

# HAS CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY CHANGED THE REPORTING MODELS OF ITALIAN PROFESSIONAL SPORT CLUBS? SOME EVIDENCE FROM A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS ISSUED BY FOOTBALL CLUBS

**Maurizio Marano**, University of Bologna, Italy, maurizio.marano@unibo.it

## INTRODUCTION

Besides relevant results of Italian football clubs in international competitions, some critics point out the low degree of corporate social responsibility (CSR) shown by their management. Even if during last twenty years CSR principles and processes spread out in Italy within many business sectors and in academic world as well (MATAACENA, 1984; CONTRAFATTO&RUSCONI, 2005), the opening to CSR culture by Italian professional sport clubs therefore seems open to debate.

No research has so far been developed in order to systematically analyse the CSR practices implemented by Italian professional sport clubs, even if MANNI (2006) interviewed the top management of Italian football clubs in order to verify if an autonomous Social and Environmental Report was issued and concluded that it was not.

The first purpose of this research is to verify the amount of “social and environmental information” which is disclosed in the reports issued by Italian football clubs (“Serie A” or Italian *Premier League*), within the MDA (Management Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operations). In fact, even if no club issues a Social and Environmental Report, MDA may be used for disclosing social and environmental information (ERNST&ERNST, 1976). The research hypothesis is the existence of an increase in social and environmental information disclosed by sport clubs as a response to criticisms about their lack of social and environmental sustainability.

Secondly, the research work is conducted in order to identify the major internal and external factor *influencing* the shift of the content of the annual reports towards topics and measures of corporate social responsibility.

## METHODS

The research involves the carrying out of a content analysis of reports issued by professional sport clubs during last three years in order (1) to analyze the social and environmental information that they include and (2) to identify the factors influencing changes in the disclosure of social and environmental information.

“Social and environmental information” is the output of the corporate social reporting. In turn, social reporting is the process of communicating the social and environmental effects of organisations’ economic actions to particular interest groups within society (GRAY ET AL., 1987 and 1996).

Therefore, concerning the first (exploratory) purpose, the research requires for an operational model of social and environmental information, which will be based on the selection of both *key-words* - identified in accordance with corporate social responsibility values and principles and with corporate social reporting standard (GBS, 2000; GRI, 2002) - and *performance indicators*. Particularly, following the GRI model it will be surveyed the use of (1) *economic performance indicators* for measuring the direct and indirect impacts on the economic situation of its stakeholders and on the economic system; (2) *environmental performance indicators*, for measuring the effects on the natural system; (3) *social performance indicators*, for evaluating the impacts on non-financial conditions of the stakeholders of professional sport clubs.

Concerning the second (inductive) purpose, different critical variables will be used; in particular, following ADAMS (2002), variables concerning (1) corporate characteristics, (2) general contextual factors and (3)

internal contextual factors will be examined in correlations with the social and environmental information issued within the MDAs.

## **RESULTS**

These will be presented in terms of the content of the reports issued by Italian professional football clubs: the amount of “social and environmental information” they contain; the frequency of each selected key word and each economic, environmental, social performance indicators ; frequency changes during the 3 year period. The correlations amongst (i) key words and performance indicators and (ii) factors influencing the process of social reporting.

## **DISCUSSION**

This content analysis will allow assertions about the nature of the information included in the selected reports, a verification of the degree of coherence with the traditional values and principles of corporate social responsibility in the reporting process of professional football clubs, and the drawing of conclusions as to whether debates and campaigns on CSR are changing the information culture of Italian football clubs. In fact, the amount of “social information” disclosed within the MDA may be considered as a first effect of a modified CSR culture or just a defensive tactic.

## **REFERENCES**

- Adams C. (2002), Internal organizational factors influencing corporate social and ethical reporting, in *Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal*, vol. XV, n. 2.
- Contraffatto M. (2005), Il corporate Social Reporting e i suoi fattori interni: teoria ed analisi empirica, in Rusconi G., Dorigatti M., *Etica d’impresa*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.
- Contraffatto M., Rusconi G. (2005), Social accounting in Italy: Origins and Developments, in *Social and Environmental Accounting Journal*, September.
- Ernst & Ernst (1978), *Social Responsibility Disclosure 1978 Survey of Fortune 500 Annual Reports*, Cleveland.
- GBS (2003), *Principi di redazione del bilancio sociale*.
- Gray J., Owen D., Adams C. (1996), *Accounting and accountability. Changes and challenges in corporate social and environmental reporting*, London, Prentice Hall Europe.
- GRI (2002), *Sustainability reporting guidelines*.
- Manni F. (2006), Finalismo delle società sportive professionistiche e bilancio sociale. Qualche riferimento al contesto calcistico, in Buscarini C., Manni F., Marano M. (eds.), *La responsabilità sociale e il bilancio sociale delle organizzazioni dello sport*, Franco Angeli, Milano.
- Matacena A. (1984), *Impresa e ambiente. Il bilancio sociale*, CLUEB, Bologna.
- Matacena A. (2005), Responsabilità sociale d’impresa (RSI): momenti interpretativi, in *Non Profit*, n. 1.