

Article

Implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility Environmental Actions in Comparison of Small, Medium, and Large Enterprises in the Slovak Republic

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Abstract: Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been a highly debated topic in recent years. The aim of this approach is to achieve sustainability through three basic pillars: the economic, social, and environmental. Today, corporate environmental responsibility is coming to the fore with the aim of solving global and regional environmental issues. An important aspect of the study was to identify the influence of the size of a company on the involvement in CSR. The results of the study suggest the potential impact of the legislative obligation to disclose non-financial information (CSR activities) on involvement in CSR, where only large companies have this obligation. No study has been conducted in the Slovak Republic on the impact of the size parameter of a company on CSR activities in the environmental area comparing small, medium, and large enterprises. The findings also indicate differences between the approach companies take to global and regional environmental issues, showing that companies are more involved with regional environmental issues. This paper adds to the literature on the issues of sustainability, corporate social behaviors, and the environmental access of companies of different sizes. The research showed the highest involvement in CSR activities in the field of ecology in large companies, which creates the need for further research with regard to possible legislative changes, with the possibility of extending the mandatory reports of CSR activities to small- and medium-sized enterprises.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility; CSR; society; environment; Slovak Republic



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1. Introduction

An emphasis on Corporate social responsibility (CSR) can be considered a modern feature of corporate governance in the developed world, not only in large enterprises but also in small- or medium-sized businesses [1]. In the so-called Green Paper of 2001, the European Commission also describes CSR as a “concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis” [2]. It should be understood that the objective and primary function of a company is not only profit maximization, a company's success should also be measured by indicators reflecting the relationship that companies have and maintain with their stakeholders; in other words, companies should also assume a certain level of social and environmental responsibility [3,4].

It is possible to agree with the argument that successful firms balance their economic and social objectives by integrating social concerns into their corporate strategies [5]. Presently, CSR is also increasingly accepted as an indicator of a company's success and contributes to achieving sustainable development, and the right environmental approach can improve firms' benefits beyond CSR [6]. Companies increasingly see their environmental activities as a means to improve their image or to enhance their competitive advantage through environmental activities [7,8]. Additionally, directly related to these activities is the fact that companies are increasingly seeking to acquire a certification in their environmental

management as a strategy to tackle environmental and ecological challenges not only within the company but in their surroundings as well [9]. This paper examines CSR in Slovak companies, where CSR is strongly affected not only by historical developments but, above all, by the European Union and its understanding of CSR [2]. Priority research presented in this paper aims at identifying different approaches to tackle environmental issues in Slovak companies for the purpose of establishing the fact whether these approaches differ depending on the size of the company.

In the European Union, companies are divided into small, medium, and large enterprises according to the number of employees, based on Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC [10]. The size of the firm is key, especially in light of the amendment to the Slovak Republic National Council Accounting Act 130/2015 [11] adopted in line with Directive 2014/95/EU [12] on the disclosure of non-financial information, i.e., the disclosure of CSR activities. In the Slovak Republic, no study on the relationship between the size of a company and its CSR activities has been made, since all studies made so far only dealt with large companies due to publicly disclosed data [13–15].

This paper shows the impact of the company's size on the degree of its CSR activities, with large companies being shown to engage to the highest degree compared to medium and small enterprises, which do not need to observe the statutory duty.

In addition, this paper also establishes the fact that companies care more about building a reputation in the region where they operate—as the questionnaire survey of employees shows (Appendix A)—the companies are more focused on the region of their operation than on company-wide CSR activities. This clearly implies that companies also strive for good relations with regional stakeholders.

The study is further divided into theoretical backgrounds from which the research questions and hypotheses were created. The next chapter consists of the research methodology dealing with the way the research was conducted and the statistical methods used to evaluate the questionnaire survey. This is followed by a more in-depth discussion, and the conclusion includes a summary of the study contributions and implications suggested for further research.

2. Theoretical Background

The Environmental Performance Index (EPI) [16] ranks 180 countries according to their environmental performance. The Slovak Republic ranked 17th in 2007 but 26th in 2020 [17,18], due to lacking in habitat and air quality, as well as in the level of environmental burdens [17,19], and poor recycling rates. Tackling the environmental issue is therefore becoming highly topical in the Slovak Republic.

The Ministry of Investment, Regional Development, and Informatization of the Slovak Republic—using the strategic document “Vision and Strategy for the Development of Slovakia until 2030—Long-Term Strategy for the Sustainable Development of the Slovak Republic” [20]—introduced the basic implementation document for the implementation of the national priorities “Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development”. The basic priorities and objectives include key areas of development, namely the protection and development of resources, their sustainable use, and community development [20]. The strategy builds on EC Communication 15011/18, A Clean Planet for All [21], where a climate-neutral economy is a key objective of the EU-wide strategy. Another important directive is COM(2019)22 [22], which defines the basic environmental and sustainable development policies. COM(2019)232 [23] is another strategic document forming the platform for the creation and codification of the European Green Deal [24], which imposes global green strategic areas and targets, such as clean and affordable energy supply, a clean and circular economy, construction using efficient use of energy and resources, the ambition of a zero-pollution and non-toxic environment, maintaining and improving air quality, preserving biodiversity and ecosystems, a green food system, sustainable and smart mobility, and the implementation of sustainability in all EU policies. In implementing the Agenda 2030, the Slovak Government has committed to shifting toward an environmentally sustainable

economy and sustainable population centers, regions, and the country vis-a-vis climate changes as part of the six national priorities [25,26].

