



DOI 10.2478/sbe-2024-0004

SBE no. 19(1) 2024

THE CONVERGENCE OF CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN MODERN BUSINESS CONTEXTS: A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS

Andra-Teodora GORSKI

Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania

Dănuț Dumitru DUMITRAȘCU

Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania

Abstract:

Global challenges such as climate change, the Covid-19 pandemic, and geopolitical instability have driven organizations to embed sustainability into their strategies and operations, moving away from the profit-driven mindset to a broader emphasis on societal value. Sustainability, today a widespread concept in academia and business, requires balancing social, environmental, and economic responsibilities to achieve long-term success. Embracing the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) model, organizations aim for profit while also positively impacting society and the environment. However, there is a prevailing tendency to emphasize rights over responsibilities, a pattern that needs to shift in order to promote sustainability. This paper contributes to the body of knowledge on corporate sustainability by exploring its relationship with social responsibility. A bibliometric analysis was conducted on a sample of 9,378 documents processed using VOSviewer. The study examines the interplay between sustainability, social responsibility, and corporate sustainability, mapping out key concepts and visualizing their networks. Furthermore, the links to other key themes such as performance, management, innovation, strategy, governance, supply chain management, leadership, stakeholders, and others were also explored. Social-responsibility disclosure was also found to be an emergent topic in terms of organizational accountability and transparency.

Key words: *corporate sustainability; performance; responsibility; social-responsibility; sustainability.*

1. Introduction

The major global challenges of climate change, coupled with those triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic and geopolitical instability, have had a major impact on economies, societies, organisations, and individuals. In light of the growing prominence of sustainability issues, organisations around the world are seeking to integrate more responsible business practices into their operations, processes, practices, and activities. Noticeably, the purpose of companies has shifted from solely the pursuit of economic profit in the 50s and 60s, to a broader role of societal service recognized in the 70s, and subsequently to creating shared value as emphasized since 2010 (Latapí Agudelo et al., 2019).

Sustainability, a concept that integrates social, environmental, and economic responsibilities (Sart, 2022), is becoming increasingly prevalent both in academic literature and business management and operations (Carter & Rogers, 2008). Achieving long-term success requires responsibility at all levels, including governmental, organizational, and individual, an approach that is closely linked to sustainability. In order to build a foundation for prosperity and sustainability in such a complex context, organisations need to deliver positive outcomes across three dimensions: profitability, environmental quality, and social justice.

In line with John Elkington's triple bottom line model (TBL or 3BL), businesses not only pursue economic outcomes ("Profit"), but also act as catalysts for change that is mutually positive for society ("People") and the "Planet" (3P) (Elkington & Zeitz, 2014). Unfortunately, there is a prevalent tendency to prioritize our rights over our responsibilities - a behaviour which warrants consideration. To ensure a smooth transition towards sustainability, it becomes increasingly important that governments, public institutions, and companies address the full spectrum of TBL responsibilities.

Companies have a significant responsibility towards their employees, customers, suppliers, and society at large, beyond merely generating profits for shareholders (Zárate-Rueda et al., 2020). If TBL becomes imperative, then environmental and social responsibility should be at the very heart of every business. Moreover, companies' commitment to environmental responsibility must be extended to include responsibility for social justice and human rights related issues (Elkington, 1997).

2. Methodology

The present paper is part of a comprehensive research that explores the topic of corporate sustainability. Some important parts of the researched theme – namely stakeholders and sustainable business models – have already been addressed in previous papers (Gorski & Dumitraşcu, 2023; Gorski & Dumitraşcu, 2024). Other topics related to the concept of corporate sustainability (CS) and corporate social responsibility (CSR) will be explored in subsequent publications.

The aim of this paper is to identify, present and analyse the most relevant issues concerning responsibility and social responsibility in the context of corporate sustainability. The research objectives are:

- Identification, visualization, and analysis of the relevant concepts/ keywords;
- Representation and analysis of the keyword networks associated with the aforementioned concepts;
- Synthesis and analysis of the most relevant links with other concepts of interest such as - sustainability, corporate sustainability, performance, management.

The scientific contribution was examined using Web of Science (WoS), performing a search on corporate sustainability as an umbrella term covering all types of entities: firms, companies, businesses, institutions, SMEs, etc. The search was conducted based on Topic, namely Authors Keywords, Keywords Plus, Title, Abstract. Of the 10,218 documents initially retrieved, only 9,378 were eligible for inclusion in the research sample as they met the English language criteria. These were exported in .csv format for further processing using

computational algorithms and graphical representations with the aid of VOSviewer and Microsoft Excel.

