*, Palgrave Mcmillan, Cham, 2021, 35-50.

The question is how much the company feels its own liability in this relation. How much would it like to push this liability to the state or the consumers? But a much more general question also emerges from where the field giving the main topic of this current study should be started: who is responsible and what for? A determined segment of the circular economy will be examined through this liability. This segment is the possibility of linking ecological and social responsibility.

## 2. WHO IS RESPONSIBLE AND WHAT FOR?

The recent period has brought great changes in the way as the companies imagine their position within the economy, and their relationship and effect to the wider socio-economic medium. The company is not just an isolated entity anymore that keeps the mystic three-step distance from its environment. The companies should have recognized that they have impact on their environment and all the stakeholders connecting to them somehow.

Of course, we have to highlight the level of liability we are talking about. From the aspect of the marked topic, the relationship between legal and ethical liability or economics and ethics may be relevant. In this current study, the latest would be emphasized as the examined issue has not had mature legal frames. Of course, this does not mean that even legal responsibility would not prevail. So, that is why legal liability is put into the background for a bit, but it is not trivialized. The reason of this is that legal and non-legal liability should be distinguished from social liability. The non-legal liability forms are such as political, moral etc. liabilities. Legal liability means such compliance obligations that occur as legal obligations. It means correctness for a kind of contractual or non-contractual damage. The legal liability system of the companies is complex. The certain liability formulas prevail side by side. Enforceability is the characteristic of legal liability, regardless of jurisdiction. Along the legal rules and the general and special field-specific legal principles, correctness is enforceable if necessary. It is worth to be highlighted at this point that, compared to the above, we have to step back one step at the examination of liability. If we talk about liability, we need to make difference between liability “because of something” or “for something”.<sup>4</sup>

As it has been mentioned, the greatest difference between legal and moral standards is the existence or lack of enforceability by state assets. However, it is important to emphasize that most of the standards regulating the society’s life are followed by people only because of their fear from the punishments. It can usually be seen behind compliance that following the moral standards similar to the

---

<sup>4</sup> Péter Miskolczi-Bodnár, “A jogi felelősség és a polgári jogi felelősség alapkérdései, a Ptk. kártérítési szabályainak rendszere, a deliktuális és a kontraktuális felelősség szétválása” In Barta et al (ed.), *Magyarázat a kártérítési jogról*, Wolters Kluwer, Budapest, 2018, 21.

law voluntarily or following them because of a different urge helps its acceptance and the identification with it. The economic side is connected to this. Kocziszky highlights that liability for others is the central element of ethical economics.<sup>5</sup> It is added by us that this liability for the others should occur in the general policy of the companies, and it should determine the applied business model as well. Ethical perception should be integrated into the mainstream of the economic thinking. This integrated perception is based on four pillars.

- justice and fairness
- honesty
- sustainability
- solidarity and social responsibility

In the frames of this study, not all the four elements can be examined separately. Because of the chosen topic, the principles of sustainability and solidarity (social responsibility) will be highlighted.

Sustainability primarily means the transformation of work organization processes, and the greening of raw material acquisition and employment. The realization of green job associated that is associated with sustainability will have a great role in this. However, sustainability means the sustainability of the market as well. If we look at the segment of consumer contracts and services, the consumers of different generations are receptive for different aspects of the circular economy. The certain generations prefer different elements of the circular economy.<sup>6</sup> But value creation occurs in all groups, regardless of generations. Recognizing this, some companies has fitted their operation to this.<sup>7</sup> The circular business model can be considered as a subcategory of the business models. But, despite the classic business model, it primarily strives for the effective use of resources instead of economic performance, while it sustains good financial health and the company's long-term viability by that. Value creation occurs as an important goal, and it defines circular business model as the follows: "it is a business model in which the conceptional logic of value creation is based on the use of economic value remaining in the product after its use during the creation of new offers". The common characteristic of every circular business model is the goal of decreasing energy-, water- and material consumption, and recycling or resale the waste produced by the company.<sup>8</sup> So, the circular business models are connected

---

<sup>5</sup> György Kocziszky, "Etikus közgazdasági gondolkodás: mikor lesz az utópiából valóság?" In G. Kocziszky (ed.), *Etikus közgazdaságtan*, Magyar Nemzeti Bank, Budapest, 2019, 15-65.

<sup>6</sup> Oláh et al: "Preferences of Central European Consumers in Circular Economy", *Ekonomicko-manazerske spektrum*" 2/2021, 99.110. doi:dx.doi.org/10.26552/ems.2021.2.99-110

<sup>7</sup> Antikainen, M., & Valkokari, K. (2016). A framework for sustainable circular business model innovation. *Technology Innovation Management Review*, 7/2016., 5-12.