Agenda 2030 aims at regulating regional environmental measures by modifying the existing legal regulation under Act 539/2008 Coll [27], Regional Development Support. Among the regional environmental measures in the field of ensuring efficient and sustainable management of natural resources, the Slovak Republic aims to ensure the protection and restoration of natural resources also in the face of climate change [28], reduction of greenhouse gases and emissions as well as the amount of landfilled municipal waste in the regions, reduction of the degree of organic fertilizers, and increase the acidification of agricultural soils in the regions. Construction designs should aim to incorporate geological factors and protection of surface and underground water as well as reduce the level of pollution of surface and underground water [29], gradually restore water bodies, prevent pollution of regional waters and habitats, and protect biodiversity [30]. Increasing the areas with organic agricultural production is another key objective. It also includes the promotion of suitable environmental technologies in agriculture and forestry and the achievement of many other regional environmental objectives [31].

The father of corporate social responsibility is considered to be Bowen [32], who theoretically established the concept of corporate social responsibility [33] when corporate social responsibility activities ceased to be seen as philanthropy but a firm's orientation toward values and goals with strong importance given to stakeholders' expectations. Expanding activism in the second half of the 20th century in the US gave rise to movements protecting women's rights, employee rights, human rights, and customer rights, as well as environmental movements leading to the stipulation of environmental CSR activities [34]. In the 1970s and 1980s, urban decay and pollution in the US created pressure to adopt environmental CSR activities as well as pressure to make companies disclose their CSR activities [35]. In 1970, the first Earth Day event was observed [36] and was a result of the deteriorating environment and air quality due to industrial development, which caused mass protests in the US. The protests were accompanied by the release of the book "The Silent Spring", which sold over half a million copies and brought forth environmental issues and the associated deterioration of the health of the population [37,38]. After strong public pressure, several environmental and ecological institutes—Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [39], Committee for Economic Development (CED) [40]—were established in the US, which had an impact on the environmental CSR activities. In 1968, the Club of Rome was founded by the Italian entrepreneur Peccei, which brought together the scientific community with social and business individuals. They brought together the worlds of science, business, and industry, and the main objective was to produce global forecasts focusing on environmental threats to humanity [41]. In 1988, the United Nations (UN) with the adoption of the Montreal Protocol [42] created the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) [43], which provided another platform to focus CSR activities on environmental challenges [44].

Globalization in the 1990s had a significant impact on the spread of corporate social responsibility ideas in the countries of the European Union and contributed to building the foundations of the environmental political agenda. The European Environment Agency was established [45] was established in 1990 and the "United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change" (UNFCCC) [46] in 1992, wherein Caroll [47] formulates a positive impact of the creation of political structures on the environmental CSR activities of companies. The European Union now defines CSR as "a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis" [2]. In 2015, although the European Commission stated that CSR is a voluntary matter for companies, governments can also play an important role in promoting CSR activities of companies on social and environmental issues through policy mandates and regulations [48].

A new perspective on CSR has been brought about by the concept of the "Triple Bottom Line", the aim of which is to achieve sustainability using three basic pillars: the economic,

social, and environmental [49]. Social responsibility mainly deals with the sharing of profits by companies and their partial return to society, while the environmental area mainly emphasizes environmental protection and responsibility with an appeal to a sustainable ecosystem [50,51].

The Triple Bottom Line theory has been further developed by other authors [52–54]. Important authors who have contributed to CSR also include Wood [55], who theorized in their work that the basic idea of CSR is that business and society are interrelated entities, and therefore, society has certain expectations about business conduct and outcomes.

Based on the theoretical background, this paper sets the research objective as follows:

RQ 1. *Does the company implement CSR activities to tackle global environmental challenges?*

A significant shift in the view of CSR was brought about by the work of Freeman [56], which laid the foundation for perceiving the need for CSR activities with a focus on stakeholders. Many authors emphasize the positive impact of the cooperation of external stakeholders, such as customers or owners, and naturally employees as one of the most important internal stakeholder groups [57,58]. Similarly, stakeholder participation promotes responsible behavior in organizations within their environment [59].

As experience shows, companies are increasingly under pressure from many stakeholders to meet their social as well as environmental responsibilities. In addition, this does not apply to large multinational companies only but to smaller companies as well in recent years [60]. In the same way, studies indicate a positive synergy between CSR and the customers' perceptions toward companies [61].

A very significant shift in the perception of CSR can be attributed to CSR importance for gaining a strategic advantage [1] and the related fact that CSR is now quite commonly considered to be an integral part of corporate strategy [62–65]. CSR initiatives are currently perceived to be beneficial not only to the local community and society as a whole but most importantly to the environmental framework of companies. By placing an emphasis on the reputation of companies through their ethical behavior, which primarily includes integrity in dealing with stakeholders, it is possible to improve the overall strategic performance of companies and the entire society as a whole [66]. A fourth dimension—philanthropy—is added to the widely accepted responsibilities associated with economic prosperity, social cohesion, and environmental sustainability [1,67]. Przytuła [13] states that corporate social responsibility is also increasingly important in terms of the ability to ensure sustainable development and create a better market position [68,69]. Such practices are assumed to be voluntary in nature, directly related to business ethics, and go beyond current legislation [70–72]. Therefore, the voluntary nature of the CSR paradigm of beyond legislation should be emphasized. Companies are responsible for their activities within the social fabric where they operate and create long-term value to ensure survival [73,74].

Since the concept of stakeholders in CSR activities of companies mainly focuses on internal and external stakeholders, the research study sets a second research objective based on the theoretical background as follows:

RQ 2: *Does the company implement CSR activities to tackle regional environmental challenges in the region of its operation?*

The division of companies into small, medium, and large is defined by the European Commission Recommendation 2003/361 EC [10], which divides enterprises according to size into micro, small, medium, and large enterprises. Micro enterprises are therein defined as those that have a maximum of 10 employees with an annual turnover and/or total annual balance sheet of up to EUR 2 million. Small enterprises are defined as those that have a maximum of 59 employees with an annual turnover and/or total annual balance sheet of up to EUR 10 million. Medium-sized enterprises have up to 250 employees and an annual turnover and/or total annual balance sheet of up to EUR 50 million. Companies exceeding these values are considered to be large enterprises. In this paper, we merged micro and small enterprises into a single category.

