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Responsibility in physical activity management / Odpowiedzialność w zarządzaniu aktywnością fizyczną

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1. PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

1.1. The stakes of sustainable development

The notion of sustainable development appeared in response to the multiple threats of our way of living on the planet. The term was used for the first time in 1987 in the report "Our Common Future" by the World Commission on Environment and Development (also called the Brundtland report after the Norwegian Prime Minister at the time). Sustainable development is defined as "development which seeks to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". It covers the integration of the economic, ecological and social dimensions.

By definition, sustainable development is based on the principle of intergenerational fairness. We must not make the earth uninhabitable for future generations. This also implies the idea of spatial fairness. Well-being must be shared by all, not only on a country-wide scale, but by the entire planet. Given the globalization of the economy, transportation and telecommunications, the world must actually now be considered a global village with the implication of an integration of levels of intervention and measures. In other words, the rule of "think global - act local" should be applied.

In an increasing number of regions, conditions determining the welfare of human populations are becoming seriously disturbed. Changes in climate and erosion of biodiversity are the major manifestations of the limits of natural systems in supporting long-term economic growth as we see it. The level and rate of greenhouse gas emissions and the rate of extinction of some species are two fundamental factors in the non-sustainable nature of our current socio-economic activities.

These physical and biological limits to growth are being imposed gradually and are exacerbating inequalities. It is unlikely that our societies will be able to adapt spontaneously to the physical and biological limits of growth. It is, however, legitimate to think that technical, economic and social innovation could give rise to certain contradictions; saving material and energy that go into products and production processes, new behaviours in changing spaces that various workers in society can consider implementing, and innovation and skill transfer toward countries in the South.

During the last World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in September 2002, the governments agreed to "play an active role in changing unsustainable consumption and production patterns". Sustainable development can become a source of innovation. Innovation deals with technological improvements in products and services as well as methodological tools related to the organization of companies and consideration of the human factor. Innovation may lead to the development of new adaptations, partnerships, and criteria of responsibility and consistency guiding individual and group behaviours.

1.2. Sports and their foundation in society

Sustainable development takes into account all the interactions between economic, social and environmental aspects and ensures a balance. It implies the adaptation of modes of consumption and production by integrating environmental and social equity factors. Sports are a lever for the sustainable development of society.

The expansion of sports offerings based on expectations beyond competition and the management of heterogeneous client relations modify the attractiveness of the market. The complexity of consumer dynamics in sports has increased over the past few years. It is linked to the following developments in society:

- the influence of demand on supply and the emergence of consumers concerned with their health;
- the influence of sports on behaviour with the creation of behavioural models and its place in areas of socialization (the family, school, places of work, the street, neighbourhoods);
- new forms of dialogue between the people involved.

Partnerships are being created between companies and public authorities to promote sports as a form of citizen participation in the community life of an area. The contribution of sports to the integration of marginalized groups in particular is based on certain challenges such as consolidating social links, converting certain infrastructures into support points to develop strategies for integration, forms of coordination (sports and work, sports and associative life, and so on) that can encourage integration.

These realities are only beginning to exert their effects and we can count on an increase because of many influences: increased life expectancy, development of forms of recreation, control of obesity, appeals to personal well-being, public information, and especially young consumers' awareness of healthy lifestyles in school programs, ethical requirements for the integration of all social classes in sports activities, competition between companies as a result of market requirements, and the development of new services among sports offerings.

2. ETHICS AND MANAGERIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Physical activity's approach to sustainable development is of interest to companies, public officials, organizations and citizens. It helps them understand new phenomena in the consumption of sports and develop the ability of future persons in the field to tackle physical activity with innovative approaches.

In organizations (companies, schools, public communities) change occurs through standards, processes and practices underlying interactions with people and their environment. The objectives pursued involve taking into account the new user's expectations and defining an attractive supply, creating value added services (e.g. integration of sports and culture, sports and heritage, sports and tourism, sports and mobility, etc.) respect of environmental obligations, improvement of the organization and internal cohesion in sports infrastructures.

2.1. From ethics to responsibility

Company ethics is concerned with relations between participants and articulates thought and action with the development of mentalities and economic realities. For company, the ethics of responsibility is associated with the duty of integrating and being accountable within the context of the society in which one is performing the activities. By meeting market requirements, company is redefining itself in terms of legitimate citizenship and economic efficiency. This social and environmental commitment has become unavoidable in the face of social pressure. Companies are increasingly seeing a new management model that could give perennial economic performance and the ability to resist crises.