<sup>8</sup> Marcus Linder, Matts Williander, "Circular business model innovation: inherent uncertainties", *Business Strategy and Environmental*, 2/2016, 182- 196. doi:10.1002/bse.1906

to the sustainable business models as they intended to create economic, environmental and, to a lesser extent, social values, they involve more interested parties and they have a long-term perspective.<sup>9</sup> Solidarity and social responsibility create such a rule material in which relative social security is an important motivation. But its point is inhesion, the promotion of the interests of the affected group, and helping each other. Solidarity, as an element, always deal with things over our own interests. It demands active behaviour for the public interest. But solidarity is a fine example of how something can be an ethical expectation and a legal principle at the same time.

Environmental protection and the creation of social security should mean such a perspective. But who is responsible for its creation and insurance? As we have talked about business models, this issue cannot be separated from the role of the companies. The question is rather how much they have to take part in solving the above-mentioned problems. The report of the European Parliament dealing with social responsibility highlights that companies cannot take over the authorities' tasks related to the promotion, performance and control of social and environment protection standards. It essentially means that the companies' liability can reach only the level that cannot replace the state's role. Of course, its legal guarantee is that the companies perform activities or provide services over the legal guarantees that serve the society. The state cannot escape liability by pushing it completely to the companies.<sup>10</sup>

In the two issues examined in this study, but in almost every other field as well, it should perform its tasks in the frames defined by the Basic Law, but with the content defined by the laws and orders. In the examined fields, the core of the state's basic obligation is given by Article XIX of the Basic Law on social security,<sup>11</sup> Article XX on the right to physical and mental health and Article XXI on the right to healthy environment.<sup>12</sup> And the detailed rules can be found in the social measurements and the environmental protection legal rules. Naturally, the

---

<sup>9</sup> Maria Antikainen, Katri Valkokari, "A framework for sustainable circular business model innovation", *Technology Innovation Management Review*, 6/2016, 5-12. Doi: 10.22215/timreview/1000villi

Marcus Linder, Matts Williander, "Circular business model). Critical success and risk factors for circular business models valorising agricultural waste and by-products", *Resources, Conservation and Recycling*, 165/2016 doi:10.1016/j.resconrec.2020.105236

<sup>10</sup> Report – A7-0023/2013, *European Parliament. Report on Corporate Social Responsibility: promoting society's interests and a route to sustainable and inclusive recovery*, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-7-2013-0023\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-7-2013-0023_EN.html), 20. Dec.2020.)

<sup>11</sup> Hilda Tóth, "Megtérítési igény az egészségbiztosítási ellátások és nyugellátások körében", In Judit Barta, Tímea Barzó, Csilla Csák (ed.), *Magyarázat a kártérítési jogról*, Wolters Kluwer, Budapest, 534-562.

<sup>12</sup> Nóra Jakab, Gábor Mélypataki, "The right to water as a social fundamental right", *Journal of Agriculture and Environmental Law*, 14/ 2018, 7-63. doi:10.21029/JAEL.2019.26.255

state can also take over tasks and liability over these legal frames. Specifying, the state can hold any amount of liability since it defines its legal frames. What separates from the general state liability is its responsibility happening over the mandatory responsibility of the state institutions. Its tool is taking public responsibility.<sup>13</sup>

The actors of the economy should define their own liability in comparison with this relationship system. We can also talk about the role of the companies and the consumers. The role of the companies can be connected to social responsibility, while the consumers' role is related to the conscious consumer movement. These two responsibilities can influence the development of the environmentally conscious economy based on social principles side by side and strengthening each other. The consumers' demand for fair and/or environment-friendly products increasingly influences the quality and nature of the products and services provided by the companies. Of course, this is only one segment of this topic, but not a negligible one. Mainly because state responsibility openly declares the validation of third generation rights as well, that condenses in the economy as well. In most cases, this condensation does not result in a legal obligation at this time, but it defines such ethical expectations that influence the companies' operation, even as a soft legal tool as well. The Volkswagen scandal erupted in 2015 can be an excellent example for this relationship, in which the Volkswagen used an irregular bypass device in the engine control of its diesel cars to circumvent the emission standards of the United States. This irregular technology was used in more than 2.5 million cars. The credibility of the company had fallen a lot because of the scandal, that could be measured in Euro billions. Companies should have open and clear communication in the frames their environmental responsibility. If the company does not do so, its failures and mistakes will even be revealed, but their social judgement will become quite negative.