Company size has also been taken into account in several research studies that dealt with the issue of CSR activities with respect to the company's size [75–77]. The size of a company is also inevitably linked to the strength thereof and its ability to finance CSR activities [78]. Previous research showed that environmental CSR activities require such resources [79]. Similarly, the need of large companies to make their activities visible to stakeholders also improves CSR activities to a greater extent [80]. This is because large companies have higher financial as well as human capital, so they can tackle environmental issues to a greater extent than smaller companies with lower either human or financial resources [79]. The need to record labor activity in large companies also leads to higher involvement in CSR activities [81].

The duty of large companies to report non-financial activities also leads to increased stakeholder pressure on CSR [80]. The relationship of mandatory reporting with CSR was also dealt with by Ullman as early as 1985 [82]. The European Union, through Directive 2014/95/EU [12] on the disclosure of non-financial information, requires large public-interest companies with more than 500 employees to disclose annual reports on the company CSR activities. The Slovak Republic has implemented the directive into the national legislation by the amendment to SRNC Accounting Act 130/2015 [83], which mandates large public-interest entities to disclose CSR activities, i.e., non-financial information. Research on the impact of the company's size has not yet been extensively conducted in the Slovak Republic, since the previous research focused on large companies [84–86] or small and medium companies, but never both [87–89].

From the theoretical background and the need that arose with regard to the research conducted so far in the Slovak Republic, the following hypotheses were put forward:

Null Hypothesis (H0). *The ranking mean values in all independent samples are equal, and the qualitative factor has no statistically relevant effect on the dependent variable.*

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *We hypothesize that the most statistically significant difference between the size of a company and CSR activities at the global environmental level can be seen when comparing small and large enterprises.*

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *We hypothesize that the most statistically significant difference between the size of a company and CSR activities at the regional environmental level where it operates can be seen when comparing small and large enterprises.*

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *We hypothesize that the best employee scores in CSR activities of companies at the global environmental level are achieved by large enterprises, followed by medium enterprises, and lastly small enterprises.*

Hypothesis 4 (H4). *We hypothesize that the best employee scores in CSR activities of companies at the regional environmental level are achieved by large enterprises, followed by medium enterprises, and lastly small enterprises.*

3. Materials and Methods

The research study is based on data collected through a questionnaire survey. Before conducting the research, we analyzed various secondary data. This mainly involved theoretical research of the topic in the national and international literature. To conduct the quantitative empirical research, we chose the basic method of a questionnaire survey. The survey was carried out in the Slovak Republic between 2020-09 and 2021-10 and surveys were distributed to a random sample of 8890 enterprises. Only one respondent per enterprise was included in the sample. The respondent in charge of the company's operations or authorized by the company's management participated in the survey. Relevant information on the companies was taken from the CRIBIS database. Respondents were contacted by email using an online form on the Google platform. The questionnaire consisted of 33 structured (selective, alternative, and closed) questions divided into two main parts, where the

first part investigated the basic characteristics of the respondent and the company, which also supported the relevance of the data of the CRIBIS database and the economic company parameters of the FINSTAT databases. The first part of the questionnaire gathered information on the industry, the number of employees, annual turnover, and the local area of the respondent. The second part of the questionnaire was directly related to environmental issues; only the part of the research related to environmental issues is dealt with only by this paper, due to the breadth of the issue. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale (1–5): never, rarely, often, mostly, almost always. We received a total of 544 fully completed questionnaires. The completed questionnaires were saved and encrypted to ensure the anonymity of individual respondents' data.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the economic characteristics of companies, which led to their division into small, medium, and large enterprises. Several descriptive statistics parameters were calculated, such as mean, standard deviation, frequency, and minimum and maximum scores. The Shapiro–Wilk test was used to test the dataset for data normality. Given the fact that the results of this test show a significant deviation from normality with regard to environmental challenges in the region $W(1084) = 0.745$, $p < 0.001$ and with regard to environmental challenges in society $W(1088) = 0.773$, $p < 0.001$ (a significant deviation) from normality, it can be concluded that data were not distributed normally [90]. The Kruskal–Wallis test, which is the non-parametric equivalent of a one-way analysis of variance, was used to analyze the data available. It was used to test whether selected factors significantly affect the values of individual measures [91].

Due to the fact that the data in this study did not meet the assumption of normal distribution and homogeneity of variance; we chose the non-parametric Kruskal–Wallis test for the follow-up analysis. This test is a non-parametric technique; but it is as efficient as parametric methods [92]. The dataset was analyzed using SAS 9.3 statistical software and the Kruskal–Wallis test, the Pearson Chi-squared test, and the DSCF post-hoc multiple comparison test. The Kruskal–Wallis test uses the null hypothesis in the analysis where the medians of all groups are identical and the following holds:

$$H_0 : F(x_1) = F(x_2) = \dots = F(x_k). \quad (1)$$

The statistical hypothesis H_0 confirms that the ranking mean values in all independent samples are equal. This means that the distribution functions of the individual samples match, i.e., the qualitative factor has no statistically relevant impact on the dependent variable. The qualitative factor is the size of the enterprise.

The statistical hypothesis H_1 implies that at least one distribution function is different from the others. In other words, at least one pair of samples exist whose means are not equal, and the qualitative factor has a statistically relevant impact on the dependent variable. The Kruskal–Wallis test compares the median of more than two independent sample sets to see if they differ [90,91]. The Kruskal–Wallis test is a non-parametric alternative to the one-way analysis of variance between subjects (ANOVA) [93]. To calculate the Kruskal–Wallis H-test statistics, we used the following formula [94,95]:

$$H = \frac{12}{N(N+1)} \sum_{i=1}^C \frac{R_i^2}{n_i} - 3(N+1), \quad (2)$$

where:

- N is the number of observations in all classes,
- R_i is the sum of the ranks in the i th class,
- C is the number of classes,
- and the n_i is the number of observations in the i th class.