Company cannot be considered a socially isolated entity whose behaviour is influenced by the marketplace. To determine its vision and place in society, it is necessary to concentrate on

analyzing social relationships taking into account not only the economic stakes but also interactions with social organizations (consumer advocates, environmental lobbyists, human rights groups, altermondist movements, and so on) and with public authorities.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CRE) takes into account questions addressed to the company by external people. The company must participate in sustainable development of the planet alongside others (public authorities, consumers, citizens) by taking preventive, precautionary measures against environmental damage and social problems, and positive action toward civil society.

Sustainable development, ethics and corporate social responsibility is in keeping with a perspective of progress which goes well beyond a profit-centred one. This approach to progress is one of the conditions of economic efficiency in the current global context. Corporate economic performance is actually dependent on corporate social and environmental commitment for various reasons commonly admitted in the company world. Social and environmental commitment gives economic performance its continuity and ability to resist crises; it reinforces internal corporate cohesiveness and the quality of human capital; it fosters innovation, creativity and risk-taking. Involvement with partnerships in public projects is also a means of tying in corporate functions that are normally separate and distinct.

According to stakeholder value and management performance theories, the centres of interest of consumers direct corporate vision and have their place in the corporate strategic plan. The creation of value consumers thus has an effect on market attractiveness and corporate competitiveness. Partnerships with NGOs, differentiation in environmental and social quality, promotion of an image that inspires confidence, defence of a reputation, identification of new markets, and so on are all actions that lead to questions concerning corporate ethics and mission.

But is it possible to speak of responsibility when the institutional bases for corporate actions are weak or nonexistent? The absence of a coordinated global policy handicaps the CRE movement since implemented or proposed actions are considered on a case by case basis and act in isolation rather than on collective functions and processes. The relationships that the multinationals have with their branches, suppliers, and subcontractors in the southern countries attest to this. Faced with legislative and regulatory systems at times not applied, poorly conceived or corrupt, corporations often withdraw. Such a position is not tenable in the face of the abuse and moral tension experienced by citizens, consumers and workers.

CRE is indisputably linked with the local political, legal and regulatory context. It involves establishing a balance between public and private governance, particularly in certain priority areas including economic modernization, risk prevention in terms of protection of workers, consumers and the environment, or support of social policies.

2.2. Managing change

Uncertainty tied to the increasing awareness of the concept of risk has changed the nature of social relationships. This risk takes into account the effects of environmental exposure on health, that is, all the biological, chemical, physical and social factors that could affect the well-being of living things and their activities, including organizational risks in the workplace. To manage this risk, dialogue and concerted action are required. This necessitates modifying the behaviour of managers and directors by creating space for interaction and dialogue, true places for corporate mediation, adaptation and innovation.

Social change is not a natural phenomenon. It is a collective learning and creative process by which those involved establish new ways of cooperating and managing conflict. The system and its constraints certainly determine the context of action and resources available to those involved, but it is influenced just as much by the calculations and manipulations of these persons. If the collective action constitutes such a definite problem for our societies, it is first and foremost because this is not a natural phenomenon. It is a social construct whose existence poses problems and whose conditions of emergence and maintenance have yet to be explained [Crozier, Friedberg 1977].

Pressure groups participate in the law-making process through concerted measures such as codes of conduct, collective agreements, paralegal conflict settlement procedures and so on. The work of defining an increased number of standards is transferred from the national legislator to company and organizations. But it is evident that self-regulation and co-regulation are not adapted when fundamental rights or important political choices are at stake. They are relevant when flexible or urgent measures are required, in as much as these measures do not affect conditions for competition.

This new "social contract" based on negotiation and mutual confidence is a gauge of efficiency and the beginning of reforms. There is, nevertheless, a risk of subordination when the capacities of the players are unbalanced. All the players present are not equally prepared for negotiation. Corporations are often in a position of strength. However, in a world of communication and transparency reinforced to the utmost, surveillance and benchmarking systems are new weapons in the hands of organizations. Safeguarding reputation and image has become a corporate nightmare.

Voluntary regulatory standards have obvious advantages:

- they are in line with the legal and constitutional tradition of some countries;
- they lend themselves well to the treatment of highly technical matters;
- they are flexible, and easy to adapt and apply;
- direct participation in the development of standards ensures a greater corporate inclination to respect them without attempting to circumvent them.

The limits of voluntary instruments are evident, however. Their application to single situations in which corporations agree to act make public action dependent on the situation, which considerably reduces the ambitions for an integrated, global approach to problems encountered by the stakeholders. In addition, corporations are less inclined to act when public authorities devote so little attention to these problems.