But what does this exactly mean in the frame of ecological and social responsibility?

### 3. ECOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THE FRAMES OF CSR

To define the answer, the definition of corporate conscience should be mentioned, referring to that the companies are organizations built up by individuals and operating as the part of the society, which are in interaction with their environment.<sup>14</sup> The strength of the connection points to the certain stakeholder groups

---

<sup>13</sup> Nóra Jakab, Zsófia Rácz, "Issues of Public Social Responsibility in Great Britain and Hungary", *Zbornik Radova Pravni Fakultet (Novi Sad)*, 2/2019, 603-617. doi:10.5937/zrpfns53-22780

<sup>14</sup> Keneth E. Goodpaster, John B. Matthews, "Can a Corporation Have a Conscience?" *Harvard Business Journal*, 1/1982,

determines the levels of this complex economic liability system. The point of the CSR is the recognition of the fact that the scope of a company does not stop at the fence. The approach has started from the thesis that, in the modern world, a company's boundaries are not at its fence, and the corporate decision makers should manage a complex interest- and value matrix, not only the "company", the employees and the company's narrow business environment.<sup>15</sup> Everyone who is influenced by the performance, or the performing process of the company's strategical goals takes part in this managed process.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, the company has an impact on its real environment. The activity of the companies has effects on their ecological environment. So, the company's liability is to decrease its ecological footprint. This is especially valid for enterprises dealing with manufacturing products.<sup>17</sup>

#### 4. THE ROLE OF PLASTICS IN THE ECONOMY – WASTE OR SECONDARY RAW MATERIAL?

The role of plastics and plastic packages is significant in the current production. Plastic is treated as a raw material defining our everyday lives that can be produced at a relatively low cost, so industry and households use it a lot. This means that plastic gets in the everyday life, the daily cycle. More and more plastic waste is created that has led to ecological catastrophe in several places. Where not, it also means a great problem, as it constantly pollutes the environment and destroys people's environment as well. Plastic as waste is just cumulating. Its reason is the lot of time needed for their decomposition. The tempo of the development of plastic waste is faster than the tempo of decomposition. Some plastic types have a decomposition time of even more than a hundred years.

But the plastic cumulating in the world's seas and other places can cause not just ecological but relating social problems as well. The administrative system and the citizens of poor areas cannot manage this large amount. From this aspect, the fact that they produce the waste for themselves, or it gets to their area and waters in a different way is not important. Some states do not have great drinking water sets. And even the small amount they have can be easily polluted. These countries are often vulnerable as greater multinational companies install factories here, and most of them does not follow the instructions. They perform strongly

---

<sup>15</sup> Dávid Adrián Máté, "6 óra munka, 9 óra pihenés, 9 óra szórakozás: A 30 órás munkahét nyomában" *Erdélyi Jogélet*, 4/2020, 77-93. doi:10.35925/j.multi.2021.5.33

<sup>16</sup> Róbert Braun, *Vállalati társadalmi felelősségvállalás – A vállalatok politikája*, Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Szigeti et al, "Vállalati ökológiai lábnyom-számítás kihívásai a KKV. szektorban", *Vezetéstudomány*, 7-8/2019, 63-69. doi:10.14267/veztud.2019.0706

polluting activities, and human rights are often violated as well. It can be seen from the above-mentioned complex phenomenon that problems also occur in groups, and they should be managed together. If the fast fashion phenomenon is taken as an example, it often displays bad employment conditions, the ignorance of human rights and pollution at the same time. The companies' responsibility is indispensable to eliminate the problems.

The areas full of plastic waste significantly influence the residents of the certain geographical areas, often causing social problems as well. We are searching the answer for the question that by what solutions the companies could manage these problems. So, later, we would like to present the Social Plastic program as a possible way and, of course, a good practice.

But firstly, we have to examine the nature of plastic waste and the opportunities hiding in it.

If looking from the perspective of CSR, the ownership and tenure are important even in the case of wastes, but the extension of social responsibility is more important. During its examination, legal and economic principals get in an apparent contrast. Along economic principles, the company's social responsibility can break the development of the waste ownership chain. However, this does not mean a direct intervention, but the use of such elements that divert the way of waste. Diversion may mean the separated collection of certain plastic types by the manufacturer. Why this should be examined? Because one of the principles of CSR is that the company's activity and its effect does not stop at the fence, but it affects over it. Accordingly, it is indirectly responsible for the life cycle of its manufactured products at least to the extent that it should be environment-friendly or less polluting. This does not mean that the company should follow-up every single product. This only means that the company should work out preventive measurements to decrease its existing ecological footprint or create a policy significantly dealing with the management or at least the reuse of wastes.