This paper was mainly aimed at confirming or refuting the statistical hypothesis, and a statistically significant effect will be determined by the value of the calculated probability

p-value. If the value is less than 0.05, it will be construed as a statistically relevant impact of the qualitative factor on the dependent variable (a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ was set).

The statistical hypothesis H_0 confirms that the ranking mean values in all independent samples are equal. This means that the distribution functions of the individual samples match, i.e., the qualitative factor, has no statistical relevant impact on the dependent variable. Thus, it can be concluded that the size of a company size does not affect the degree of CSR activities of the company.

If the value of the calculated probability *p*-value is less than 0.05, the post-hoc tests of contrasts, i.e., the Dwass–Steel–Critchlow–Fligner test, are used. The qualitative factors are CSR activities in terms of global environmental challenges and CSR activities in terms of regional environmental challenges where the company operates. The size of the companies constitutes the independent variables, which are scaled into small, medium, and large enterprises according to the number of employees. In line with Recommendation 2003/361/EC, the number of employees parameter is one of the most important criteria and as such we have chosen it as a sorting parameter to determine the size of the company [10]. As part of our research, we also examined the turnover of the company, and we found that turnover information corresponds to the classification of companies according to the number of employees, i.e., 53% of respondents have an annual turnover of less than EUR 1 million, 20.2% have a turnover of up to EUR 10 million, and 12.9% of enterprises report an annual turnover of up to EUR 43 million, 13.6% report a turnover of more than EUR 43 million. The research sample is indicated in the following table.

As shown in Table 1, the research sample covers the full spectrum of enterprises. 56.3% of respondents representing small companies, 23.5% of respondents representing medium companies, and 20.2% of respondents from large companies participated in the questionnaire survey. The descriptive statistics of the issues under study can be seen in Table 2.

Table 1. Research sample identification.

Size of Company	Number of Employees	N	Relative Frequency	Cumulative Frequency
Small	49 and less	306	56.3%	56.3%
Medium	50 to 249	128	23.5%	79.8%
Big	250 and more	110	20.2%	100%
Together	Together	544	100.0%	

Table 2. Studied corporate social responsibility descriptive statistics.

	Mean	Min	Max	SD	Variance	Skewness	Kurtosis
CSR from the perspective of ecological issues in the region	4.069853	1	5	1.086096	1.179604	−0.92294	−0.15816
CSR from the perspective of ecological issues in the company	3.496324	1	5	1.279985	1.638363	−0.40656	−0.91741

The methods applied herein allowed us to verify whether the application of CSR principles differs between global environmental challenges and environmental challenges of the region where the company operates. The paper gives an important insight into different CSR approaches of companies depending on their size both from global and regional perspectives.

4. Results

The results showing the respondents' attitudes toward global environmental CSR challenges depending on the size of the company are shown in the following figure.

Following the results shown in Figure 1, it is clear that the attitude in small, medium, and large companies shows an oscillation within the mean values. Therefore, it can be

concluded that the perception of the level of involvement of companies in tackling global environmental challenges can be considered “high” to “very high”. This was 51.6% with small businesses and up to 59.4% with medium businesses. The situation is somewhat different with large enterprises, where the results indicate that the respondents perceive their organization’s involvement in global environmental issues of society to be only as low as 49.1%. This is also supported when we look at the lower end of the involvement category, “very low” or “low”, wherein large companies reached a 35.5% value in contrast with the 23.6% average value of all companies. The research shows that in the end, the best scores were achieved by medium enterprises, then small enterprises, and lastly large enterprises. Thus, it can be concluded that Hypothesis 3 is invalid, in which we hypothesized that the best employee scores in CSR activities of companies on the global environmental level will be achieved by large enterprises, followed by medium enterprises, and lastly small enterprises. Hypothesis 3 has, therefore, been disproved. In testing the statistical hypotheses, the following table represents the results:

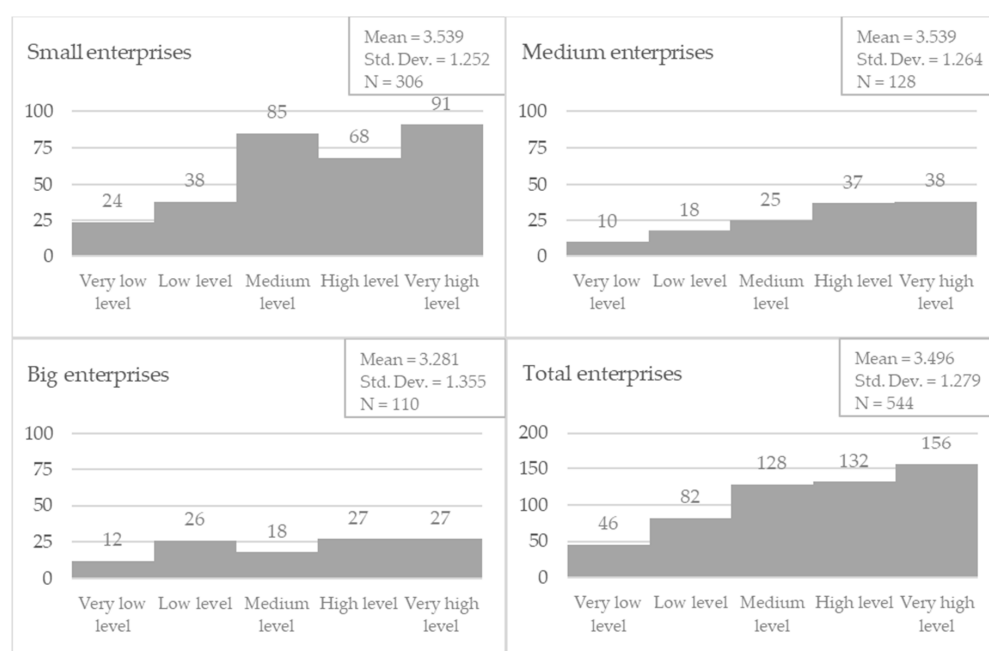


Figure 1. Degree of CSR activities to tackle global environmental challenges according to the size of the company.