Codes of conduct are necessary to promote corporate values and for the purposes of reference by stakeholders. The adoption of a code therefore has undeniable repercussions on corporate management and internal control strategies. Implementation of a code requires human resources, an action plan, an administrative management process to monitor protected rights, a stakeholder training program, as well as internal and external communication strategies. However, these instruments present certain problems of legal efficiency, the main ones being the diversity of monitoring methods and very often the absence of sanctions.

The great heterogeneity of actions under CSR makes it difficult to form any coherent view within the current context of modern society. Its application has been criticized on several counts (harmonization of actions by sector; transparency; evaluation, validation and comparison of results) and respect (control) of mechanisms in place) Careful study of accomplishments in the area of worker and consumer defence and environmental protection shows the relatively modest nature of the actions taken in relation to the stakes. In the majority of cases, the scope remains limited to the system of values to which the corporation adheres or the existing legal regulations. The mechanisms in place are not binding, and the corporate world has few incentives for encouraging the development of new forms of behaviour, social dialogue, collection decision making or regulatory mechanisms.

These observations have led corporations to question the meaning of their social and environmental practices. Certain directors and managers understood that an evolution of the developmental model was necessary [de Woot 2005].

In Belgium, the Interdepartmental Commission for Sustainable Development (ICSD) set out a frame of reference for corporate social responsibility (CIDD - Cadre de référence de la responsabilité sociétale des entreprises, Belgium, March 29, 2006). The initiative by the ICSD and federal authorities is part of the implementation of the 2004–2008 federal sustainable development plan; it is intended to reinforce and disseminate CSR in Belgium by providing a framework for

authorities, corporations and stakeholders and contribute to a common vision, harmonized language and more coherent definition of CSR.

The main priority consists in creating conditions for legitimacy of public authorities to intervene in the area of CSR with a policy to support and validate voluntary standards. The priority is actually the articulation of relationships between ethical corporate measures and institutional changes. Solutions combining formal rules with other unenforceable rules, in a mutually agreeable framework, are a good indication of the principles of good governance stated by the European Commission in its 2002 White Paper. An adaptive, participative model of mixed law including three components is actually lacking. It would notably include a legislative framework into which voluntary initiatives would be entered and developed; the existence of a public or administrative institutional (regulatory) structure in charge of encouraging, monitoring and controlling the actual respect of sectoral commitments; guaranteed participation of organizations representative of collective interests in question in the regulatory authority.

2.3. Compromises

The ethical questions confronted by corporations remain difficult to define and operationalize. According to Pesqueux and Biefnot [2002], ethics are acts of creativity which, unlike law, are not territorial and, unlike morals, are not universal in nature. This search for direction is always problematic, as it is voluntary, applied, complex, related to single cases, and never predefined. Would a label suffice to relieve the corporate responsibility for eventual ecological damage? Just how far should precautionary measures be taken? How can the benefits of progress be brought to citizens? Must a corporation denounce a competitor who does not respect a code of conduct?

Corporations have a duty to be ethical without having the right to rule the world. Benetton, which supported the role of revealing human tragedy caused by provocative exploitation of suffering in order to sell its clothing, shocked public opinion and was condemned by the French justice system. Labels, advertising, communication and all the marketing tools are first and foremost the vehicles of a search for economic efficiency. Their cultural dimension lies in a desired adequation with society values. It can certainly be demonstrated that marketing influences the evolution of values by proposing models of behaviour and invading all social spaces from street to school. This is particularly the case of advertising. But this responsibility is very obviously circumscribed by the obligation of compromising with the economic function. Messages and actions directed at consumers are subject to a duty of loyalty, no less with respect to their commercial adaptation than product quality or price.

Media campaigns mounted against Nike in the nineties because of company working conditions played a significant role in the development of its social and environmental programs.

Gilles Grolleau [2005] distinguishes three generations in Nike's attitude prior to its current approach.

Denial and inactivity (1970–1997)

The company eschewed critics by minimizing its responsibility, stating that ethical problems with subcontractors were not caused by Nike, wages were low but the people wanted to work for the subcontractors, maintaining activities in these countries was in itself an ethical activity, and that Nike was acting like all the other sporting goods companies.

In 1992, Nike adopted codes of conduct that bound suppliers and subcontractors without providing the means for applying and monitoring them.

Reactivity (1997–2003)

Since 2001 Nike published a sustainable development report with the addresses of its Asian subcontractors. The company adhered to the Global Compact and launched the Transparency

2001 program by publicizing the results of its audits. When the company is attacked, it reflects on the strategy to adopt to respond to this criticism and resolve its public relations problems.

