

## Ecological awareness and attitudes of managers

### Świadomość ekologiczna i postawy menedżerów

#### **Abstract:**

*The growing role of the ecological factor in functioning of companies inflicts that initiating of proecological policies depends on management personnel, being the main carrier of the value and possessed ecological competences. The paper presents the results of the research which was conducted by the questionnaire method. The purpose of the article was the diagnosis of ecological consciousness on the declarative level and attitudes, opinions of future managers in the matters of the environmental responsibility of companies. The results of the research points that there is a satisfactory level of the personnel ecological consciousness on the declarative level.*

#### **Streszczenie:**

*Rosnąca rola czynnika ekologicznego w funkcjonowaniu firm sprawia, że inicjowanie działań proekologicznych spoczywa w głównej mierze na kadrze menedżerskiej, będącej głównym nośnikiem wartości oraz posiadanych kompetencji ekologicznych. W artykule przedstawiono wyniki badania przeprowadzonego metodą ankietową, którego celem było poznanie świadomości ekologicznej na poziomie deklaracyjnym oraz postaw i poglądów przyszłych menedżerów w kwestiach odpowiedzialności firm za środowisko naturalne. Z przeprowadzonych badań wynika, że poziom świadomości ekologicznej badanych jest zadowalający na poziomie deklaracyjnym.*

**Key words:** *ecological awareness, corporate environmental responsibility, proecological attitudes.*

**Słowa kluczowe:** *świadomość ekologiczna, odpowiedzialność ekologiczna przedsiębiorstw, proekologiczne postawy.*

In the last few years the main topic of many discussions and papers was the idea of the *Corporate Social Responsibility – CSR*. This idea concerns several areas of the activities of companies, such as: economical, sociological, social, ethical and ecological. Initiating of the activities in the previously mentioned areas rests mainly in the hands of the management personnel which represents the company both outside and inside the company. The responsibility of the business for the natural environment gains more and more supporters because of the increasing demand and social requirements connected with the increasing identification of the ecological threats and ecological awareness of many societies. The main aim of this paper is the recognition of the ecological awareness on the declarative level as well as the attitudes and opinions about the role of the ecological factor in business of the of the future managers – owners of the companies, who decide on the company attitudes towards the care of the natural environment.

The ecological awareness is the concept which consists of many components of the psychological, sociological as well as the economic nature. The level of the ecological awareness of the societies depends on economic

conditions of the individual country as well as contemporary tendencies. The ecological awareness of the society<sup>1</sup> influences many forms of the social activities of the entrepreneurs in the area of ecology and environment protection.

The idea of the ecological awareness is difficult to define unambiguously, which fact is stressed by many authors. There are two perspectives on the ecological awareness, wide and narrow. In the narrow perspective, the ecological awareness is the knowledge, attitude towards the natural environment, in the middle perspective, additionally the respect towards the natural environment and ecological intentions are taken into consideration. But in the wide perspective the ecological awareness expresses the proecological behaviour which is the direct, visible act of the individual whose aim is the prevention or reduction of the influence on the natural environment [1].

The ecological awareness can be also understood as the “dependence of people on the remaining part of nature and the awareness of the influence which the activities of people which influence the natural surroundings” [2]. Depending on the level of understanding and awareness of

✉ Dr Oksana Seroka-Stolka – ul. Armii Krajowej 36 b 42-200 Częstochowa, e-mail: oksanas@zim.pcz.pl, tel. 343250-484 lub 343250-417.

<sup>1</sup> Environmental awareness can be seen both as an social issue or as an individual issue also on the declarative or realised level.

the link between a human being and the natural environment it is possible to divide the ecological awareness into several levels: low, average, high and very high. Each level of the ecological awareness is characterised by the individual attitude towards the problems of the environment protection.

To realise the dependence between *a human being and the natural environment* and its meaning for a human being it is necessary to gain knowledge and information about the condition of the natural environment and threats. The link between the role of the natural environment and functioning of many companies should be especially acknowledged by the management personnel.

The knowledge about the natural environment is understood as the knowledge possessed by a manager about the natural environment, links in ecosystems and problems connected with the natural environment as well and possibilities of solving them. The knowledge about the natural environment itself is not sufficient enough to undertake particular proecological actions in companies. It is necessary to gain the sufficient level of the ecological knowledge but also its rational and emotional assimilation, which motivates to undertake particular proecological actions.

