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**Corporate Social Responsibility in Retrospect and Prospect:  
Exploring the Life-Cycle of an Essentially Contested Concept**

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*Routledge Major Work on Corporate Social Responsibility*)

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## **Corporate Social Responsibility in Retrospect and Prospect: Exploring the Life-Cycle of an Essentially Contested Concept**

*"Corporate social responsibility means something, but not always the same thing to everybody." Votaw (1972, p. 25)*

*"The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) field presents not only a landscape of theories but also a proliferation of approaches, which are controversial, complex and unclear." Garriga and Melé (2004, p. 51)*

### **INTRODUCTION<sup>i</sup>**

Through the twentieth century, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) developed both as a management idea (Porter and Kramer 2006, Donham 1927) and as an academic concept (Bowen 1953, Walsh, Weber and Margolis 2003, Clark 1916).<sup>ii</sup> This development has been reflected in the depth and breadth of its place in management and the academy, particularly management and business scholarship and education (Cheit 1978, Frederick 2006, Matten and Moon 2004, Moon and Orlitzky 2011). The development has certainly been uneven but it is also true to say that CSR's status in the second decade of the twenty-first century is greater than it had been in the previous hundred years (de Bakker, Groenewegen and den Hond 2006, Lockett, Moon and Visser 2006, Margolis and Walsh 2003). The emphasis of this collection is certainly academic but it also includes numerous accounts of CSR as a management concept and practice.

Corporate social responsibility broadly refers to: (a) the expectation that business is responsible *to* society—in the sense of accountability (Bowen 1953, Carroll 1979) and *for* society—in the sense of compensating for negative externalities and contributing to social welfare (Crouch 2006, Arrow 1974); (b) the expectation that *business conducts itself a responsible fashion* (Carroll 1979); and more specifically (c) the *management by business of the corporation-society interface through the enhancement of stakeholder relationships* (Barnett 2007, Gond and Matten 2007, Freeman 1984) .

However, as we shall see below, definitions have varied together with the concepts used to describe the social phenomena corresponding to CSR. Although these transformations usually reflect sound conceptual developments (Wood 1991, Carroll 2008) or changes in managerial practices and visions they also reveal the *zeitgeist* that accompany the cycle of consulting and managerial fads and fashions (The Economist 2005, 2008, Abrahamson 1996, den Hond, de Bakker and Neergard 2007).

Thus CSR can be understood as dynamic, overlapping and contextual. Its dynamic quality in large part rests on the developments in business-society relations – including through new or re-invigorated understandings of *irresponsibility*. The overlapping nature of CSR reveals that it is something of a ‘cluster concept’ (Moon 2002: 4) reaching into and drawing from such cognate fields as business ethics, corporate governance, business strategy, sustainability, business-society relations and business-government relations, to name but a few. Although the emergence of CSR has been most conspicuous in the USA (see Volume 1 in particular), it is also true that CSR has also emerged in very different national contexts, reflecting different corporate governance, institutional, economic, political, social and ethical contexts such that CSR stories can be told in a variety of countries (see Volume 3 in particular). Moreover, even within and across countries different sectors have developed distinctive CSR trajectories, often reflecting respective balances of risk and opportunity, or market structure and ownership.

As a result of this dynamic, overlapping and contextual character, a broad range of labels, concepts and constructs have been used to describe and theorize the social phenomena that correspond to CSR—e.g., Businessmen Responsibility, Corporate Social Performance, Corporate Social Responsiveness, The Triple Bottom Line, Corporate Stakeholder Responsibility or Corporate Citizenship—to name but a few. We use the label of CSR as an overarching ‘umbrella construct’ as suggested by Hirsh and Levin who define this category as “broad concepts used to encompass and account for a diverse set of phenomena” (1999, p. 199). In line with Garriga and Melé (2004) and Gond and Matten (2007), we contend that in the specific case of CSR, the set of phenomena encompassed by this broad concept refers by and large to the business and society interface.

Our purpose in this introduction is to briefly account for the development of the CSR umbrella construct in practice and academia, in order to lay the ground for organizing the perspectives we have used to make sense of the CSR literature in this collection. We rely on several metaphors that shed complementary lights on the complex of CSR genesis and development in theory and practice. According to Morgan (1980, p. 612) metaphors are useful to question theoretical assumptions. Metaphors are effective when they can link two phenomena that are perceived as overlapping yet significantly different. Metaphors also offer a powerful way of accounting for the nature and development of an academic concept.

We first review the emergence and changes of definitions of the CSR construct, and we infer from this exercise that CSR can be described as '*chameleon concept*' as its definition and nature seems to change over time. To address this changing nature, we rely on a second marketing metaphor and investigate the CSR '*product life-cycle*' in line with prior works focused on conceptual developments in organization theory and business and society (Hirsch and Levin 1999, Gond and Crane 2010). This exercise allows specifying the nature of CSR as a permanent issue and an area of debates in management theory and practice, rather than a well stabilized construct with a clear and constant operationalization. The third, philosophical, metaphor we mobilized to interpret this state of affairs and deepen our understanding of CSR is the notion of '*essentially contested concept*' proposed by Gallie (1955 – 1956) (see also, Moon 2002, Okoye 2009). We finally explain and briefly introduce our selection of texts in the four volumes.