3. Social Responsibility – Literature Review

Today, topics such as corporate social responsibility (CSR), business ethics, corporate citizenship, accountability, sustainability, are widely included in corporate agendas not only in the form of philosophical and theoretical concepts, but they are also translated into practice, adopted by businesses, and integrated into their mission, thus becoming a critical part of their DNA (Carroll, 2015). Geissdoerfer and collaborators (2017) point out that the private sector plays a central role in achieving sustainability as they manage more capabilities and resources than any other stakeholder.

Corporate Social Responsibility is a company's voluntary effort to address social and environmental issues in its business for sustainable impact (Molderez, 2021). Carroll identified four types of organisational responsibilities and represented them in the shape of a pyramid. This suggestive and reasonable representation, which proved to withstand the test of time, identifies four different categories of responsibilities - economic (required), legal (required), ethical (expected) and philanthropic (desired) - to which organisations should pay attention in order to demonstrate a socially responsible behaviour. According to Carroll's framework, the foundation of the construct lies in economic responsibility, linked to the financial aspect, without which there can be no reliable or sustainable structure. These are followed by legislation and regulations that are required to ensure the legitimacy of the way in which the business operates. The next expectation is for the business to operate ethically in relation to all stakeholders. Finally, businesses are expected to be good corporate citizens, and give back, contributing to the development of their communities (Carroll, 1991).

As defined in ISO 2600:2010, social responsibility - which contributes to sustainable development, health, and the well-being of society - is "an organisation's responsibility for the impact of its decisions and activities on society and the environment." It involves: consideration of stakeholders; compliance with legislation; transparency and ethical behaviour; an integrated approach internally and in relations with other entities. ISO 26000-2010: Guidance on Social Responsibility identifies seven core topics related to social responsibility and seven key principles of socially responsible behaviour (Figure 1).

Themes	Principles
• "Organizational governance" • "Human rights" • "Labor practices" • "Environment" • "Fair operating practices" • "Consumer issues" • "Community involvement and development"	• "Accountability" • "Transparency" • "Ethical behavior" • "Respect for stakeholder interests" • "Respect for law" • "Respect for international norms of behavior" • "Respect for human rights"

Figure 1. Themes and principles of social responsibility

Source: Author's processing based on information from ISO 2600-2010

Responsibility is crucial for achieving corporate sustainability, which is rooted in the TBL approach, whereby the three pillars - environmental, social, and economic - are addressed not in isolation, but in synergy. Considering the imperative to achieve sustainability, research highlights the importance of a company's holistic approach in terms of the three dimensions - social, environmental, and economic. Some research examines the concepts of corporate sustainability and renewable energy through the lens of CSR, TBL, stakeholder theory and green economics (Chang et al., 2017).

All types of businesses, nonprofit organizations (NGOs), public institutions, and governments have to be socially responsible in order to strengthen relationships with their stakeholders – employees, customers, suppliers, community, and society at large. An organization's reputation is affected both directly and indirectly, in short and long term by the implementation of socially responsible initiatives. Long term relationships are built on collaboration, transparency, trust, and mutual respect. In a very competitive world, it is essential to integrate stakeholder needs and desires into the core of the organizations. Moreover, to act in an ethical and socially responsible manner is not a fad, but a necessity. All stakeholders are important, but consumer/customer satisfaction and loyalty are vital for business success. Consumer/Customer behaviour plays an essential role in promoting social responsibility. Their interest in environmentally friendly products and services generates pressure on organizations to align their initiatives with consumer demand. Green consumers trust ecologically sustainable practices and actively participate in green initiatives, exhibiting their green purchase intentions. Such measures are critical in driving companies towards offering green products and avoiding any propensity towards greenwashing (Ahmed & Zhang, 2020). Effective stakeholder engagement is particularly effective in increasing the rate of green product innovation, especially when it involves environmentally conscious customers who have the power to exert pressure on companies. Furthermore, these customers can participate in identifying and exploring enterprise opportunities, serving as valuable resources for the development of innovative eco-friendly products. (Chen & Liu, 2019).