It is an important step that the companies try to validate the theory of circulate economy in their CSR policy. They can do this as it can be found in the sustainability report of the IKEA issued in 2018. The IKEA report contains the medium-term goal of becoming a business building on circulate economy in 100% by 2030. This means building sustainable buildings, using renewable energy resources and, interestingly, the use of plastic.<sup>18</sup> From the aspect of this study, the latest should be highlighted. IKEA sees the opportunity in plastic, and it thinks about it as a long-lasting raw material. Items made of plastic can be used for long and for numerous purposes. The plastic's disadvantage can be its advantage as well. Products made of plastic are usually durable, and that is why it does not motivate for constant consumption, because they are not for single use.

---

<sup>18</sup> IKEA's sustainable growth – Local sustainability report, <https://preview.thenewsmarket.com/Previews/IKEA/DocumentAssets/535135.pdf>, 01 November, 2021



So, a plastic product not necessarily becomes waste after one use. Of course, it depends on the product's function as well. In connection with this, it can be highlighted that the development of circulate economy is related to the current global systems. The European Union also realized this when it submitted an action plan in the frames of the European green arrangement and as the part of the new industrial strategy in March 2020 to realize circulate economy. The Committee's statement mentions the revision of the rules applicable to the extended manufacturer liability as one of its tools.<sup>19</sup> Besides these, the EU has the aim to make all the packages of recyclable plastics by 2030. A significant part of plastic wastes is given by single-use plastic products and packages. In this context, circulate economy originates from that the item which would be waste could be raw material as well. On the level of today's industrial technology, the operations and procedures transforming plastic waste to raw material are existing. Moreover, the lifetime of plastics makes possible for a product or waste to take part in more cycles.

As a consequence of the above, this point of view should be learnt by the companies as soon as possible. The increasing amount of waste will mean increasing pressure. From now, it will be an important factor that the market itself will demand that the companies rely rather on circulate economy, become environmentally conscious and take the responsibility. Szabolcs NAGY highlights that the social judgement of companies occurring on the market of environment-friendly products usually improves even on short-term. Of course, this depends on the quality of corporate communication and the level of commitment as well. And he also adds that consumers take the liability of the companies equal to individual liability that causes important consequences.<sup>20</sup> The company should describe its successes and failures achieved on the environment field for the society by the help of the environment-conscious promotion-mix. The presentation of failures is important because only this way is ethical with the consumers. That's why the so-called dieselgate case was so loud.

So, from our point of view, circulate economy is such economy in which the usable wastes are constantly recycled to the production as secondary raw material. This secondary raw material should be prepared and used considering the aspects of cost efficacy besides minimum material loss. And in this case, the social responsibility of the companies is that the way of waste is legally and technologically existing, but this way is divertible and so, plastic can be attached to the circulate economy. Treating plastic wastes in this way has primarily ecological effects. The fight for the green goals itself can be interpreted as a realized CSR.

---

<sup>19</sup> European Commission's Report, Communication From the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions- European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0028&from=HU>, 01. Nov. 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Szabolcs Nagy, Környezettudatos marketing. Miskolci Egyetem? Miskolc, 2005

One of the commitments of the Kersia is such an example. Kersia considers repressing pollution to be especially important. The collection and reuse of plastic packages is one of the preconditions of the circulate economic strategy. The aim of the company is to transform this social expectation to a real business model, using an approach that involves the following:

- buying packages containing recycled plastic
- collecting packages
- recycling packages

But more categories of wastes are known. We can talk about settlement, inert and dangerous wastes as well. In certain cases, their collection itself is an important responsibility. However, from legal aspect, the definition of waste involves a wider range. The definition of waste involves “garbage” as well, materials that are unsuitable for further use and recovery and they are disposed. Over this, the definition of waste also involves materials which are suitable for further use or use as secondary raw material. In the interpretation of the definition of waste, treating recyclable materials as waste and their regulation cause most of the problems. Some materials categorized as waste can be even valuable properties. The boundary line between materials categorized as waste and “valuable products” is very narrow.<sup>21</sup> It is possible that while something is waste for the consumer, the enterprise can still use it as a secondary raw material.