### **THE CHANGING NATURE OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: CSR AS A CHAMELEON CONCEPT**

The '*chameleon*' is probably the best animal metaphor for describing the changing nature of CSR both as a managerial idea and as an academic concept. From a managerial viewpoint, the '*social responsibility ideology*' has emerged in the US in the late 1800s from a tradition of industrial paternalism or philanthropy grounded in the religious beliefs of leading captains of industry such as Andrew Carnegie or John D. Rockefeller (Heald 1970, Carroll 2008). Contrary to a received view (e.g., Porter and Kramer 2006), social responsibility has been shaped by businessmen themselves (Bowen 1953, Frederick 2006, Swanson 2008). It is to a large extent a by-product of

the broader movement of managerial professionalization (see, e.g., Abrams 1951, Donham, 1927) that accompanied the progressive separation of corporate ownership and corporate control (Berle and Means 1932). This separation has created both a need for the new class of 'professional managers' to justify their social status vis-à-vis the society, and the possibility to do so, in enhancing forms of managerial discretion that had no historical precedent (Friedman 1970, Bowen 1953, Berle and Means 1932).

As an ideology, social responsibility is aimed at enhancing the legitimacy of both 'big business' and its management (Acquier and Gond 2007, Moon, Kang and Gond 2010, Pasquero 2005). The legitimacy of the new 'giant' corporations under cephalisation was indeed contested at the beginning of the prior century (Chandler 1962, 1977). On the one side, the so-called "muckrakers" vocally denounced corporate scandals (e.g., Sinclair 1946), raising public concerns about corporate regulation (Markham 2002). On the other side, this uncontrolled development of 'hierarchy'—an inherent feature of corporations as organizational forms (Williamson 1985)—was perceived as a direct threat to American democratic ideals (Miller and O'Leary 1989). In this new context, executives started thinking about the perception of their business activities in the eyes of what was broadly defined as the 'general public'. The first 'public relations' departments were created (Heald 1970) and with them emerged the idea that corporations have a duty to serve the general public, and diffused the notion of *public service* that corresponds to an early form of social responsibility (Toynbee 1953).

In the 1920s, social responsibility was most commonly approached by managers in terms of *stewardship* and *trusteeship*, two notions inspired by the protestant religion (Bowen 1953, Carroll 2008, Heald 1970). "Stewardship" contends that "those who own property have the duty of using and administering it, not exclusively for their own purpose, but in ways that will serve the needs of the whole society" whereas "trusteeship" affirms that "[T]he owner is a trustee accountable to God and society" (Bowen 1953, p. 33). According to Heald (1961, 1970) these two concepts provided the ideological foundations that laid the ground for the development of CSR in the USA until the 1960s, and the most noticeable innovation of the 1950s and the 1960s would be the formulation and diffusion of the *social responsibility* label itself. In a bit less than 50 years, CSR was thus successively approached in the managerial world through

notions as diverse as 'public service', 'stewardship', 'trusteeship' and finally 'social responsibility'.

Between the 1950s and the 1960s, social responsibility moved from practice to academia and CSR became a theoretical concept on its own (Heald 1970). This process would accelerate the pace of CSR transformations. Howard R. Bowen is often credited with being the founder of 'modern corporate social responsibility' (Wood 1991, Carroll 2008, Carroll 1999), through the publication of his landmark book *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman* in 1953. Although his book laid strong institutional economic foundations for studying social responsibility as a tool for corporate behaviours regulation (Acquier, Gond and Pasquero 2011), the academic posterity does not remain much more than its page 6 definition of social responsibility as "[...] the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of actions which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society" (p. 6). This first definition of businessmen's social responsibility opened a subsequent succession of academic refinements and redefinitions.

Table I provides an overview of the CSR 'definitional work' that has been already reviewed in depth by Carroll (1999, 2008). The chameleon kept changing its form, as several authors proposed alternative conceptualizations to capture the social phenomenon of CSR, such as corporate social responsiveness ("CSR-2") that in the 1970s focused on the management of social issues (e.g., Frederick 1978) or corporate social performance that aims at integrating the prior notion of social responsibility (e.g., Carroll 1979).