As can be seen from Table 3 below, the impact of the number of employees on the perception of CSR activities of the company vis-a-vis global environmental challenges is insignificant, and the existence of a statistically significant impact is not confirmed because the p -value is greater than 0.05. The statistical hypothesis H_0 is confirmed, i.e., the ranking mean values in all independent samples are equal, and the qualitative factor has no statistically relevant effect on the dependent variable. Contract tests were used to illustrate the individual dependencies, which are shown in the Table 4.

Table 3. Wilcoxon scores and Kruskal–Wallis test of CSR activities of companies for tackling global environmental issues.

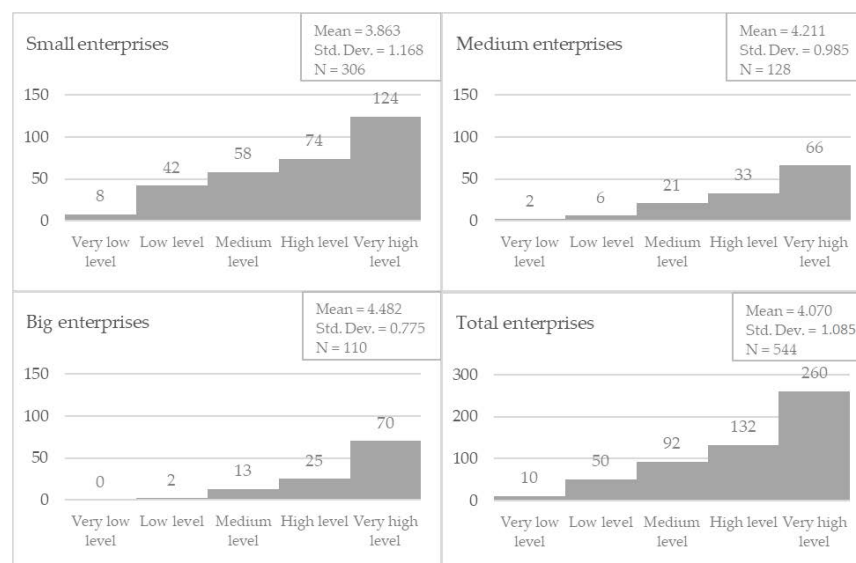
Wilcoxon Scores (Rank Sums) for Variable CSR_Eco Classified by Variable Company_Size					
Company Size	N	Sum of Scores	Expected Under H0	Std Dev Under H0	Mean Score
1	306	21128.0	20884.50	625.671105	138.091503
2	128	9191.0	8736.00	534.993564	143.609375
3	110	6809.0	7507.50	506.568423	123.800000
Average scores were used for ties.					
Kruskal-Wallis Test					
Chi-Square	2.1363				
DF	2				
Pr > Chi-Square	0.3437				

Table 4. Dwass–Steel–Critchlow–Fligner (DSCF) test of CSR activities of companies for tackling global environmental issues.

Pairwise Two-Sided Multiple Comparison Analysis Dwass–Steel–Critchlow–Fligner Method Variable: CSR_Eco			
Company Size	Wilcoxon Z	DSCF Value	Pr > DSCF
1 vs. 2	−0.5024	0.7105	0.8701
1 vs. 3	1.2058	1.7052	0.4497
2 vs. 3	1.3668	1.9329	0.3585

Although the evaluation of the Kruskal–Wallis test did not confirm that the influence of the classification factor was statistically significant, it was nevertheless necessary for the research to use the DSCF test to show whether the largest differences were observed between small and large enterprises, between small and medium enterprises, or between large and medium enterprises. The results show that the most significant difference, albeit not statistically significant, is between medium and large enterprises. Thus, we can conclude that Hypothesis 1 is invalid and so is the assumption that the most statistically significant difference is between small and large enterprises.

As part of the research, in addition to the study of CSR activities of companies from the perspective of global environmental challenges, attention was also given to the issue of CSR activities of companies from the perspective of the environmental challenges of the region in which they operate. The results thereof are shown in Figure 2:

**Figure 2.** Degree of CSR activities to tackle environmental challenges in the region of their operation according to the size of the company.

When assessing the social responsibility of companies vis-a-vis the region where they operate, large enterprises ranked first according to the evaluation of their respondents. It is possible to observe a significant positive shift for all categories of enterprises compared to the assessment of CSR in terms of the global environment. With regard to the results of large enterprises, we can conclude that “very high” and “high” involvement of companies in CSR activities in the region represent up to 86.37% of all responses. Medium enterprises also performed very well, with respondents reporting ‘very high’ or ‘high’ ratings in 77.34% of cases with regard to the involvement of companies in regional environmental CSR activities. In small enterprises, the results were equally encouraging, when 64.7% of respondents selected one of these options. On the other end of the spectrum, i.e., “very low” and “low” degrees of CSR involvement of companies in regional environmental issues, the respondents rated large enterprises to be the best with only 1.82% ratio of “very low” or “low” answers. The results, therefore, confirm Hypothesis 4, i.e., employees ranked large enterprises to be the best when it comes to regional environmental CSR activities, followed by medium enterprises, and small enterprises. In testing the statistical hypotheses, Table 5 represents the results:

Table 5. Wilcoxon Scores and Kruskal-Wallis test of CSR activities of companies for tackling regional environmental issues.