Affirmation of its status as a citizen's company (since 2003)

Beginning in 2003 Nike stated its new strategy to become a global citizen, a company that wished to act ethically and wished, in addition, to contribute actively to the welfare of society and collaborate in the development of new ethical standards.

The company's "Corporate Responsibility" strategy consists of three lines:

- Initiate positive systemic change in current working conditions in the clothing, footwear and sports equipment industry;
- Create durable, innovative products;
- Use sports to introduce positive social change and militate in favour of sports and physical activity becoming a fundamental right for each person.

The company is aware that it can derive strategic opportunity from social pressure. It is aware that it cannot act alone and that it must work in partnership with other companies, governments, NGOs, and unions.

Nike has discovered that its strategy conveys innovation in the company, whether in its work methods, systems management, or in product design and production. The company deploys considerable energy to initiate and train its staff so that they can integrate the new approach in their work. In Europe, each department head must take into account what he has done in terms of CR. Distributors are also initiated in the company's ethical commitments.

Nike has entrusted some of its missions to specialized, independent organizations, reinforcing the equitable nature and transparency of the actions undertaken (e.g. training facilitators, street educators, and police in the organization of sports activities; encouraging young school drop-outs to acquire vocational skills using sports as a motivator; occupational integration of the unemployed in shoe sorting and the shipment of products to developing countries).

3. RISK MANAGEMENT

3.1. Environmental health management

In its 2006 Annual Progress Report on Growth and Jobs (COM(2006)30 final), the European Commission invited companies to demonstrate their commitment toward sustainable development with a CSR resolution. Public authorities were called upon to create a climate in which company managers were held in esteem not only because they made a profit, but also because they rose to certain challenges in society.

Meeting the European Commission's concern required changing company management methods. It was not simply a matter of the companies integrating social and environmental concerns into their activities (CSR management system) but also developing new methods of socially responsible management.

More recently, the Commission stated its preoccupation with making Europe a Pole of Excellence on corporate social responsibility and backing a European alliance which is a political umbrella for new or existing CSR initiatives by large companies, SMEs and their stakeholders (COM(136)2006 final). The Commission notably intends to promote core labour standards and include European provisions favourable to internationally recognized CSR instruments. It supports the respect of major international principles in the areas of labour and human rights, governance and environmental protection, particularly due to the new Generalized System of Preferences "GSP Plus" which came into effect on January 1, 2006.

The Belgian law of August 4, 1996 respecting worker well-being is the basis of a new corporate preventive approach advocating a systemic approach focussing on the physical, mental and psychosocial aspects of occupational health and well-being as well as the organization of work,

social conditions, and environmental factors (Welfare Act and the Worker Welfare Code). Classic occupational pathologies have decreased considerably and the current working world imposes an overabundance of psychic constraints. Because of frequent changes and reorganizations of the productive apparatus to increase flexibility and pace, psychosocial risks such as stress, depression, harassment and violence at work merit in-depth research particularly with a view to develop the profession of occupational medicine. The mission of physicians has extended to new areas such as monitoring expectant, new and nursing mothers, monitoring the health of young workers, reclassification of workers who have become unable to perform their current job (e.g. older workers), and casual and temporary workers.

Existing standards concern primarily the physical load on workers and should be reviewed in order to integrate new dimensions of occupational health, particularly with a view to preventing new risks. In addition, questions related to individual safety and products in the company also have non-negligible effects on individuals other than the workers, such as nearby residents and consumers who must be taken into account in an approach integrated with environmental health.

3.2. A systemic approach

Gradual implementation of an integrated management system for health, safety, environment and work requires a systemic approach with a certain level of complexity.

Although regulations encompass the actions of companies, problems of interpretation may arise and the recommendations of external experts (inspectors, auditors, occupational physicians and so on) may diverge, since the advocated methodologies are not that compatible. Except where the safety of occupational facilities and tools is threatened, prevention is rarely part of companies' strategic activities. In several areas of activity, prevention and its integration in company management are still not taken much into account and differences according to area of activity are significant [Barriat, Warrant 2004].

Risk analyses are not included in procedures and documents covering only health, safety, social work standards or environmental standards. The main standard frames of reference cover different questions. Thus, for example, ISO 14001 is related to protection of natural resources, OHSAS 18001 to health and safety, and SA 8000 to social protection of workers. These standards are permanent improvement tools and an increasing number of companies resort to them. They are also used as criteria in the selection of suppliers and subcontractors and thus encourage small companies and producers in the South to improve their environmental and social performance.