4. Results and discussion

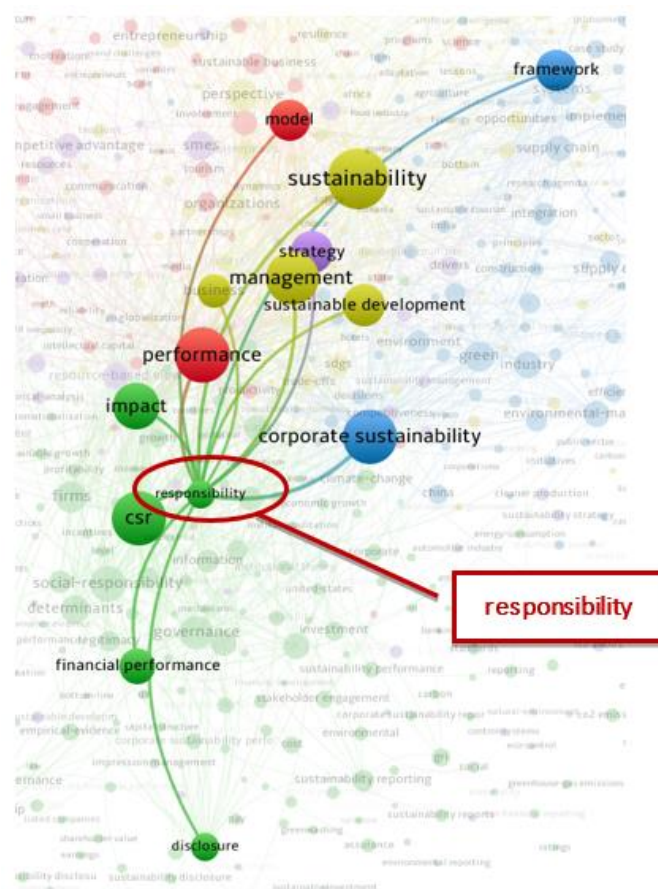
In the present paper, the interest is to analyse the concepts networks regarding "responsibility", "environmental responsibility", and "social-responsibility".

4.1. Responsibility

In the conducted bibliometric research, authors frequently address the topic of "responsibility" in papers related to the searched topic (Occ.: 276). Figure 2 shows that the keyword "responsibility" has strong links (Links: 525; Total Link Strengths - TLS: 2254) with other concepts such as:

- "performance" and "model" (cluster 1 – dark red);
- "csr", "impact", "financial performance", "disclosure" (cluster 2 - green);
- "corporate sustainability", "framework" (cluster 3 - blue);
- "management", "sustainability", "sustainable development", "business" (cluster 4 - yellow);

- "strategy" (cluster 4 - magenta).



Item: responsibility	Cluster: 2	Links: 525	Total link strength: 2254	Occurrences: 276	Avg. pub. year: 2018.14
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Figure 2. “Responsibility” – Network Map

Source: Authors' computation with data from VOSviewer

Figure 3 depicts, in descending order of occurrence, the thirteen concept keywords that have direct links –with the concept “responsibility”. As can be seen, the most prominent in terms of occurrence is “sustainability” (Occ.: 1963), followed by “performance” (Occ.: 1538), “corporate sustainability” (Occ.: 1451), “csr” (Occ.: 1421), “management” (Occ.: 1362), and “impact” (Occ.: 1000). The other six keywords – “sustainable development”, “strategy”, “framework”, “model”, “financial performance”, “business”, and “disclosure” – have a frequency of less than 1000 occurrences.

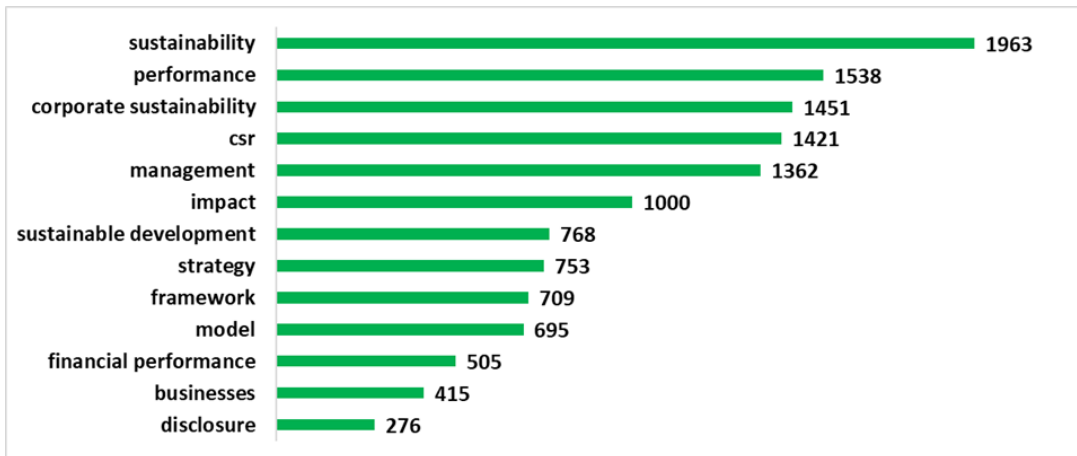


Figure 3. Keywords with direct links with "responsibility"
Source: Authors' computation with data from VOSviewer