But it is very important to highlight that the actors of the economy will be as proactive as they can see the state to be initiative. Supporting recycling is also an important task of the state. This has been recognized by some countries, so 75% of metal wastes are recycled in Germany and the United Kingdom. The total amount of recycled waste is 68% in Germany and 35% in Hungary.<sup>22</sup>

It should also be recognized that the above-mentioned activity often has not just ecological, but social effects. This affects mainly the fields where the population’s standard of living is not high, and more and more waste floods their environment in different ways. The basic issue is how ecological and social liability could be realized at the same time. One of the currently working solutions is the Social Plastic system. But what is this? I would like to describe its conception in the following as a good practice.

---

<sup>21</sup> Csilla Csák, “A hulladék fogalmának értelmezése az uniós ítélkezési gyakorlat alapján”, *Publicationes Universitatis Miskolcensis Sectio Juridica et Politica*, 29/2011, 423-434.

<sup>22</sup> Európai Parlament. (16/02/2021.). Waste management in the EU: infographic with facts and figures, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20180328STO00751/eu-waste-management-infographic-with-facts-and-figures>, 20. Dec, 2021.; *Circular economy: definition, importance and benefits*, European Parliament, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/economy/20151201STO05603/circular-economy-definition-importance-and-benefits>, 27. Dec. 2021; Horváth et al., “The waste management sector of Hungary. ‘Review of Business & Management’”, *Theory Methodology Practice*, 1/2021, 31-42.

## 5. SOCIAL PLASTIC

We need to leave the frames of the company to understand the operation of Social Plastic. Social Plastic means the circular system itself found out by the founders of the Plastic Bank and also the collected plastic itself. Social Plastic, as a circular economic model, works based on that plastic collected by people essentially works as a convertible currency.

We have no data about how much of the plastic waste gets back to the circulation in this way. But the importance of this collecting method is highlighted by the fact that in Ethiopia, a geographical unit which could be potentially affected, only 3.5% of the plastic bottles used in connection with the disposal of used bottled water get back to the collectors for recycling, while 40% of the water bottles are thrown in the trash.<sup>23</sup>

As we have referred to it before, the Plastic Bank motivates people to take plastic waste to collecting points worldwide for recycling over the world. In return, they get digital tokens. Plastic waste becomes a value for at once, since it helps people in need as a convertible currency. And as we are talking about digital tokens, the financial benefits given for the collected waste can be used as a cash-gentle tool. Digitalization, and the use of virtual currency itself makes the developed processes more greener. These digital tokens can be managed and used on a bank account available by a smart phone. People can buy food, water, phone minutes and further products by the “money” found on the bank account. We are talking about items connected to the everyday life which are natural for the members of the major society. But the mentioned groups pay for these services by plastic waste. It is interesting that plastic waste gets a positive context from this perspective. Its reason is that it, as a currency, has a significant role in the field of equivalence and the development of equal opportunities between people. As it has been mentioned by a lot of people, the use of cheap plastics has democratized consumption (Plastics Industry Association), and the recyclable and collected plastic strengthens the aspiration for creating social equality.<sup>24</sup> It can be interpreted as a kind of social preference where waste and the token got for it helps the delivering party to reach a level equal to the level of the members of the major society by the gained benefits. The system working like this can be only a complement of the state system. In this case, this means the complementation of the social aid system that

---

<sup>23</sup> Abdissa Gemechu, Béla Illés, “Reverse Logistics Process of Used Plastics Water Bottles Supply Chain in Ethiopia”, In K. D. Dimitrov, D. Nikolovski, & R. Yılmaz (editor), Proceedings of XIV. International Balkan and Near Eastern Social Sciences Congress Series on Economics, Business and Management-Plovdiv / Bulgaria, September 26-27, 2020 University of Agribusiness and Rural Development, Plovdiv, 2020, 175-185.

<sup>24</sup> *Plastics Role in Social Justice and Equity*. Plastics Industry Association, <https://thisisplastics.com/economics/plastics-social-justice-equity/>, 27. Dec. 2021.

is more likely to connect to the companies' CSR policy than the state systems. Despite this, or even because of this? – it can be efficient. The system of Social Plastic and the network of the Plastic Banks is an international supranational network that seems to be easy to be adapted.

For managing recyclable materials and the tokens, the Plastic Bank offers a secure method without cash. The system shows motivators that motivate the clients for collecting and dropping waste. This means a source of livelihood for them. This source of livelihood can provide help primarily in the countries of the third world, that is why Ethiopia and its related data has been mentioned as an example.

In the countries of the third world, it can be an aid primarily in those areas where there is a beach or ocean front. The project itself also urges the delivery of waste collected from the oceans and seas, because they hide a high amount of waste. Over this, Social Plastic means not just an economic model, but the specific plastic as well. As it has been mentioned, it is a currency and a potential raw material as well. Companies connect at this point by their CSR activity. Companies participating in this system agree to produce a newer product or package from the collected plastic.