During the last few years the new social demands as well as the slow but constant increase of the ecological awareness of the Polish society could be observed. It is really important for companies to look for the purchasers who possess the high ecological awareness and measure up. Despite a still small participation of the companies in Polish society many companies decide to offer the proecological products. On the other hand, the main reason to stimulate the proecological activities in a company are internal stakeholders, especially employees. The high ecological awareness of the company owners, management personnel and junior employees is the main factor which can influence the increase of the ecological culture of the organisation and ecoinnovation stimulation [3]. Most of the decisions concerning the ecological goals as priorities rest however on the management personnel which is the bearer of the crucial virtues, standards and possessed ecological competences [4]. It is the management personnel that make a contribution to involve the companies in the care of the natural environment in many different ways. So without a high level of the ecological awareness and proecological attitudes of the management personnel it will be difficult to set up the company which is responsible for the ecology. Many records and codes of the ecological behaviour in companies must be respected by all employees and the management personnel.

## Materials and methods

In order to discover the attitudes and views of the potential future managers – company owners, about the role of the

ecology in business and their ecological awareness, the research was conducted by the questionnaire method. To get the results the method of the individual questionnaire given directly to the interviewed was used (auditorium questionnaire), and the test tool was the questionnaire itself. The test was conducted in 2010 in the group of extramural students of the marketing management of the technical college. The specimen consisted of 159 people with the different age, gender and employment. There were 72% of women and 28% of men, and most of the people were employed (89% of the questioned people). All questioned were divided into three age groups:

- from 18 to 26 years old (64,7% total),
- from 27 to 35 years old (21% total),
- above 36 years old (14,3% total).

The graphical representation of the questioned group with regard to the amount of women and men in the age groups is shown on Graph 1.

The questionnaire was divided into two testing areas. The first part considered the attitude of the questioned respondents towards the issue of responsibility of the companies for the natural environment, whereas the second one was connected with the individual actions in the scope of care for the environment and ecological awareness of the respondents on the declarative level. The data analysis was developed with regard to amount and during the test only the percentage of the valid answers was taken into consideration. The survey was a part of the pilot study.

## Results

In the first part of the questionnaire the respondents were asked about their attitude towards and responsibility of the companies for the natural environment. 35% of the questioned support the ecological responsibility of the companies as an indication of the public demand. The distribution of the interviewed people connected with the ecological responsibility of the companies as a way of competitiveness is presented comparably (21,6% of indications) and treatment of the environmental problems as less important economic issues (23,6% of indications). Almost one fifth of the interviewed do not have the opinion on the tested issue. The distribution of the respondents in the scope of the responsibility of the companies for the natural environment is presented on Graph 2.

On the basis of the next question of the analysed areas it may be said that the interviewed are not interested in the influence of the companies on the natural environment. The vast majority does not know (about 85%) or cannot show the companies which are ecologically responsible or irresponsible. The respondents declared that Coca-Cola, Electrolux, HP, Unilever Polska are the most ecologically responsible companies. These companies were appreciated

for the proecological actions. Huta Częstochowa (steelworks) was most often mentioned as a company which is the most ecologically irresponsible company, mostly because it pollutes the air in the region.

In the next part of the questionnaire the respondents were presented the set of statements concerning different ecological actions taken by the ecologically responsible companies.

Table 1 shows the order of the obtained results of the respondents with regard to the amount of indications.

Table 1. What a company should do in order to say that it is a company which is ecologically responsible?

Description of the presented attributes (choice of max 3 answers)	Amount of indications
Take into consideration the common welfare of the company, local community and the natural environment	125
Protect health and ecological security of the employees	95
Follow the environmental protection laws and honestly pay all pollution taxes	64
Limit the exploitation of the natural resources by the company	53
Join the non-compulsory environmental programs	24
Organise some ecological actions	22
Financial support of ecological organisations	19
I do not know	1

Source: Own the test results.

Next two questions concerned the opinion of the respondents about the involvement of the companies in the ecological activities depending on the influence of the companies on the natural environment and connecting the financial benefits with the proecological activities.

More than a half of the interviewed (52%) can expect from the companies a bigger involvement in the ecological activities only in case of their negative influence on the natural environment, 26% think that the ecological activities should concern all companies regardless of the scope of their business. For the rest of the interviewed the proecological management of the company is not important (9,5%). 7,5% of the interviewed do not have their opinion and 5% do not expect any proecological activities from the companies.