While Figure 3 represents the concepts in descending order of occurrence, Table 1 displays the same concepts in descending order based of the link strengths (LS) with "responsibility".

Table 1. Responsibility – Linked concepts
Source: Authors' computation with data from VOSviewer

No	Researched Concept	Linked Concepts	Link Strength (LS)
1	Responsibility	"corporate responsibility"	108
2		"sustainability"	73
3		"performance"	72
4		"management"	70
5		"csr"	66
6		"impact"	50
7		"strategy"	32
8		"sustainable development"	39
9		"financial performance"	39
10		"disclosure"	31
11		"framework"	29
12		"model"	25
13		"business"	24

It is also important to visually display (Figure 4) the strongest links between "responsibility" and the most important concepts for the present research: "corporate sustainability" (LS: 108), "sustainability" (LS: 73), "performance" (LS: 72), "management" (LS: 70), and "csr" (LS: 66).

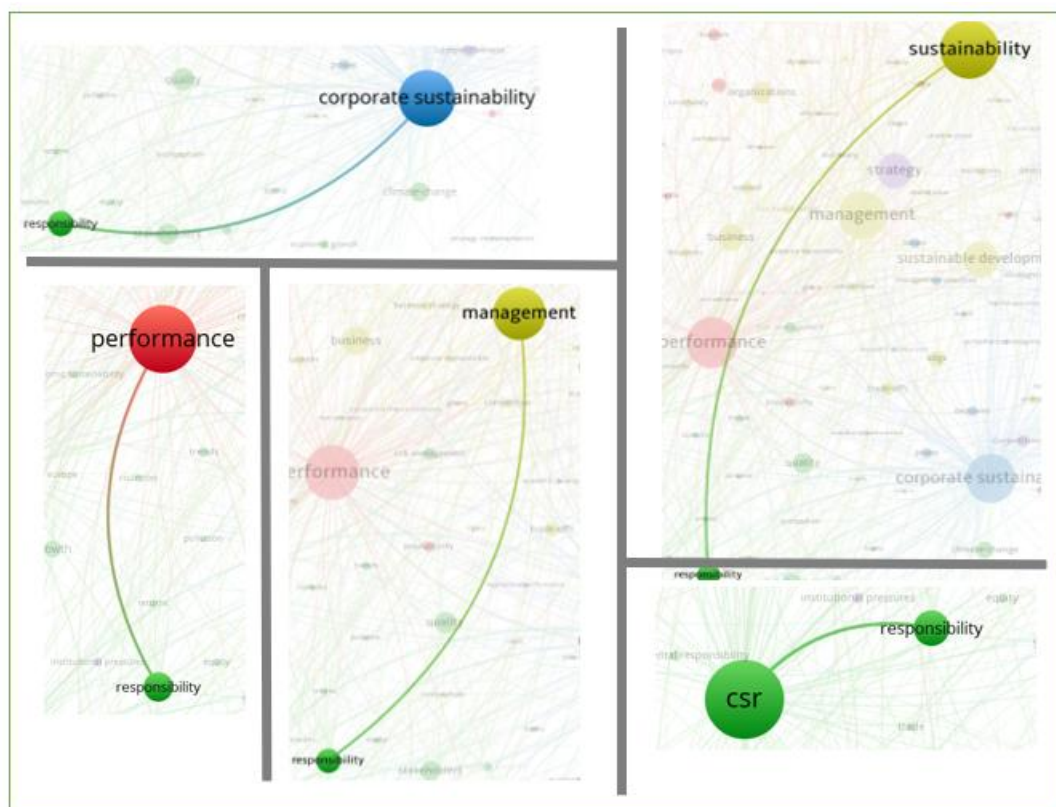


Figure 4. Links between “responsibility” and other concepts
Source: Authors' computation with data from VOSviewer

The different forms of responsibility found in scientific work represent another interesting element to highlight. The VOSviewer-generated map indicates that the search for the term “responsibility” includes results such as: “environmental responsibility,” “social responsibility,” “social responsibility disclosure,” and “corporate responsibility” (Table 2).