The companies' message on decreasing the plastic pollution of the oceans and seas has become a real action instead of an empty promise. In the frames of Social Plastic, there is a real chance for the results to become true. Achieving the results demands active intervention from the companies.

If we would like to summarize the point of Plastic Bank and Social Plastic shortly from this context, it would be this: *Defeating ocean plastic and global poverty by block-based token allowances*. According to the scientists' prediction, if the plastic pollution of the oceans will move in such a pace, there will be more polluting plastics in the ocean by 2050 than the number of fishes living in the ocean. In order to protect the nature, the Plastic Bank, cooperating with the IBM and the Cognition Foundry service providers, mobilizes both the entrepreneurs dealing with recycling and the members of the world's poorest communities. It creates a relationship between companies and people that results in a mutual win-win situation. The point of the relationship is clearing the oceans and seas from plastic waste and giving life-changing benefits in return. The Plastic Bank supported by the IBM technology presents the value of plastic waste, interrupts its flood to the ocean, and provides its use for new products for the companies.<sup>25</sup>

In this situation, waste can be characterized as “social plastic” even in an abstract sense, that provides insurance for reaching products and services. The mainly plastic waste used as a currency usually goes to the consumers from the Plastic Bank as recycled plastic. Several companies use these recycled plastics.

---

<sup>25</sup> János Takács, *Blockchain – CSR szempontjából.*, <https://csrhungary.eu/csrblog/blockchain-csr-szempontjabol/>, 25. Okt. 2021.

Among others, the Henkel has also joined to this initiation, and they produce the packages of their products by raw material gained via the Plastic Bank. Producing 100% of the packages by recycled plastic is one of the long-term goals of the Henkel. Their aim is to decrease the amount of virgin plastic originating from fossil resources in the packages of our consumption products by 50%. This is intended to be reached by increasing the rate of recycled plastic to more than 30%, decreasing the amount of plastic and using rather bio-based plastic.<sup>26</sup>

## 6. THE LIMITS OF THE SOCIAL PLASTIC CONCEPTION

Social plastic as a system can be described as an increasingly more efficient system to which several greater company groups have joined. It is worth to examine that this conception and system is also able to achieve other goals over the ecological ones. Can social plastic be considered as a social service? As a social allowance originating from the liability of the corporate sector and not the state's will? Can responsibility be expected from the companies in this form? About the companies' social responsibility, the European Union's report mentioned above highlights that the goal and expectation is the accountable, transparent and responsible business behaviour and the sustainable increase. The report emphasizes that companies cannot take over the liability of promoting, performing and controlling social and environmental standards from the state authorities. This essentially means that corporate responsibility can reach only the level that does not replace the state's responsibility. Of course, legal guarantee is necessary from the state's side as well. Performing activities or providing services serving the society over the legal guarantees cannot mean a basis for the state to decrease its liability. The state cannot escape its liability by pushing it totally to the companies. This is not in contrary to the view that the companies' social responsibility is an essential element of corporate governance. This is especially true for the relationships with the authorities, employees and their representative bodies, and the case regarding the corporate remuneration policies when the excessive remuneration or the extremely great remuneration of the leaders is not compatible with socially responsible behaviour, especially if the company is in a difficult situation.<sup>27</sup> The report emphasizes that it supports the new definition of the Committee which ceases the difference between the voluntary and mandatory approaches. The definition contained

---

<sup>26</sup> Henkel integrates Social Plastic® in packaging for Beauty Care and Laundry & Home Care products, <https://www.henkel.hu/sajto-es-media/2019-04-29-henkel-integrates-social-plastic-in-packaging-for-beauty-care-and-laundry-home-care-products-936188>, 12. Dec.2021.

<sup>27</sup> Report on Corporate Social Responsibility: promoting society's interests and a route to sustainable and inclusive recovery

in the green book is in line with this, according to which companies voluntarily integrate social and environmental point of views into their partnerships and business relationships.

In summary, social plastic can be interpreted as an ecological responsibility from the aspect of CSR activities that means the production, process and use of secondary raw materials. The collected tokens and the services to be bought for them are the tools of providing social benefits, which can be the tools of the fight against social poverty. Although, it should not be forgotten that this activity is limited, as it can play only a secondary role compared to the state. It cannot be expected from the companies to do more, even if the incomes of certain multinational companies exceed the budget of certain countries. The social contribution can be no more than complementary in nature.