The respondents were questioned about their view connected with the possibility of joining the proecological activities of the companies with the financial benefits. More than 80% were of the opinion that it is possible to join the proecological actions with the balanced financial development of the company. The indication of the results is presented in Graph 3.

In the next question which concerned the tested area which considered the possibility of gaining some financial benefits in the companies which have the proecological programs the respondents assessed the possibility of

gaining profit by the companies which implemented the proecological activities. 46% of the interviewed claim that the proecological activities do not generate any company loss or profit. About 22% of the interviewed state the opinion that the proecological activities can make a contribution to gaining lower income by the company. The indication of the results is presented in Graph 4.

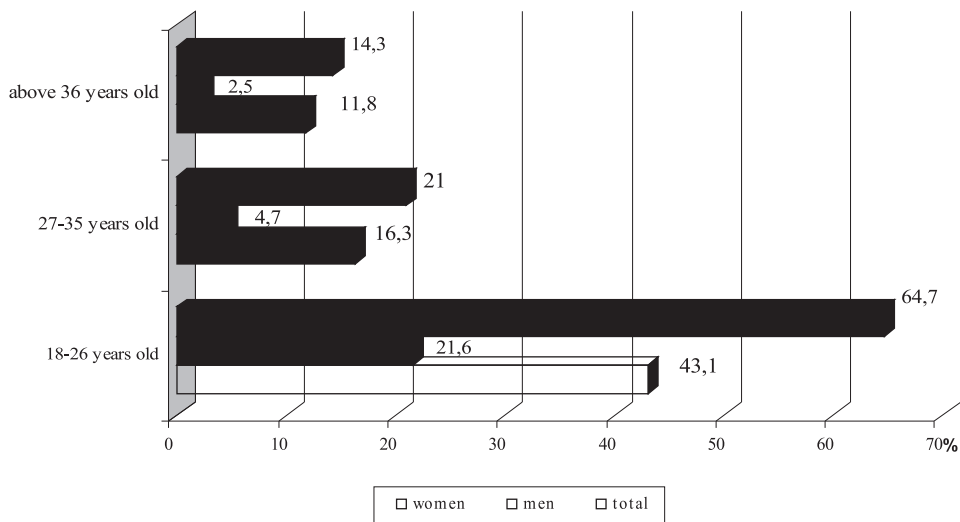
In the second testing area of the questionnaire the respondents were asked if they would like to have the company which is ecologically responsible. The vast majority of the interviewed people (86%) declared the intention to implement the rules of the ecological CSR in their own business (the total amount of the answers “definitely yes” and “rather yes”), the rest of the interviewed gave the following answers: “rather not” – 6,3%, “definitely not” – 0,6% and “I do not have my opinion” – 6,9%.

The next question of the analysed area was connected with recognising by the respondents the products which fulfil the standards of the ecological quality and the recognition of the companies which are ecologically responsible and irresponsible. Less than 27% of the interviewed pay attention “often” and “always” on the products which fulfil the standards of the ecological quality (the total amount of the answers “always” and “often”). Above 43% of the interviewed declare that such products Draw their attention only “sometimes”. The rest of the interviewed, i.e. above 30% do not pay any attention or pay attention rarely to such products (the total amount of the answers “never” and “rarely”). Data presented in Graph 5.

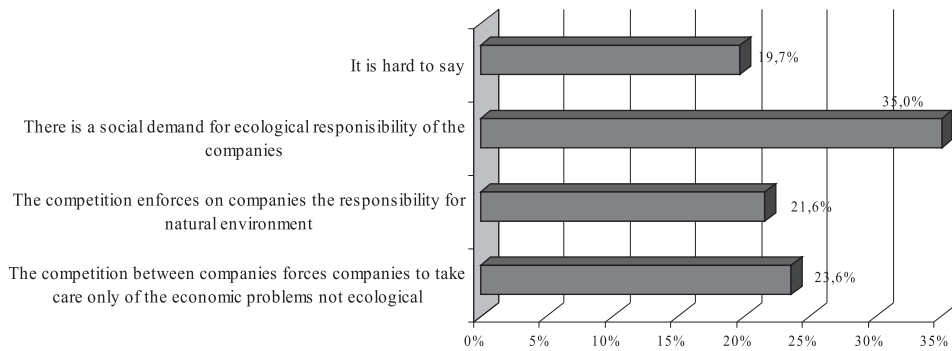
In the last part of the questionnaire the respondents declared their own ecological awareness according to the following answers “definitely yes”, “rather yes”, “I do not have the opinion”, “rather not”, “definitely not”. From the quantitative analysis results that 79% of the interviewed are ecologically aware (the total amount of the answers “definitely yes” and “rather yes”). The last questions in the questionnaire were intended to make the initial verification of the previously declared level of the ecological awareness. The respondents were asked about their individual actions which were taken to limit the exploitation of the natural resources and segregation of the domestic waste. The vast majority answered declares mainly the reduction of the electric energy usage (83,6%) and water (78,6%). The answers are presented in Graph 6.