Table 2. Forms of responsibility
Source: Authors' computation based on data from VOSviewer

No.	Keywords	CL	Occ.	L	TLS	APY	LS with CS	LS with P	LS with S
1	“csr”	2	1,421	822	10,823	2018.31	347	349	407
2.	” social-responsibility”	2	574	653	4763	2018.11	207	72	126
3.	”responsibility”	2	276	525	2254	2018.14	108	72	73
4.	” social-responsibility disclosure”	2	33	129	315	2019.03	-	-	-
5.	”environmental	2	31	123	219	2018.39	-	-	-

	responsibility"								
6.	"corporate responsibility"	4	31	111	196	2015.71	-	-	-
TOTAL LS							668	493	606
Legend: CL – cluster; L – links; LS – link strengths; CS – corporate sustainability; P – performance, S – sustainability									

Regarding responsibility – irrespective of its type and form of manifestation - the most frequent occurrence in the researched construct refers to the concept of "csr" (Occ: 1421, Links: 822, TLS: 10.823) - which actually refers to applying the concept of social responsibility at the corporate level. The second and third most frequent terms are "social responsibility" (Occ: 574, Links: 653, TLS: 4763) and the broad concept of "responsibility" (LS: 407, LS: 525, TLS: 2254), respectively.

Within the current research endeavor it is also important to identify the strongest links with other concepts of interest. Thus, as shown in Table 2, the strongest Total LS is with "corporate responsibility" (Total LS: 668), followed closely by "sustainability" (Total LS: 606) and "performance" (Total LS: 493).

The same Table 2 also presents the individual links between each of the six concepts under the responsibility "umbrella" ("csr", "social-responsibility", "responsibility", "social-responsibility disclosure", "environmental responsibility", "corporate responsibility") and the adjacent concepts (CS – "corporate sustainability"; P – "performance"; S – "sustainability"). Based on the results, it can be concluded that the highest links are found for "csr" (LS with "sustainability": 407, LS with "performance": 349, LS with "corporate sustainability": 347). The second place is taken up by "social-responsibility" (LS with "corporate sustainability": 207, LS with "sustainability": 126, LS with "performance": 72), and third by "responsibility" (LS with "corporate sustainability": 108; LS with "sustainability": 73, LS with "performance": 72). In the same area of "social-responsibility" the reporting topics, i.e. "social-responsibility disclosure" (Occ.: 33; Links: 129; TLS: 315) can also be found. Another interesting finding is that the concept "environmental responsibility" has lower frequencies and links compared to "social responsibility" (Occ.: 31; Links: 123; TLS: 219).

In terms of concept novelty, the most recent average publication year (APY) is for "social-responsibility disclosure" (APY: 2019.03).

The subsequent analysis covers various categories of responsibility, starting with "environmental responsibility" and progressing towards "social-responsibility", which is often referred to as corporate social responsibility (CSR) at an organizational level.

4.2. Responsibility

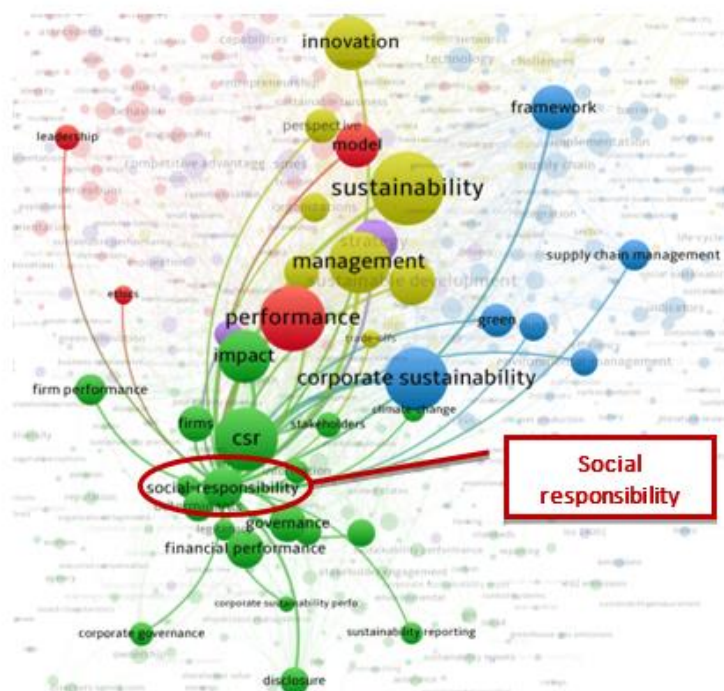
In the search conducted, the concept "environmental responsibility" appears in cluster 2 (Occ: 31; Links: 123; TLS: 219).