But the limits of the project go beyond the above. The Plastic Bank's aim is primarily the cleaning of the oceans and seas, so it limits the geographical areas where this activity could be performed. Of course, waste disposal of the whole planet alone cannot be the goal of the project. In the frames of the project, it can also be the support of people living on defined geographical areas. This support is a form by which people are motivated to clean their environment. It is not enough that the environment could be cleaner, but living problems can also decrease. But the first clause should be specified by that the amount of waste developed in the seas and oceans depends less on the local population and more from the great polluters. So, of course, people doing the cleaning task for long find a constant living resource for themselves. This is a positive and a negative thing at the same time. It is positive that the person can sell the waste constantly, but it is negative that this means the realization of the level of pollution on a constant level. The project presents an especially good practice that can be useful quite globally by including companies and motivating the local population. It has limits, but this is natural. However, it can be mentioned as an example, and its variants optimized even for land or other way can also be used. The project itself realizes sustainability and the function of social help that is worth to be followed and developed or cloned. There is a lot of plastic waste and poverty is huge as well. One movement, that is the collection of plastic waste, can act against both.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This publication was produced in the framework of the project “National Laboratory for Social Innovation”, funded by the Ministry of Innovation Technology, National Research Development and Innovation Office, project number NLP-08.

## REFERENCES

- European Parliament. (16/02/2021.). Waste management in the EU: infographic with facts and figures, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20180328STO00751/eu-waste-management-infographic-with-facts-and-figures>, 20. Dec, 2021.;
- Péter Miskolczi-Bodnár, “A jogi felelősség és a polgári jogi felelősség alapkérdései, a Ptk. kárértési szabályainak rendszere, a deliktuális és a kontraktuális felelősség szétválása” In Barta et al (ed.), *Magyarázat a kárértézési jogról*, Wolters Kluwer, Budapest, 2018, 21.
- Abdissa Gemechu, Béla Illés, “Reverse Logistics Process of Used Plastics Water Bottles Supply Chain in Ethiopia”, In K. D. Dimitrov, D. Nikolovski, & R. Ylmaz (editor), *Proceedings of XIV. International Balkan and Near Eastern Social Sciences Congress Series on Economics, Business and Management-Plovdiv / Bulgaria, September 26-27, 2020* University of Agribusiness and Rural Development, Plovdiv, 2020, 175-185.
- Antikainen, M., & Valkokari, K. (2016). A framework for sustainable circular business model innovation. *Technology Innovation Management Review*, 7/2016., 5-12.
- Bulat Z. Akhmetzyanov – Serik R. Egizbaev, S., “Opportunities and Prospects for the Transition to Post-COVID Circular Economy”. In : Osipov, V.S. (eds) *Post-COVID Economic Revival, Volume II Sectors, Institutions, and Policy*, Palgrave Mcmillan, Cham, 2021, 35-50.
- Circular economy: definition, importance and benefits, European Parliament, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/economy/20151201STO05603/circular-economy-definition-importance-and-benefits>, 27. Dec. 2021
- Circular economy: definition, importance and benefits*, European Parliament, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/economy/20151201STO05603/circular-economy-definition-importance-and-benefits>, 27. Dec. 2021;
- Csilla Csák, “A hulladék fogalmának értelmezése az uniós ítélkezési gyakorlat alapján”, *Publicationes Universitatis Miskolcensis Sectio Juridica et Politica*, 29/2011, 423-434.
- Dávid Adrián Máté, “6 óra munka, 9 óra pihenés, 9 óra szórakozás: A 30 órás munkahét nyomában” *Erdélyi Jogélet*, 4/2020, 77-93. doi:10.35925/j.multi.2021.5.33
- European Commission’s Report, Communication From the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions- European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0028&from=HU>, 01. Nov. 2021,
- György Kocziszky, “Etikus közgazdasági gondolkodás: mikor lesz az utópiából valóság?” In G. Kocziszky (ed.), *Etikus közgazdaságtan*, Magyar Nemzeti Bank, Budapest, 2019, 15-65.
- Henkel integrates Social Plastic® in packaging for Beauty Care and Laundry & Home Care products, <https://www.henkel.hu/sajto-es-media/2019-04-29-henkel-integrates-social-plastic-in-packaging-for-beauty-care-and-laundry-home-care-products-936188>, 12. Dec.2021.