## Discussion

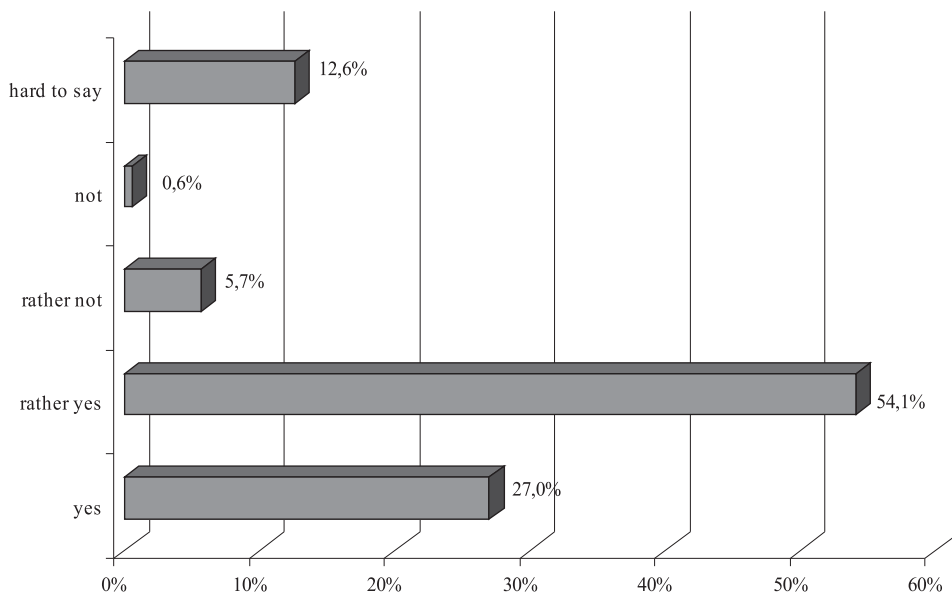
In Poland the idea of ecological CSR enjoys a bigger popularity however the level of involvement of the Polish companies in the ecological actions is not at the same level as in the western countries. The level of the ecological awareness of the Polish society also diverges from the level in many western societies. The understanding and



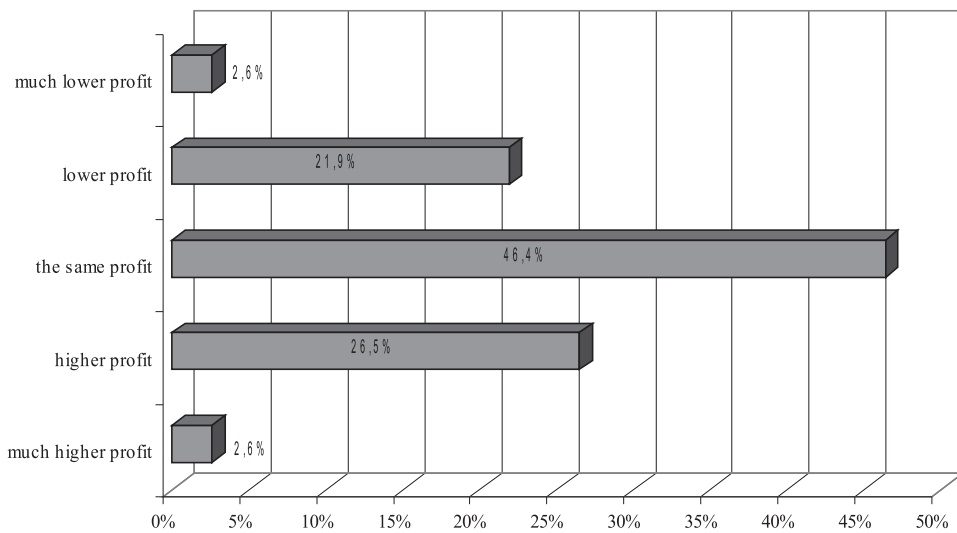
Graph 1. Age and gender structure of the questioned respondents  
 Source: Own the test results.