Although the new ISO 26000 standard claims to be a social responsibility standard, it has not yet been subject to many applications and requires research on its specific impact on company management systems. In addition, it cannot be used for certification purposes.

An integrated management system takes into account company culture, functional organization (trades, equipments, technology, buildings, tools) and work organization (work methods, responsibilities, polyvalence, flexibility and so on). It is based on standards, negotiation processes, and procedures which are the constituent elements of occupational health in a sustainable environment.

Management control has a pivotal role in the coherence of operational strategy at three levels:

- Direction: Some people achieve little simply because they do not know what the company expects of them. Direction is lacking when company objectives are not clearly defined. In our problem area, this would be the case if the company's priority of environmental health was not adequately communicated;
- Motivation: individual and company objectives do not always naturally coincide and may frequently cause motivational problems. Dilemmas may arise when individual objectives oppose the company's environmental, social and safety objectives as, for example, when managers are evaluated on short-term individual performance while environmental, social and safety actions are aligned with long-term strategic objectives.

- Ability: A company is sometimes faced with this kind of problem when a person knows what is expected of him and is motivated but does not correctly perform his duties because he is unable to do the work.

Bridging management sciences with ergonomics involves analysing the human factors in the company and covering both company and workers' points of view. The DEPARIS (DEpistage PArticipatif des RISques, or participatory screening of risks) is a general prevention tool which touches on different aspects of the work situation [Malchaire 2002, 2003, 2004]. It is based on the experience of the worker, who is the most familiar with the work situation. The method is willingly directed toward reflection, questioning various aspects of the work situation, as well as a concrete search for improvements. This is a general method which does not isolate any one position but, on the contrary, examines a set of job positions and their interactions. It touches on the material aspects of safety, social aspects, and psychological aspects of job satisfaction and worker well-being. Workers are evaluated on the basis of their proven abilities and intrinsic knowledge of the job.

Worker health, well-being and production is constantly adjusting itself in occupational activity [Guérin *et al.* 1997]. Thus, workers develop different strategies enabling them to take into account variability in working conditions and himself, in order to regulate and maintain a balance between his health and production. Activity can thus result in job satisfaction as well as physical and mental ailments when this regulatory process fails.

Chatigny [2001] demonstrated the limits of notion-based learning focussed exclusively on the material and technical aspects of a job. Various levels of learning must be achieved to master a job. At the first level, operational learning enables the person to become familiar with company expectations and the various persons involved as well as the means and conditions provided to perform his duties. The second level identified is the acquisition of on-the-job ease. During this period, the worker develops some sort of way of regulating his work to decrease constraints. The third level enables him to face the variability of work, incidents, and events. The margin for regulating his health and production must therefore be sufficient to be in control of the situation despite the difficulties encountered. Risks and injuries often arise in situations where strategies are not sufficiently developed to maintain a balance between health and production.

4. CHALLENGES OF SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION¹

Company and consumer responsibility must be shared in accordance with the principles of precaution and preventive action which are the basis of European environmental and consumer policy. The European policy provides for the management of environmental and health risks from the developmental or design stage of a product to its final elimination as waste. In addition, environmental and health damage must be rectified in order of priority at the source and may no longer be supported by the environment, community or taxpayer. In this context, concerted policy action between the consumer and industrial world have become indispensable

4.1. Consumer information and product policy

The area of concern of the current consumer movement has expanded to take into account the impact of production and consumption on the environment and social inequality. Ecosystem disturbances and pauperization are concerns raised by consumer organizations in consumer reports, not only in the name of economic imperatives to correct market imperfections, specify operational rules and better inform the consumer, but also in the name of social and ethical requirements. Analysis of corporate actions toward consumers, particularly communication strategies demonstrate how partnership with organizations and public authorities can encourage com-

¹ Voy. N. Fraselle, D. van Caillie, M. Lehaire, Mise en place d'une stratégie de communication et de contrôle de la qualité écologique et sociale fondée sur l'étiquetage, les indications de qualité et la force de marque pour les vêtements, les articles de sport et les voitures, Study commissioned by the EC, December 2004.

petition and emulation in the respect of higher standards as well as the implementation of significant competitive advantage.

A growing presence of values and images of health, ecology and ethics has been observed in sales practices. On the one hand consumer expectations have changed because of new environmental and social requirements. On the other hand, the rules of the game of competition have adapted around the stakes of these requirements. Several authors have said that the promotion of an image inspiring confidence, defence of a reputation, identification of new markets, differentiation by environmental and social quality, are the focus of corporate communication strategies toward consumers.