In the map the concept emerges as a distinct entity - closer to "csr" than to "corporate responsibility", but without having direct and explicit links to either of these concepts. This can be explained by the fact that the literature on environmental issues mainly focuses on environmental performance, management, sustainability, and innovation, rather than environmental responsibility.

Furthermore, the bibliometric research (Table 2) also revealed "pro-environmental behavior" and "environmental orientation" as modern concepts addressed by researchers (APY: 2019.48, respectively APY: 2019.43).

4.3. Social-responsibility (SocResp)

The concept "social-responsibility" is a relatively modern one (APY: 2018.11), with a high number of occurrences in research (Occ.: 574), but also with very strong links to other concepts (Links: 653; TLS: 4763) from the same cluster (Cluster 2) and different clusters (Figure 5).



Item: social-responsibility	Cluster: 2	Links: 653	Total link strength: 4763	Occurrences: 574	Avg. pub. year: 2018.11
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Figure 5. Social-responsibility network

Source: Authors' computation with data from VOSviewer

Social-responsibility links:

- "performance", "model", "leadership", "ethics" (Cluster 1 – dark red);
- "csr", "governance", "stakeholders", "financial performance", "firms", "firm performance", "impact", "corporate governance", "sustainability reporting", "disclosure" (Cluster 2 - green);
- "corporate sustainability", "green", "supply chain management", "framework", "environmental management", "industry" (Cluster 3 – dark blue);
- "management", "sustainability", "sustainable development", "strategy", "perspective", "organizations", "innovation" (Cluster 4 – yellow);
- "resource-based view" (cluster 5 – magenta).

Figure 6 showcases the keywords that have links with “social-responsibility”. In green there are the common concepts – that appear also in the “responsibility” map – represented and in blue, the unique ones (that have links only with “social-responsibility”). Black is assigned to represent different terms within the organizational umbrella – firms, companies, organizations.

As can be seen, the most prominent in terms of occurrence is “sustainability” (Occ: 1963), followed by “performance” (Occ.: 1538), “corporate sustainability” (Occ: 1451), “csr” (Occ.: 1421), “management” (Occ.: 1362), “innovation” (Occ.: 1047), and “impact” (Occ.: 1000). The other keywords have a frequency below 1000 appearances.