Wilcoxon Scores (Rank Sums) for Variable CSR_Eco_Reg Classified by Variable Company_Size					
Company Size	N	Sum of Scores	Expected Under H0	Std Dev Under H0	Mean Score
1	306	18858.0	20884.50	600.622638	123.254902
2	128	9147.0	8736.00	513.575332	142.921875
3	110	9123.0	7507.50	486.288179	165.872727
Average scores were used for ties.					
Kruskal-Wallis Test					
Chi-Square	14.2749				
DF	2				
Pr > Chi-Square	0.0008				

Table 5 confirms the existence of a statistically significant effect of the size factor of companies on their CSR involvement in regional environmental issues, since the p -value is less than 0.05. Thus, the statistical hypothesis H1 is confirmed that at least one distribution function is different from the others. In other words, at least one pair of samples exist whose means are not equal, and the qualitative factor has a statistically relevant impact on the dependent variable. Since the Kruskal–Wallis test confirmed that the effect of the classification factor was statistically significant, it was necessary to use the DSCF test of contrasts, which clearly showed that the answers of respondents differed according to the company size-independent variable. Table 6 shows the tests of contrasts:

Table 6. Dwass–Steel–Critchlow–Fligner (DSCF) test of CSR activities of companies for tackling regional environmental issues.

Pairwise Two-Sided Multiple Comparison Analysis Dwass–Steel–Critchlow–Fligner Method Variable: CSR_Eco_Reg			
Company Size	Wilcoxon Z	DSCF Value	Pr > DSCF
1 vs. 2	−1.8050	2.5527	0.1679
1 vs. 3	−3.6440	5.1534	0.0008
2 vs. 3	−1.8489	2.6148	0.1539

As the results show, the most significant difference is represented by the attitudes of employees in small and large enterprises. It can also be concluded that CSR involvement in regional environmental issues is perceived highly positively regardless of the size of the company. Indeed, negative perceptions of this area of CSR activities are very low. It only remains to be stated that all companies not only scored the best in the assessment of CSR activities with regard to regional environmental issues but also reported the lowest ratio of complete dissatisfaction among respondents in this area.

Similarly, we can conclude that Hypothesis 2 is valid since the assumption that the most statistically significant difference is between small and large enterprises has been proven correct.

5. Discussion

The paper discusses the relationship between the size of companies and their involvement in environmental CSR activities from a global and regional perspective in comparison to small, medium, and large enterprises. The global perspective is construed as strategic government programs, especially the global “Recovery Plan”, which sets the following strategic objectives (SO) [31]:

- SC1 Halt Biodiversity Loss
- SC2 Reform State Institutions for Nature Conservation
- SC3 Develop and Apply Integrated Landscape Conservation Concept
- SC4 Prevent and Mitigate Climate Change Impacts by Protecting Ecosystems and Their Services
- SC5 Increase the Use of Green Measures in Flood Protection
- SC6 Retain Water in the Landscape

We consider all environmental management activities focused on the region where the company operates to be regional environmental activities. From the environmental sustainability perspective, the pressure primarily comes from external stakeholders, and companies are often forced under this pressure to integrate environmental management into their operations [96]. As it turns out, the environmental management system can be a tool whereby companies can respond to the internationalization of environmental issues and present their positive approaches toward sustainability vis-a-vis the stakeholders [97,98]. That is why it is necessary to demand that company managers define ways and means for companies to become more socially responsible and especially environmentally sustainable [69,99].

The main objectives of the study were to determine whether companies in the Slovak Republic carry out activities that can be understood to be CSR activities (activities beyond the legal duty) in the areas aimed at improving the environment from global and regional perspectives. The research has shown that the perception of employees with regard to the company’s involvement in global environmental CSR activities does not differ statistically enough between different company sizes, which suggests that the perception of global environmental issues is similar, affecting their engagement in this area as well. The study set out four hypotheses, each taking into account the impact of the company’s size on CSR activities. Two hypotheses focused on the CSR activities of companies from a global environmental perspective. Hypothesis 1, wherein we assumed that the most statistically significant difference between the size of a company and CSR activities at the global environmental level will be seen when comparing small and large enterprises. This hypothesis was not supported as the research showed that no statistically significant differences exist between different company sizes as regards to CSR activities.

Hypothesis 3 assumed that the best employee scores in CSR activities of companies at the global environmental level will be achieved by large enterprises, followed by medium enterprises, and lastly small enterprises. This hypothesis was refuted as well because as the results of the evaluation of small, medium, and large enterprises show, the predominant answer of employees is “always” 29.4% in small enterprises, 31.3% in medium enterprises,

and 23.6% in large enterprises. The lowest number of respondents are inclined to the opposite assessment, i.e., that companies never engage with global environmental issues.

With regard to regional environmental CSR activities, we set two hypotheses in the study.

Hypothesis 2 assumed that the most statistically significant difference between the size of a company and CSR activities at the regional environmental level where it operates will be seen when comparing small and large enterprises. The research showed that we can confirm this hypothesis. We can also confirm Hypothesis 4, which assumed that the best employee scores in CSR activities of companies at the regional environmental level will be achieved by large enterprises, followed by medium enterprises, and lastly small enterprises. In response to the questions as to whether the company applies CSR activities to tackle regional environmental challenges, the answer “always” and “very often” was reported in large companies in 86.37% of cases, medium companies in 77.34% of cases, and small companies in 64.7% of cases. Thus, we can unambiguously confirm that large enterprises ranked first, followed by medium enterprises, and then small enterprises.

However, the results also showed that companies are less committed to global environmental issues than they are to regional environmental issues in their own place of operation. The results of the respondents’ assessment of regional CSR engagement were significantly better, and the statistically significant effect of the company’s size on the degree of engagement in tackling regional environmental issues was confirmed. The research showed that the perception gap in small businesses lies in the answer that the company “always” engages in regional environmental issues in 11.1% of cases more than in global environmental issues. In medium enterprises, this value was 18.7%, and in large enterprises, this value was as high as 41.9%.