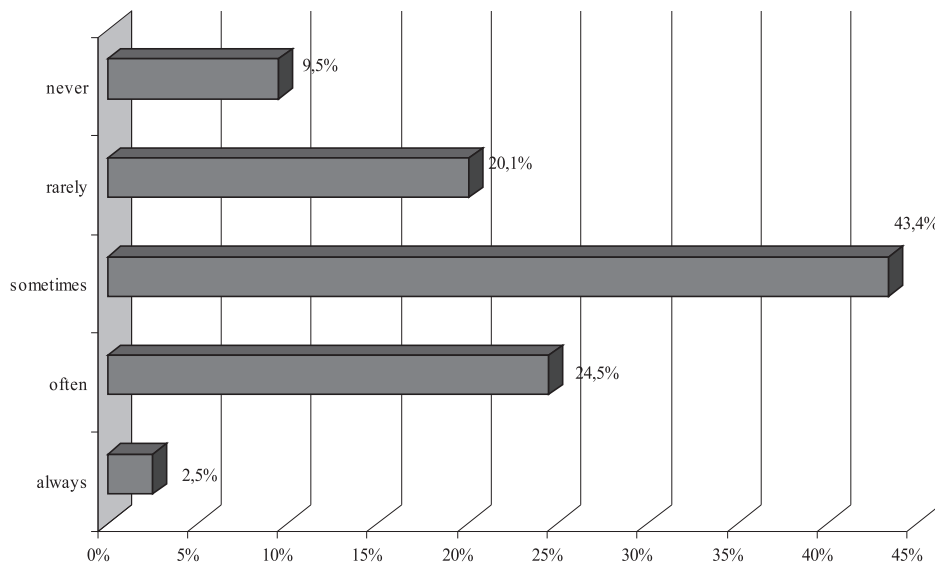
Graph 2. Quantitative analysis of the indications (%) of the respondents in the scope of the responsibility of the companies for the natural environment.  
 Source: Own the test results.



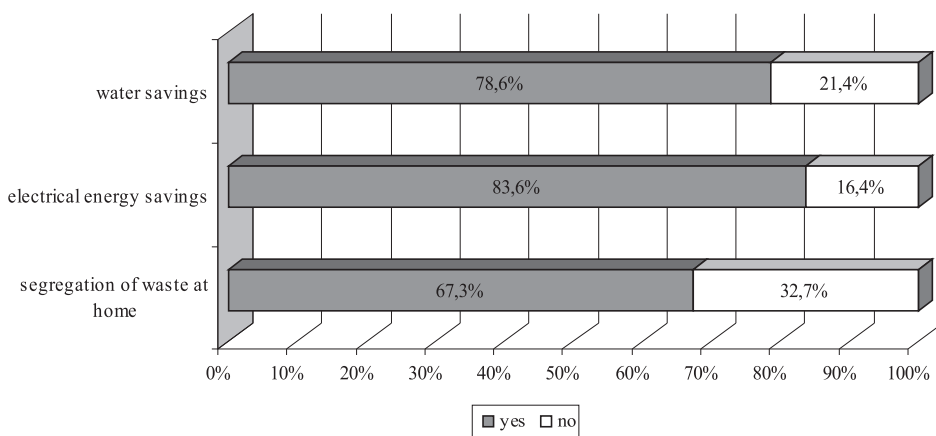
Graph 3. Connection of the proecological activities of the companies with the financial benefits (% of indications).  
 Source: Own the test results.



Graph 4. Proecological activities of the companies versus gaining the financial income by the company (% of indications).  
 Source: Own the test results.



Graph 5. Quantitative analysis of the indications (%) of the respondents in the scope of recognition of the products which fulfill the ecological standards  
 Source: Own the test results.