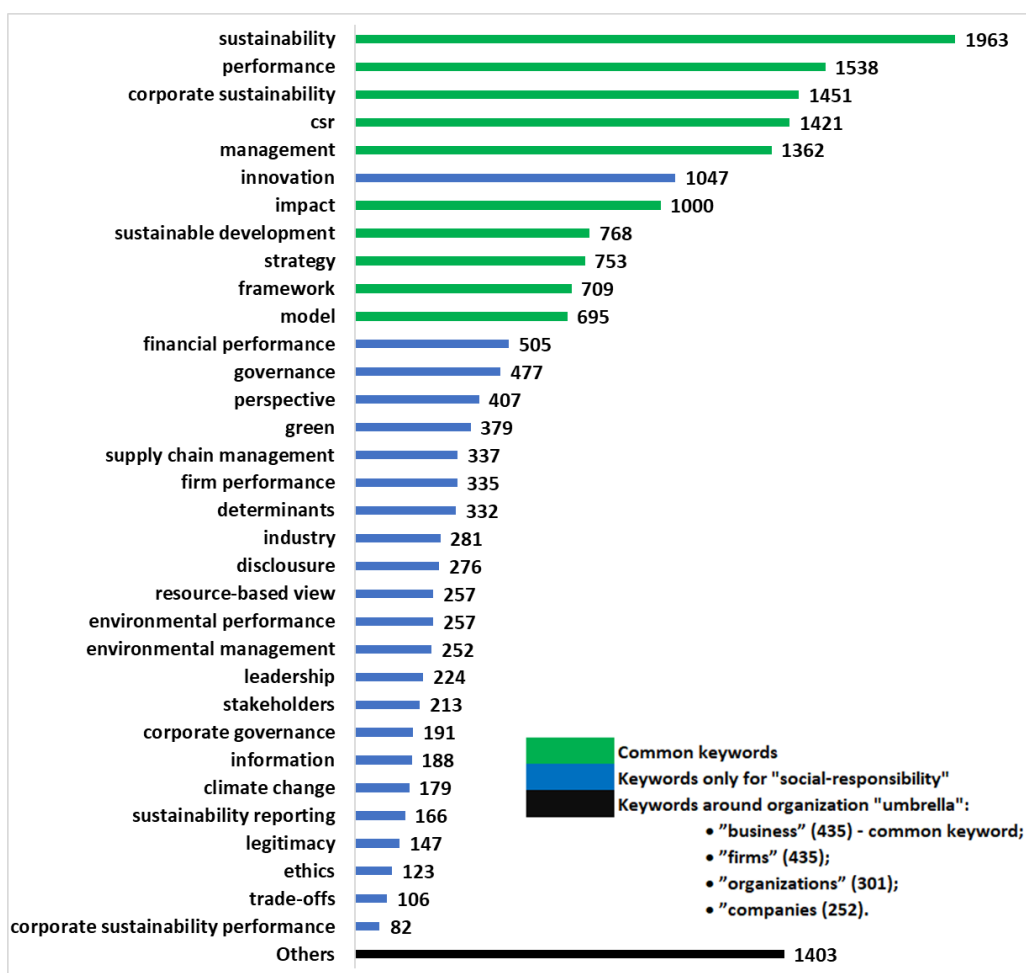


Figure 6. Social-responsibility network – a comparative analysis with “responsibility”

Source: Authors' computation with data from VOSviewer)

There is particular interest in the relationship between "social-responsibility" and other relevant concepts – "corporate sustainability", "performance", and "csr". From the research results shown in Figure 7, it is noticeable that the strongest link is with "corporate sustainability" (LS: 207), followed by "csr" (LS: 188), "performance" (LS: 141), "sustainability" (LS: 126), and "management" (LS: 126).

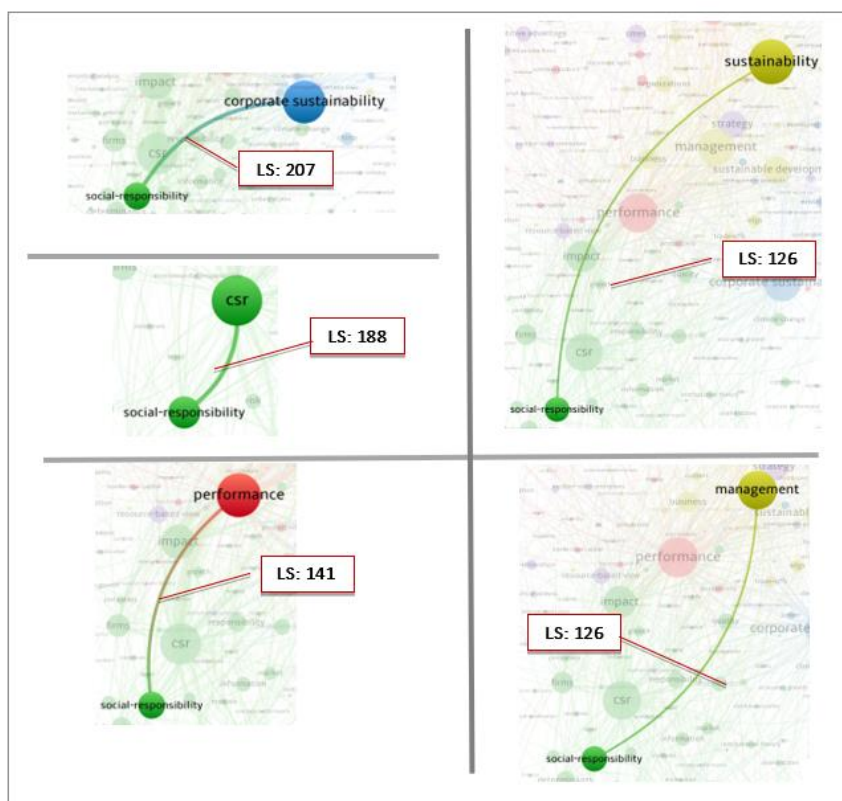


Figure 7. Links between "social-responsibility" and other essential concepts – "performance", "corporate sustainability" and "csr"

Source: Authors' computation with data from VOSviewer

5. Conclusions

Economic, political, social, cultural, and environmental issues create opportunities, but also pose significant risks and threats that may exacerbate inequalities. It is therefore essential to reconsider outdated and conventional approaches, and to promote shared values and commitment in order to achieve a more equitable and inclusive world.

