

CR³ Conference: The Power of Responsibility

Stream 1

Articulating the Political Role of Business through CR: Paradigm Shift or Business as Usual?

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In the traditional understanding of the relationship between politics and business, there is a separation between the political institutions of the state and business firms operating as economic actors only. While it is acknowledged in this view that firms may attempt to influence the political system notably through lobbying, this does not make them political actors and it is assumed that they interact with the political sphere only in order to gain economic benefits. In contrast, recent influential works on Corporate Citizenship and CSR (see Matten & Crane, 2005; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007) have noted that this separation between the political and the economic sphere has become blurred. The main reason for this evolution has been argued to be a failure of territorially bound nation states to address economic, social and environmental issues due to regulatory and enforcement gaps caused by the process of globalization. Further, it has been claimed that as a result of these gaps and societal pressure for companies to act in a more responsible manner, many firms have entered a process of voluntary self-regulation, leading them to contribute to the production of public goods and take on the traditional responsibilities of governments. This extended understanding of Corporate Citizenship and 'Political CSR' conceptualizes the role of business in a new way: it invites us to see firms as economic *and* political actors.

Now, this articulation of a 'new political nature of the firm', an attempt to introduce a 'paradigm shift' (Scherer & Palazzo, 2009) making it possible to address challenges of global governance through self-regulation of firms and voluntary deliberation with other stakeholders, raises a number of questions. Perhaps most importantly, given the way contemporary publicly listed corporations are legally constrained to think foremost about shareholder value, what can make us assume that these corporations may take on political roles for some other purpose than just economic benefits? How far is it possible to organize the production and distribution of public goods through the self-regulated and profit-seeking activities of private companies and their deliberations with their stakeholders? Furthermore, what are the political underpinnings of the claimed paradigm shift towards an extended political role for corporations? Should such a shift be understood as a progressive alternative to neo-liberalism, or on the contrary as a strengthening of corporate power leading to further neo-liberalization?

Following the calls of Scherer, Palazzo and Matten (2008; 2009) for '[discussing] the consequences of a political mandate of the business firm and [examining] the implications for the theory of the firm', we invite both theoretical and empirical papers that critically reflect on

the political role of the firm. The broad content area of submissions to this stream may cover (but is not limited to) one or more of the following themes/questions:

- Theoretical elaborations and critical assessments of works on Corporate Citizenship and Political CSR
 - Alternative and/or complementary theory development on the notions of Corporate Citizenship and Political CSR
 - How credible are corporations as producers of public goods or as subjects of justice?
 - How can democracy and an extended political role for corporations fit together?
 - Critical assessments of the notion of 'Corporate Political Responsibility'
 - What are the tensions between corporate power and the public interest?
 - What are the consequences of corporate political strategies and political lobbying?
 - Problematizing the politics of global governance and the roles of businesses, states, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
 - What are the political underpinnings and consequences of the fusion of traditionally distinct societal spheres (business, state, civil society)?
 - Problems with oxymoronic constructs in the articulation of business-society relationships
 - Problems with the interpretations of globalization that work as a background for the extended understandings of Corporate Citizenship and Political CSR?
- Empirical studies providing insights into phenomena related to Corporate Citizenship and Political CSR
 - Descriptions of, and reflections on, processes of social innovation
 - Discussions of challenges of the different forms of cooperation between firms, NGOs, and other stakeholders
 - What may be the role of inspirational leadership in social change?
 - How do business firms express their enlarged political role (for good and bad)?
 - Descriptions of, and reflections on, win-lose and lose-lose business-society cases