Graph 6. Quantitative analysis of the indications (%) in the scope of the individual actions taken by the respondents taken to reduce the usage of the natural resources at home.  
 Source: Own the test results.

supporting of the influence sources of the country must be supported by the wide ecological awareness of the management personnel. So the companies should not only follow the regulations but also tend to declare a deeper ecological ideology [5]. The managers and the stakeholders who follow so-called ecological philosophy in their actions in the context of the ecological activities of the company, can decide about many benefits for the company and adequately planned and fulfilled proecological actions can generate higher income as well as gaining and maintaining the consumers.

On the basis of the conducted tests, it is clearly visible that the potential future managers consider themselves as people who are ecologically aware and declare reduction of the usage of the natural resources in their individual actions. The basic problem of the level assessment of the ecological awareness is its high declarativity. The reason of savings in the household by the interviewed can be mainly identified as the economic issues in times of the rising media prices. The interviewed cannot be also included in the so called "green consumers" because only 2,5% of the interviewed "always" pay attention to products with the high ecological quality, what proves their low ecological awareness on the realisation level. Most of the interviewed are not interested in the influence of the companies on the natural environment. The low level of interest in the environmental protection issues influences their level of ecological knowledge. Such attitude does not make a contribution to increase of the demand on products made by the companies which are ecologically responsible and those of the high ecological quality. Admittedly, the vast majority of the respondents in case of their own business would like to have a company which cares of the ecological issues but almost one fourth of the interviewed think that the proecological actions mean a lower or much lower income for the company. The lack of faith in the effectiveness of the proecological actions, reluctance and fear of the business representatives that the care of the natural environment generates loss for the companies are the most often reasons of not undertaking the initiative. It must be stressed that each action on the company must be performed according to its balanced financial development but cannot limit itself only to gaining the profit because care of our common welfare which is nature contributes to increase of the level of the social prosperity [6]. The companies which in their business take into consideration the common welfare of the company, local community and natural environment and which protect health and ecological security of the employees are identified by most of the respondents as ecologically responsible so the companies which follow the rules of the balanced development. More than half of the interviewed await higher involvement in the care of the natural environment from the companies which contribute to its biggest

pollution. The vital problem of such situation is the fact that both consumers as well as very often company representatives are not aware that almost each company, regardless of the scope of their business activities, somehow influences the natural environment. A very fifth of the interviewed think that the main reason which decides on the involvement of the company in the ecological issues is the strong competition. There is also an optimistic fact that the interviewed see the changes and growing requirements in the fulfilment of the social needs which concern the understanding and the role of the protection of the natural environment in today's business.

## Conclusion

The growing role of the ecological aspect in functioning of the companies causes the increasing interest in ecology among Polish university students. The ecological knowledge learned during the economy studies can facilitate understanding of many crucial natural environment mechanisms and it can influence on shaping of the ecological value-system of the future managers and ecological education of the young generation. The ecological knowledge, high ecological awareness and ecological skills of the management personnel and company owners and boards will stimulate the tend of responsibility of the companies for natural environment. One of the conditions of maintaining the competitive advantage is the ability to acquire and interpret signs which come from the surrounding and using it to shape the development processes of the organization. The business which is ecologically responsible is connected with introduction of such management style which is based in voluntary commitments, which are based on understanding and knowledge that the natural environment is part of the human being's life and is the natural surrounding of the companies. So the role of the ecologically aware management personnel is necessary to develop proecological action which result from the rules of the balanced development.

## LITERATURE

- [1] Kramer M.: Urbaniec M., Kryński A.: *International Environment Management. Interdisciplinary Foundations of the Proecological Management of a Company*. Wydawnictwo C. H. Beck, T. I, Warszawa, 2005, p. 116.
- [2] Kobyłko G.: *Proecological Management of the Company*. Wydawnictwo AE in Wrocław, Wrocław 2007, p. 91.
- [3] Seroka-Stolka O.: *Determinants of the Ecological Innovativeness of an Organisation*, W: Pabian A. (red.). *Creativity and Innovations in Organisation Management*, Wyd. WWZ PCz, Częstochowa 2010, p. 41.
- [4] Chodyński A.: *Ecological Knowledge and Competences in Company Development Strategies*. Wydawnictwo Diffin, Warszawa 2007, p. 160.
- [5] Żemigala M.: *Social responsibility of a company*. Wydawnictwo Oficyna a Wolters Kluwer business, Kraków 2007, p. 129.
- [6] Por. Nidumolu R., Prahalad C. K., Ranganaswami M. R.: "Why sustainability is the now key driver of innovation, Harvard Business Review" September 2009, p. 57-64.