Today, stakeholders exert significant pressure on organizations to behave ethically, act responsibly, contribute to social causes, protect the environment etc. Companies, trade associations, NGOs, and governments have a global social responsibility to form partnerships for the common good. Responsibilities of all types are essential and involve a multi-stakeholder approach.

The research conducted has revealed interesting aspects related to the issue of responsibility. Thus, sustainability, performance, innovation are important themes. In addition, the research emphasizes that social responsibility is closely linked to "csr", "corporate sustainability" and "sustainability", but also with "performance", and "management". Another interesting aspect resulting from the bibliometric research is the

growing interest in new “models” and “frameworks” that integrate social-responsibility into “strategy”.

“Governance” and “corporate governance” are other concepts closely linked to social-responsibility (Sahut et al., 2019). The importance of fulfilling and respecting shareholder rights, executive compensation, board of director accountability for all four types of responsibilities – economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic – are only some of the issues related to the two concepts mentioned above.

It is important to point out that environmental responsibility is not very well represented in the map and is not linked to other concepts. However, the documents identified in the research sample address environmental themes - green, environmental performance, environmental management, climate change etc. From the analysis it can be concluded that environmental actions are often not seen as a responsibility, but rather as:

- obligations imposed by legislation, standards, guidelines;
- ways to reduce/ streamline costs;
- means to gain competitive advantage;
- pressure from different stakeholders.

In addition, traditional stakeholders are often not directly and keenly interested in ethical, moral, and altruistic responsibility towards the environment. In this regard, there is a need for intermediaries to promote and “fight” for environmental responsibility. Within such a modern proposition, a more comprehensive approach to the concept of stakeholders is required, with the environment as one of them (Gorski & Dumitraşcu, 2023).

Moreover, environmental responsibility is also part of social responsibility, when viewed in a broader perspective that addresses society as a whole and includes the environmental component, which is essential to long-term prosperity and wellbeing of both present and future generations. Responsibility for the environment is about everyone's obligation - governments, industry, communities, and individuals - to preserve and protect the environment. It is closely linked to integrating environmental values and commitments to energy efficiency and climate change into human thinking and practices. Today we face major climate change issues, unprecedented increases in pollution – water, land, air – with inefficient use of natural resources, waste, and huge amounts of non-recycled waste. Unfortunately, in addition to products or services, companies generate externalities that society needs to bear and can have devastating long-term effects. Achieving carbon neutrality (by 2030), promoting responsible resource management, reducing waste, eco-responsible production – these are just some of the topics related to environmental responsibility. Now, more than ever, it is important that people - as employees, consumers, citizens - behave in an environmentally friendly manner and that companies internalise environmental costs that should not be borne by society. Moreover, accountability, transparency and respect for stakeholder interests are important principles linked with social-responsibility. In this regard disclosure, especially social-responsibility disclosure is not a fad, but a must.

In a complex environment, drivers, and enablers such as sustainability, ethics, going green, and innovation influence both rights and responsibilities. To achieve sustainable performance and long-term benefits, organizations have obligations to minimize the negative and to maximize the positive impact on the environment and society (Ye & Dela, 2023). This

is no easy task. The relationship between rights and responsibilities is a delicate one. In this regard, social responsibility should be integrated into the vision, mission, and organizational culture of entities. Moreover, there is also a need for new styles of “leadership” – transformational, responsible, servant, authentic, ethical, sustainable. Global citizenship education that promotes ethical responsibility, global interconnectedness, and universal human rights, is essential to foster ethical values, global solidarity, and active participation in social responsibility for a better world.

6. Future Research

In the present paper, the term “csr” (Cluster 2) - which refers to the application of social responsibility at the corporate level - has not been analyzed in detail. It is an essential topic in our construct, occurs with high frequency and has strong links with other terms in the resulting map (Occ.: 1,421; Links: 822; TLS: 10,823). In our future work, this concept should be analyzed to identify the most important links with other concepts such as - sustainability, performance, innovation, strategy, sustainable business models, stakeholders, leadership, human resource management, ethics, and others.

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