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SOCIAL AUDIT AS A TOOL FOR STRENGTHENING TRUST BETWEEN YOUTH AND BUSINESS

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Introduction. In the context of ongoing transformations within the global and European economic environment, the importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and transparent business practices continues to grow. Youth, as a dynamic socio-economic group, play a crucial role in shaping innovation, developing entrepreneurship, and modernising business ecosystems. Their expectations regarding ethical behaviour, accountability, and social engagement of companies significantly influence the formation of new standards in youth–business cooperation.

Against this background, social audit emerges as an essential mechanism that provides independent verification of a company’s social commitments, strengthens the trust of young people in business, and promotes sustainable partnerships. In Ukraine – where European integration processes overlap with the challenges of wartime the need for responsible, transparent, and socially oriented business practices becomes especially urgent. Companies oriented toward sustainability, youth engagement, and responsible governance require effective instruments to assess their performance.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the role of social audit in strengthening trust between youth and business, examine relevant European practices, and identify opportunities for adapting these approaches to the Ukrainian context.

Methodology. The methodological framework of the study includes: i) An analysis of European standards and regulatory documents (ISO 26000, EU ESG reporting directives, youth and employment initiatives); ii) Structural and logical analysis of the role of social audit in youth–business cooperation; iii) Comparative

analysis of CSR and non-financial reporting practices in the EU and Ukraine; iv) Systematisation of the main functions of social audit and their impact on corporate reputation. This approach enables a comprehensive assessment of the potential of social audit to enhance transparency and strengthen youth–business partnerships.

Results. In EU member states, social audit is an integral part of corporate governance. Companies are required to report on labour conditions, environmental performance, diversity, ethical governance, and community engagement. Young people – whether as employees, entrepreneurs, or innovators – consider these aspects highly relevant when choosing employers or business partners.

European initiatives such as the EU Youth Strategy, Youth Guarantee, and Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs promote youth entrepreneurship and employment, while emphasising the need for responsible corporate behaviour. Social audit therefore plays an important role in increasing youth trust in companies; providing access to reliable non-financial information; shaping the image of socially responsible employers; encouraging youth involvement in community, innovation, and sustainability projects.

A social audit provides an independent assessment of non-financial dimensions of corporate activity, including working conditions and equal opportunities; corporate culture and values; environmental practices; social investments and community engagement; transparency and accountability systems.

By reducing information asymmetry, social audit helps ensure that youth and other stakeholders have a clear and accurate understanding of a company's social impact. This is particularly important in an era where ethical and sustainable behaviour is increasingly valued.

In wartime conditions, Ukrainian companies are increasingly involved in supporting communities, internally displaced persons, humanitarian initiatives, and reconstruction projects. Social audit enables companies to verify their social commitments; evaluate the effectiveness of youth support programmes; increase investment attractiveness and compliance with EU standards; strengthen trust among young employees, communities, and stakeholders; align business practices with European sustainability requirements.

As Ukraine moves toward post-war recovery, social audit may become a key instrument for establishing long-term reputational stability and fostering cooperation with European partners.

Social audit contributes to strengthening corporate reputation by confirming compliance with CSR and sustainability standards; fostering youth trust in business; enhancing transparency and public accountability; encouraging youth involvement in innovation, volunteering, and entrepreneurship initiatives.

For young people, working with companies that demonstrate proven responsibility is a critical motivator for long-term professional and entrepreneurial engagement.

Discussion. The findings indicate that social audit holds significant potential for enhancing youth–business cooperation. The implementation of social

audit practices supports structured development of CSR activities; strengthening of corporate culture; creation of transparent and equitable business environments; harmonisation of Ukrainian business practices with EU sustainability and reporting standards.

In the context of post-war reconstruction, social audit becomes particularly important for fostering societal trust, improving accountability, and strengthening Ukraine's integration into the European economic space.

Conclusion. Social audit functions as an effective instrument for building trust between youth and business and constitutes an important component of European CSR and sustainability practices. Its application contributes to increased transparency of corporate activities, the development of socially oriented corporate cultures, the promotion of youth entrepreneurship, the enhancement of sustainable youth–business partnerships, and the acceleration of Ukraine's European integration. Expanding the use of social audit in Ukrainian companies will support sustainable recovery, improve investment attractiveness, and foster closer cooperation between youth and business communities.

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