This post-modern period is clearly distinguished from the modern period. While the modern period viewed consumption as an accumulation of goods, the post-modern period is characterized by consumption through which the purchaser establishes a personal identity. According to Belk [1988], beyond the objective qualities of a product, the consumer also seeks an extension of his personality. Consumption conveys symbols and allows consumers to express values. In this context, ethics becomes a central value of the post-modern period.

According to Gavard-Perret, nothing can be done henceforth without consumer confidence and taking into account rising expectations in the area of ethics, transparency and consumer behaviour [Gavard-Perret 2000, p. 16].

Creyer and Ross [1997] have shown that there is a positive relationship between consumer preference and their perception of corporate ethics. Similarly, Brown and Dacin [1997] explain that a negative perception of corporate social behaviour negatively affects a consumer's evaluation of products. Inversely, a positive perception leads to an improved evaluation of the company and its products.

According to Hosmer [1994], when a company integrates ethics into its strategic decision-making process, it may increase the confidence and commitment of all its stakeholders, including consumers.

Maignan and Ferrell [2000] have explained how consumers who are familiar with a company's ecological and social measures share this information with others. For Hartline and Jones [1996], there is a positive relationship between the consumer's willingness to spread positive information about a company and the perception of the company in terms of value and quality by word of mouth.

Product policy raises the question of a product's environmental and social quality as it relates to consumer interest. Consumer associations are demanding relevant, verifiable, comparable information on product quality to guide consumer market choice. The associations are denouncing the great confusion surrounding labels and consumer lack of confidence in company statements.

The brakes have been put on for several reasons:

- absence of a reference point integrating ecological and social components in analyses, investigations, audits and benchmarks,
- absence of reliable information on global corporate performance;
- absence of an obligation to publish certain information (e.g. France's NRE law) and a ban on making disloyal self-declarations;
- absence of strong incentives for promoting sustainable development, acting decisively on supply and market attractiveness.

There are several hundred of quality labels in Europe. Such a plethora discredits corporate actions to advertise their values and progress to consumers. Added to this problem is the gearing down of labels for the same company or product. In addition, criteria for the attribution of labels, or the interpretation of what has been done with them, is evolving in time and space. According to Zonneveld [Chair, FLO 2001], it is necessary to enlighten consumers who suffer information overload most of the time. The European Union has expressed its willingness to reduce the number of labels and increase quality. But would it not be more convenient to invest in a company-oriented measure rather than in brand names for products or services?

According to Observateur Cetelem (Edition 2004), sustainable development is currently at the heart of corporate reflection. Several workshops are in progress. Consumers are either aware or do not really understand what it is all about, defy what could well be only deceptive communication. Sustainable development undeniably gives a sense and value. It can only contribute both confidence and sustainable consumption on behalf of the consumers of the product. How can the visibility and credibility of the underlying actions be increased? Such is the current corporate challenge for those committed to this route [Observateur Cetelem 2004, p. 31].

Le CRIOC/Centre de Recherche et d'Information des Organisations de Consommateurs (Centre for Research and Information for Consumer Organizations in Belgium) has conducted several successive surveys on consumer expectations with respect to labelling. The criteria determining the consumer's final decision at the time of purchase are price, quality (functionality, solidity), and brand confidence. The presence of a label does not change this. It therefore appears that consumers do not consider environmental and social criteria as priorities in their choice. The interest in production conditions is increasing, however. In inferior social groups the interest in the social aspects prevails, while superior social groups are particularly attached to the environment. Environmentalist consumers are aware of the absence of GMOs or additives and for them the packaging is an essential source of information. "Citizen" consumers look for products from companies with citizen behaviour. They denounce the lack of information of this topic and shortage of ethical products on the market.

For the CDO (Centrum voor Duurzame Ontwikkeling, Université de Gand) which conducted a study in 2003 on the opinions of Belgian consumers on the development of a label, 53% of the consumers were aware of the concept of sustainable development, and women were particularly interested in the subject. 75% of the consumers said they were in favour of a sustainable development label but specified the conditions: clear presentation, awareness of the development of corporate outcomes, independent control.

The overabundance of labels on the market presents unequal requirements and raise problems of relevance, verifiability and comparability. Those who, like the European Ecolabel or Belgium social label social, adhere to strictly defined standards monitored by a third party, show a real interest in changing non-sustainable means of production and consumption. By monitoring a product's life cycle throughout the production line, the system introduced a regulatory method geared to higher standards.