Thus, the research objectives of the study answered two basic research questions, i.e., whether the company engages in environmental CSR activities from the global and from the regional perspective; the findings showed a significant difference in these two perspectives. However, a positive outcome of CSR activities was also found in small enterprises, where a positive shift was observed in the involvement of small company employees in environmental issues [89]. A clear positive shift in the perception of this particular issue was observed among small companies. We attribute this shift to the explanation that more and more companies, regardless of size, are following the path of fair and sustainable business resulting in positive impacts on society. Local companies often manage their business intuitively but responsibly without the need for formal processes as is the case with large companies. Implementation of formal environmental management systems in the Slovak Republic is often affected by relationships with other organizations and business partners [84].

Thus, the results show that employees themselves perceive CSR activities in the region where the company operates much more strongly than activities aimed at tackling global environmental challenges. As for the statistically significant difference between CSR activities on environmental issues in the region where the company operates when taking into account the independent variable, i.e., the size of the company, it was shown that the most significant statistical deviation was in the assessment of large enterprises compared to small companies. Large companies also scored significantly higher in the research. In our opinion, this result is also due to the mandatory disclosure of CSR activities of large companies in the Slovak Republic under Directive 2014/95/EU [12] on the disclosure of non-financial information. Since 1 January 2017 this directive has been implemented into Slovak law by Act 130/2015 Coll [83], dealing with the duty to disclose non-financial CSR activities in the financial statements of companies. From Directive 2014/95/EU: “The scope apply only to those large undertakings which are public-interest entities and to those public-interest entities which are parent undertakings of a large group, in each case having an average number of employees in excess of 500, in the case of a group on a consolidated basis.” [12] (p. 3). According to Act 423/2015 on statutory audit and on the amendment of

Act no. 431/2002 Coll. on accounting as amended, public-interest entities are defined in Slovakia as: "

- (a) an entity that has issued securities which have been admitted to trading on a regulated market of any Member State;
- (b) a bank and a branch of a foreign bank,
- (c) Export-Import Bank of the Slovak Republic,
- (d) an insurance undertaking, a branch of an insurance undertaking of another Member State and a branch of a foreign insurance undertaking,
- (e) a reinsurance undertaking, a branch of a reinsurance undertaking from another Member State and a branch of a foreign reinsurance undertaking,
- (f) health insurance company,
- (g) a management company and a branch of a foreign management company,
- (h) a pension management company,
- (i) a supplementary pension company,
- (j) Stock Exchange,
- (k) Railways of the Slovak Republic,
- (l) the entity preparing the consolidated financial statements of the central administration,
- (m) higher territorial unit,
- (n) an accounting entity that is a municipality, city or city district according to special regulations" [100] (article 1, paragraph 2).

Thus, only public-interest entities with more than 500 employees have a legal obligation to disclose non-financial information, which in the Slovak Republic represented 180 entities as of 3/31/2022 [101–103]. The KPMG Survey of Sustainability Reporting 2020 was an analysis of 52 countries, KPMG states that the Slovak Republic ranked only 40th, but nevertheless the Slovak Republic is one of the top three countries to achieve the most significant increase in the number of CSR reports compared to the previous year's KPMG survey [104]. Their Risk Consulting Executive Director for Slovak Republic states that: "The high increase in Slovakia may be due to the fact that the legislation introduced an obligation to report on non-financial activities as well. Another explanation is that our companies are increasingly taking into account the reputation. Customers are starting to take this aspect into account when making their purchases" [105]. According to the analysis, up to 76% of companies in the Slovak Republic show CSR activities, while the KPMG survey focused on the first 100 Slovak companies by turnover. Many of them are international corporations, and CSR reports were also reported for Slovakia as part of the overall central report [104,105].

KPMG's 2020 analysis showed that 73% of G250 companies (250 of the world's largest companies) and 67% of N100 (100 of the world's largest companies) in 52 countries use Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standards [106,107]. In 2016, the SmartHead was launched in the Slovak Republic, a paid B2B digital solution for the presentation of CSR activities of companies. The platform meets ISO 26000 Social responsibility standards and offers software solutions according to GRI standards [108]. According to SmartHead "the number of sustainable activities of companies on the besmarthead.com platform increased by 83% compared to 2020 and by 201% by 2019. This increase was mainly due to a significant increase in the number of companies that created a Sustainability Profile on our platform: 259% more than in 2020 and a staggering 1109% more than in year 2019. At the same time, VUB Bank, Tesco, Super Zoo, Dedoles and McDonald's were among the five most active companies at SmartHead last year." [109]. The platform is used by many entities that do not have a legal obligation to publish non-financial statements, not only multi-national companies, but also large companies owned by Slovak investors—for example, CSR reports are published by ESET, Dedoles, Accace, SuperZoo, and many other large companies [110–113].

This puts some social pressure on companies with more than 500 employees to engage in CSR activities to a higher degree [15,114,115]. No significant difference was found in the engagement in global environmental CSR activities when comparing small, medium,

and large companies. Our findings complement the results of other research in this area conducted in Slovakia [84,88,116–118].

6. Conclusions

The social, political, and, above all, environmental crises of the last decade have significantly changed the nature and especially the stability of our lives and have severely constrained the economic development of companies [119]. The situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the implications of the climate crisis [120,121]. The perspective on environmental corporate social responsibility presented herein shows that in the Slovak Republic, companies are significantly more aware of the environmental impacts of their activities when it comes to their area of operation rather than having a global perspective. On the other hand, although the difference between perceptions of environmental issues is about 20 percent more pronounced at the regional level, more than half of the companies surveyed are active in addressing global environmental issues. This can be seen as a good signal for the future when the issue of environmental impacts combined with the current COVID-19 pandemic crisis will escalate [122].