- Hilda Tóth, “Megtérítési igény az egészségbiztosítási ellátások és nyugellátások körében”, In Judit Barta, Tímea Barzó, Csilla Csák (ed.), *Magyarázat a kártérítési jogról*, Wolters Kluwer, Budapest, 534-562.
- Horváth et al., “The waste management sector of Hungary. ‘Review of Business & Management’”, *Theory Methodology Practice*, 1/2021, 31-42.
- IKEA’s sustainable growth – Local sustainability report, <https://preview.thenews-market.com/Previews/IKEA/DocumentAssets/535135.pdf>, 01 November, 2021
- János Takács, *Blockchain – CSR szempontjából.*, <https://csrhungary.eu/csrblog/blockchain-csr-szempontjabol/>, 25. Okt. 2021.
- Keneth E. Goodpaster, John B. Matthews, “Can a Corporation Have a Conscience?” *Harvard Business Journal*, 1/1982,
- Magdolna Vallasek, (2021). “Munkajog a világjárvány idején. Régi dilemmák, új megoldások?” In M. Bak, & J. Gagyí (ed.), *Minden másképp...?*, Scientia, Kolozsvár, 161-170
- Marcus Linder, Matts Williander, “Circular business model innovation: inherent uncertainties”, *Business Strategy and Environmental*, 2/2016, 182- 196. doi:10.1002/bse.1906
- Marcus Linder, Matts Williander, “Circular business model). Critical success and risk factors for circular business models valorising agricultural waste and by-products”, *Resources, Conservation and Recycling*, 165/2016 doi:10.1016/j.resconrec.2020.105236
- Maria Antikainen, Katri Valkokari, “A framework for sustainable circular business model innovation”, *Technology Innovation Management Review*, 6/2016, 5-12. Doi: 10.22215/timreview/1000villi
- Nóra Jakab, Gábor Mélypataki, “The right to water as a social fundamental right”, *Journal of Agriculture and Environmental Law*, 14/ 2018, 7-63. doi:10.21029/JAEL.2019.26.255
- Nóra Jakab, Zsófia Ráczy, “Issues of Public Social Responsibility in Great Britain and Hungary”, *Zbornik Radova Pravni Fakultet (Novi Sad)*, 2/2019, 603-617. doi:10.5937/zrpfns53-22780
- Oláh et al: “Preferences of Central European Consumers in Circular Economy”, *Ekonomicko-manazerske spektrum*” 2/2021, 99-110. doi:dx.doi.org/10.26552/ems.2021.2.99-110
- Plastics Role in Social Justice and Equity*. Plastics Industry Association, <https://thisisplastics.com/economics/plastics-social-justice-equity/>, 27. Dec. 2021.
- Report – A7-0023/2013, European Parliament. Report on Corporate Social Responsibility: promoting society’s interests and a route to sustainable and inclusive recovery*, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-7-2013-0023\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-7-2013-0023_EN.html), 20. Dec.2020.)
- Report on Corporate Social Responsibility: promoting society’s interests and a route to sustainable and inclusive recovery
- Róbert Braun, *Vállalati társadalmi felelősségvállalás – A vállalatok politikája*, Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 2015.
- Szabolcs Nagy, *Környezettudatos marketing*. Miskolci Egyetem? Miskolc, 2005
- Szigeti et al, “Vállalati ökológiai lábnyom-számítás kihívásai a KKV. szektorban”, *Vezetéstudomány*, 7-8/2019, 63-69. doi:10.14267/veztud.2019.0706



Габор Л. Мељџаџаки  
Универзитет у Мишколцу  
Правни факултет  
jogmeqa@uni-miskolc.hu  
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-0359-6538

## Повезивање еколошке и друштвене одговорности – пројекат *Social Plastic* као могуће решење?

**Сажетак:** Одржива економија је сложено питање које захтева активно или чак проактивно понашање свих актера. Држава мора да користи својствене инструменте како би координисала кључне процесе, борила се против друштвено-политичких проблема и истовремено покушала да омогући остваривање одређених људских права. На овај начин, природно је да би држава ипак жељела да буде ослобођена терета одговорности. Питање је у којој мери је то могуће. Посебно имајући у виду питања као што су животина средина и борба против сиромаштва? У којој мери се активност КДО (корпоративне друштвене одговорности) предузема или активност ЈДО (јавне друштвене одговорности) јавних власти могу сироводити и у ком друштвеном и законском оквиру? Ко је одговоран и у којој мери? У нашем раду ће се наведено питање испитати на нивоу теорије и праксе. Да бисмо илустрирали праксу, жељели бисмо да представимо пројекат *Social Plastic* као пример добре праксе.

**Кључне речи:** права из социјалног осигурања, *Social Plastic*, социјална политика, управљање отпадом.

Датум пријема рада: 05.09.2022.

Датум прихватања рада: 29.09.2022.