For consumer organizations, the involvement of public officials in label implementation gauges efficiency for consumers in several respects:

- 1) the level of protection is higher, above that established in legislation and monitoring procedures have been implemented to guarantee their effectiveness;
- 2) the measures adopted have a broader scope and take into account the aspects to which a company or industry will not necessarily willingly attach, by encompassing, for example, measures of control for suppliers and waste management;
- 3) strictly defined criteria give rise to the apposition of the same logo or diagram for a category of products.

The question of organizing controls is a major one in the context of ecological and social label. Contrary to other standards for quality, the consumer is unable to proceed with any verification whatsoever on the basis of his perception of or experience with the product. And if labels play a role in orienting demand, this cannot happen without consumer's confidence. The interest of duly verified information is therefore measured in the case of ecological and social labels.

Companies recognize that the European Ecolabel has several objectives²: to strengthen the corporate philosophy and image, have a future space, provide for long-term investment, have a niche in the market, have a pioneer role, communicate positively with stakeholders, and distin-

² Etude réalisée en Belgique par le Centre Entreprise-Environnement de l'Université de Louvain (2003–2004): Les instruments à privilégier pour un développement durable. Enquête qualitative auprès de onze organisations professionnelles.

guish itself. Principal resistance evidenced by companies is as follows: on the one hand, customers show little interest in the Ecolabel when the basic product quality is deficient and many think that a product which is better for the environment is necessarily less resistant, less effective and less valuable than another product; on the other hand, the label does not allow for positioning on a gradual scale which would promote company progress. The review takes place every three to five years, which is perceived as too quick by certain companies. Finally, the system is considered costly since a fee of 0.15% (set at the European level) on the volume of sales in the country and abroad must be paid to the label manager (HTVA price from the factory).

Companies also emphasize the devaluating impact of the label on products that are not labelled but meet high environmental standards, an argument which attests to the Ecolabel's contribution to the emergence of competitive advantage.

For certain companies, it is an elitist system that rewards the best without encouraging the others to improve. Such is the model of the energy label on household electrical appliances in the form of a diagram listing appliances from the desirable A (most energy efficient) to the least desirable G (least energy efficient). This combines all the benefits of official labelling and allows each company to become part of a dynamic of progress. In addition, the information provided to consumers is easily understood.

However, companies are keeping their guard up and denouncing quite a few public initiatives because they do not meet the internal constraints. The result is that labelled products are limited to niche markets, accessible only to a small segment of consumers who are convinced and rather privileged. Evolution toward mass markets requires double action aimed at increasing the supply and market share of labelled products.

A European approach to labels is necessary for a convergence of measures toward the realization of a broader, more open and competitive market. More specifically, a harmonized European-level labelling strategy would avoid overburdening commercial and administrative management in companies with a counter-productive multiplication of labels. It would save companies from having to conform to as many specifications as labels on the market and consequently help decrease certification costs.

4.2. Toward European labelling?

There is currently no tool integrating all the parameters of sustainable consumption. There are, however, elements allowing for the initial stages of development of environmental and social quality reference. In France, the NRE law compels companies listed on the Stock Exchange to publish an annual report on their sustainable development policy. This report contains indicators established on the basis of the "Global Report Initiative" of American origin. In Belgium, a social label is granted to companies for products or services respecting the minimal rules of the ILO. In Europe, there is an official label, the Ecolabel, certifying products for their environmental quality. In addition, the European Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) allows for certification of companies that adopt an eco-management system and meet certain levels of performance.

It is also known that a product procedure is easily understood by consumers but it corresponds only to case by case initiatives, for only a few products or services and allows companies to break away from a responsibility touching on culture, management methods and all their activities. In addition, not all product families are certifiable. A company process integrates all the environmental and social quality criteria; it is better able to fit in with a global sustainable development process. These elements plead in favour of a company form since it would be more accessible to small companies; respect of the product references in the European Ecolabel is fastidious. However, evaluation criteria should be comparable and the procedure made visible to consumers.

A voluntary European labelling policy for ecological and social quality has become indispensable. It would give rise to a new QES standard. This policy should hinge on the following recommendations: limit environmental or social self-declarations to measures validated by offi-

cial certification procedures; be based on existing tools, and be in the appropriate condition or undergoing improvement (NRE law, Belgian social label, European Ecolabel, Global Compact, SA8000, EMAS, GRI, and so on); integrate the two complementary "product" and "corporate" measures resulting in the development of simple, relevant signs recognizable to the European general public because of strong institutional communication.

Following the energy-efficient labeling model for household appliances, the label could have a diagram or pointer classifying the product by color or stars. The diagram would consist of two pointers, one attesting to product quality, the other to its social quality.

If a double value scale or QES pointer positions the company at a particular ecological or social level, companies that obtain an adequate score and are involved in a continuous development and improvement plan in the area of sustainable development could receive a European "Progress toward Sustainable Development label". This label would be authorized for all their products or services.