The aim of the paper was to map the issue of corporate social responsibility from the perspective of two areas, namely corporate social responsibility vis-a-vis society, global, and regional environmental issues. An important aspect that we focused on was the comparison of the results depending on the size of the enterprises we studied. Social responsibility toward environmental issues, whether within the company or in the region where it operates, includes activities, such as environmentally friendly production, services, eco-packaging, recycling, energy, water, and other scarce resources saving plans, waste minimization, conservation of natural resources, environmentally friendly transportation of goods and materials, and many other activities within CSR [123,124]. The benefits of the CSR environmental agenda include a new perception of internal and external stakeholders who no longer expects regulatory compliance within the internal and external company processes but also a responsible attitude toward the environment as such [125–128]. New societal pressure to increase environmentally friendly behavior is emerging, not only on individuals but on for companies. To maintain competitiveness and reputation, CSR strategies in this area are becoming a necessity, increasing the loyalty of employees as well as customers and improving the goodwill of the company [7,86,129,130]. It is undeniable that another important factor with a positive impact on environmental CSR strategies is cost efficiency and waste reduction, and new business opportunities can be generated with sound marketing communication of CSR activities in this area. Environmentally oriented corporate strategy, whether when it comes to production, service provision, marketing, or HR resources (green offices, less noise, green acquisition and purchasing policies) is becoming an important part of internal corporate policies as well as a tool in national legislations.

Organizational performance should be measured in terms of interrelated environmental, economic, and social dimensions [131]. The efforts of managers to adopt environmentally sustainable initiatives should be highlighted in the context of the global trend of environmental protection [132,133]. It is for this reason that companies are implementing appropriate tools to facilitate such approaches [134]. The implementation of environmental processes can improve the relationship between CSR and company performance [135,136]. Two studies examined environmental management systems in the Slovak Republic [84,115]. Both studies focused on the relevance of environmental management mainly from the perspective of the application of ISO 14001 to the internal management standards of companies. According to many authors, the application of ISO 14001 in companies' policies is so significant that it reduces costs, contributes to strict environmental standards, and replaces the need for managerial audits [137,138]. ISO 14001 is an environmental management system that increases efficiency and transparency in the management of companies [84].

The research study contributed to the perception of environmental CSR activities in small, medium, and large enterprises in the Slovak Republic. The results also indicate

a possible link between the mandate to disclose CSR activities of large public-interest enterprises and the research results because large companies that have the legislative duty to disclose non-financial information performed best in their CSR involvement as perceived by their employees. A new proposal from the European Commission COM(2021)189 [139] dated 4/21/2021, aims to amend Directive 2013/34/EU, Directive 2004/109/EC, Directive 2006/43/EC and Regulation (EU) No 537/2014, as regards corporate sustainability reporting (CSRD legislative procedure 2021/0104(COD)), and will introduce a new obligation to report non-financial information not only for large companies that are public-interest entities, but for all large companies and all medium and small companies listed on EU regulated markets. Listed micro enterprises are exempted from the obligation to report non-financial reports. Large undertakings under Directive 2013/34/EU [140] must meet at least two of the following three criteria:

1. balance sheet total: EUR 20,000,000,
2. net turnover: EUR 40,000,000,
3. average number of employees during the financial year: 250.

“The final timetable will depend on how the Parliament and Council progress in those negotiations. If an agreement is reached in the first half of 2022, then the European Commission may be able to adopt the first set of reporting standards under new legislation by the end of 2022, and companies would have to apply the standards for the first time in reports published in 2024, covering their 2023 financial year.” [141] (p. 2). To better imagine the impact of the adoption and implementation of the new forthcoming directive, the non-financial reporting obligation would be extended from 11,000 companies in the EU to around 50,000 companies [142]. In the conditions of the Slovak Republic, this is an increase from 180 companies to about 600 companies [143].

The research does not include the direct implications of the mandatory disclosure on the incentive to engage in CSR activities. This should be addressed by further research studies, as the effects of CSR incentives due to mandatory disclosure are dependent on the legislative regulations in this area and extend the mandate to disclose CSR reports to medium as well as small enterprises not only those listed on EU regulated markets under legislative procedure 2021/0104(COD).

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Appendix A

This section contains relevant parts of survey questionnaire that was used during our research.

Table A1. Section A: Demography.

In what sector of the economy does your organization operate?	selection
Telecommunications/information technology	
Media/entertainment industry	
Retail/consumer goods	
Manufacturing industry	
Public services (energy/gas/water)	
Chemical industry (oil processing/transport)	
Financial services	
Real estate/construction industry	
Public sector	
Logistics	
Other	
How many employees does the company have?	selection
0 to 49 employees	
50 to 249 employees	
More than 250 employees	
What is the annual turnover (sales) of the company?	selection
Less than EUR 2 mil	
EUR 3 to EUR 10 mil.	
EUR 11 to EUR 50 mil.	
EUR 51 to EUR 200 mil.	
More than EUR 201 mil.	

Table A2. Section D: CSR Environmental Part.

Does the company implement the following activities in the field of global environmental problems in CSR?	Never	Rarely	Often	Almost	Always
Air pollution					
Greenhouse effect					
Carbon neutrality of corporate buildings and operations					
Ozone hole enlargement					
Reducing oxygen production					
Water pollution					
Threats to biodiversity					
Land loss and degradation					
Soil degradation—soil degradation					
Deforestation—deforestation					
Over-exploitation of mineral resources					
Does the company carry out the following activities in CSR in the area of regional environmental problems in the place of its operation?	Never	Rarely	Often	Almost	Always
Ecological production of products, services					
Ecological packaging of products					
Ecological decision-making in purchasing policy					
Ecological decision-making in marketing activities					
The pursuit of green offices					
Efforts to reduce noise in the workplace					
Recycling of raw materials					
Gentle transport of goods and materials					
Waste sorting in the workplace					
Involvement in community ecological projects					
Creating ecological projects for the community					

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