This communication strategy is aimed at meeting the following four conditions:

Value added

The system guarantees value added in relation to legal provisions.

Verifiability

Respect for the QES standard is subject to external monitoring by an independent body.

Visibility

The system is easily accessible, identifiable and comprehensible to the consumer.

Viability

The system is inspired by experiences already existing while at the same time meeting the criticism.

The proposed system is also a management control tool for companies.

To describe the notion of control, Anthony and Govindarajan [1998] compare an organization to an automobile; the driver uses, for example, the steering wheel to change direction. The steering wheel is thus an instrument for controlling the vehicle. The same is true of a company. Its managers use a set of control and directional tools necessary for leading it wherever they wish.

Every control system is at minimum defined by the combined presence of four elements:

1. A detection device providing information on what is actually happening in the monitoring system. The QES pointer plays a detective role as it is the tool which conveys the social and environmental commitment of companies.
2. An assessor/expert who compares this information with a certain reference standard or objectives to be attained. It compares the actual situation with the desired situation. In the case of the cursor, there are two experts, an internal assessor, the company's quality control officer who determines the cursor level, and an external assessor who monitors the position of the cursor and gives it credibility.
3. An effector who modifies the adopted behavior if necessary as indicated by the assessor.
4. A communication network which allows for circulation of information between the detector and the assessor as well as between the assessor and the effector.

Once the company has informed the consumer of the ecological and social quality of its products, it can measure the impact of this information on the market based on whether the consumer decides to make a purchase. In order for the cursor to be efficient, it must transmit a "good signal" to the consumer. The underlying principle of the signal theory is as follows. In a transaction between two or more players (which we will refer to here as the vendor and the purchaser) the party who is best informed on the object of the transaction (the vendor) sends a signal to the least informed party (the purchaser). This signal must allow the vendor to distinguish his offer from that of current competitors in the market and reduce the asymmetry of information between vendor and purchaser regarding the exact quality of the product and its features.

The vendor has information on the object of the transaction which is not observable by the purchaser (particularly on the conditions and circumstances in which the good was produced). The signals are the actions taken by the vendor to transmit observable information to the purchaser and thus modify his beliefs about the object of the transaction. In fact, companies displaying their environmental and social concerns do not necessarily obtain the anticipated consumer response. A purchase decision is influenced by other factors. Thus, according to Hannah Jones, Nike's Director of Corporate Responsibility for the European region, the idea that these products would be more expensive, less interesting from a design point of view or less effective than the others remains fixed in the minds of certain reticent consumers. The signal sent by companies may then contribute to modifying these beliefs. It must inspire consumer confidence and allow the company to differentiate itself from its competitors.

To make a characteristic observable, the vendor ("signaler") sends a signal to the consumer ("receiver"). According to Spence's theory [1974], a signal is observable, modifiable information that must meet three particular requirements: it must be true, non manipulable and controllable. The QES cursor provides true information validated by internal and external audit, as well as by the recognition of public authorities. The cursor should be based on a QES reference; it would therefore be part of a strict framework which provides non manipulable information. A monitoring procedure is provided by an impartial, external third party; the information would therefore be verifiable since it is subject to the external monitoring of an independent body.

The investments involved are generally such that it would be too costly for a company manufacturing low quality products to send the same signal as a producer of superior quality products. Thus, a good signal is only accessible to the latter. A simple oral communication for promotional purposes is a bad signal since it may be used by all market participants. It does not allow the purchaser to distinguish between vendors offering low quality products from those offering high quality products.

4.3. Communication risks

"It is important that a society not be on the front page of the newspaper." *Such is the opinion of several companies regarding their relations with the media.*

Many companies hesitate to communicate their ethical commitments since those who do so the most are exposed to criticism. In addition, the potential weaknesses of a company influence public attitude to a stronger extent than when there is a positive influence from ethical advances.

Sustainable development has become unavoidable. Certainly the ecological and social quality of products and services is of considerable and increasing consumer interest but it does not yet represent a criterion determining choice in the market. Although a company's ethical position does not directly influence a purchase decision, the existence of an influence on the process of consumption can not be denied. A negative perception of a company's behavior has harmful consequences on consumer evaluation of its products; a positive perception produces an improvement in the evaluation of the company and finally its products. The signal theory shows that true, verifiable, non manipulable communication has more benefits than risks.

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Słowa kluczowe: społeczeństwo, rozwój zrównoważony, zarządzanie zdrowiem

STRESZCZENIE

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