**Table 1. Illustrative CSR Concepts and Definitions**

<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Construct proposed</b>	<b>Definition provided</b>	<b>Focus / Perspective</b>
Bowen (1953)	Businessmen social responsibility	"It refers to the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of actions which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society" (p. 6)	Businessmen / Normative / Institutional
Davis (1960)	Corporate social responsibility	"businessmen's decisions and actions taken for reasons at least partially beyond the firm's direct economic or technical interest" (p. 70)	Business men / Normative / Beyond expectations
McGuire (1963)	Corporate social responsibility	"The idea of social responsibilities supposes that the corporation has not only economic and legal obligations but also certain responsibilities to society which extend beyond these obligations" (p. 144)	Corporation / Normative / Beyond expectations
Walton (1967)	Corporate social responsibility	"In short, the new concept of social responsibility recognizes the intimacy of the relationships between the corporation and society and realizes that such relationships must be kept in mind by top managers as the corporation and the related groups pursue their respective goals" (p. 18)	Top managers / Normative / Institutional
Friedman (1970)	Business social responsibility	"There is one and only one social responsibility of business—to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception or fraud." (p.LAST)	Normative / Critical / Profit focus
Eells and Walton (1974)	Corporate social responsibility	"In its broadest sense, corporate social responsibility represents a concern with the needs and goals of society which goes beyond the merely economic. Insofar as the business system as it exists today can only survive in an effectively functioning free society, the corporate social responsibility movement represents a broad concern with business's role in supporting and improving social welfare" (p. 247)	Normative / Institutional / Ecological / Welfare focused
Frederick (1978 [1994])	Corporate social responsiveness	"Corporate social responsiveness refers' to the capacity of a corporation to respond to social pressures" (1994, p. 247)	Corporation / Institutional
Carroll (1979)	Corporate social responsibility	"The social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time" (p. 500)	Business / Integrative
Carroll (1979)	Corporate social performance	"...for managers to engage in CSR they needed to have (a) a basic definition of CSR, (b) an understanding/enumeration of the issues for which a social responsibility existed (or, in modern terms, stakeholders to whom the firm had a responsibility, relationship or dependency), and (c) a specification of the philosophy of responsiveness to the issues" (as reported in Carroll, 1999, p. 283-283)	Managers / Integrative

**Table 1. Illustrative CSR Concepts and Definitions (continued)**

<b>Author</b>	<b>Construct proposed</b>	<b>Definition provided</b>	<b>Focus / Perspective</b>
Epstein 1987	Corporate social responsibility	"Corporate social responsibility related primarily to achieving outcomes from organizational decisions concerning specific issues or problems which (by some normative standard) have beneficial rather adverse effects on pertinent corporate stakeholders. The normative correctness of the products of corporate action have been the main focus of corporate social responsibility" (p. 104)	Corporations / integrative / Normative
Frederick (1986)	Corporate social rectitude	" <i>Corporate social rectitude</i> embodies the notion of moral correctness in actions taken and policies formulated. Its general value referent is that the body of sometimes dimly or poorly expressed but deeply held moral convictions that comprise the culture of ethics." (p. 135)	Corporation / Normative
Wood (1991)	Corporate social performance	"A business organization's configuration of principles of social responsibility, processes of social responsiveness, and policies, programmes, and observable outcomes as they relate to the firm's societal relationships" (p. 693)	Organization / Integrative
Maignan and Ferrell 2000	Corporate citizenship	"The extent to which businesses meet the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary responsibilities imposed on them by their stakeholders" (p. 284)	Corporation / Stakeholder / Integrative
McWilliams and Siegel 2001	Corporate social responsibility	"Here, we define CSR as actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interest of the firm and that which is required by law" (p. 117)	Corporation / Social good / Beyond requirements
Matten and Crane 2005	Corporate citizenship	"Corporate citizenship describes the role of the corporation in administering citizenship rights for individuals" (p. 173)	Corporation / Political / Institutional
Campbell 2006	Corporate social responsibility	"I view corporations as acting in socially responsible ways if they do two things. First, they must not knowingly do anything that could harm their stakeholders. Second, if they do harm to stakeholders, then they must rectify it whenever it is discovered and brought to their attention" (p. 928)	Corporation / Stakeholder / Institutional / Minimalist
Crouch (2006)	Corporate social responsibility	"...behaviour by firms that voluntarily takes account of the externalities produced by their market behaviour, externalities being defined as results of market transactions that are not themselves embodied in such transactions. CSR is essentially 'corporate externality recognition'." (p. 1534)	Corporation / Transactional / Externality focused
Basu and Palazzo (2008)	Corporate social responsibility	"...we can define CSR as the process by which managers within an organization think about and discuss relationships with stakeholders as well as their roles in relation to the common good, along with their behavioral disposition with respect to the fulfilment and achievement of these roles and relationships." (p. 124)	Stakeholders / Common good / Integrative



Conceptual changes have been so numerous over the last half century that one can legitimately ask whether we still talk about the same concept. This question has no simple answer for three reasons. First, the same concept and corresponding acronym, CSR, may refer to substantially different elements: compare and contrast Bowen's (1953) and Friedman's (1970) definitions of businessmen social responsibility, or McGuire's (1963) and Basu and Palazzo's (2008) definition of CSR as reported in Table I.

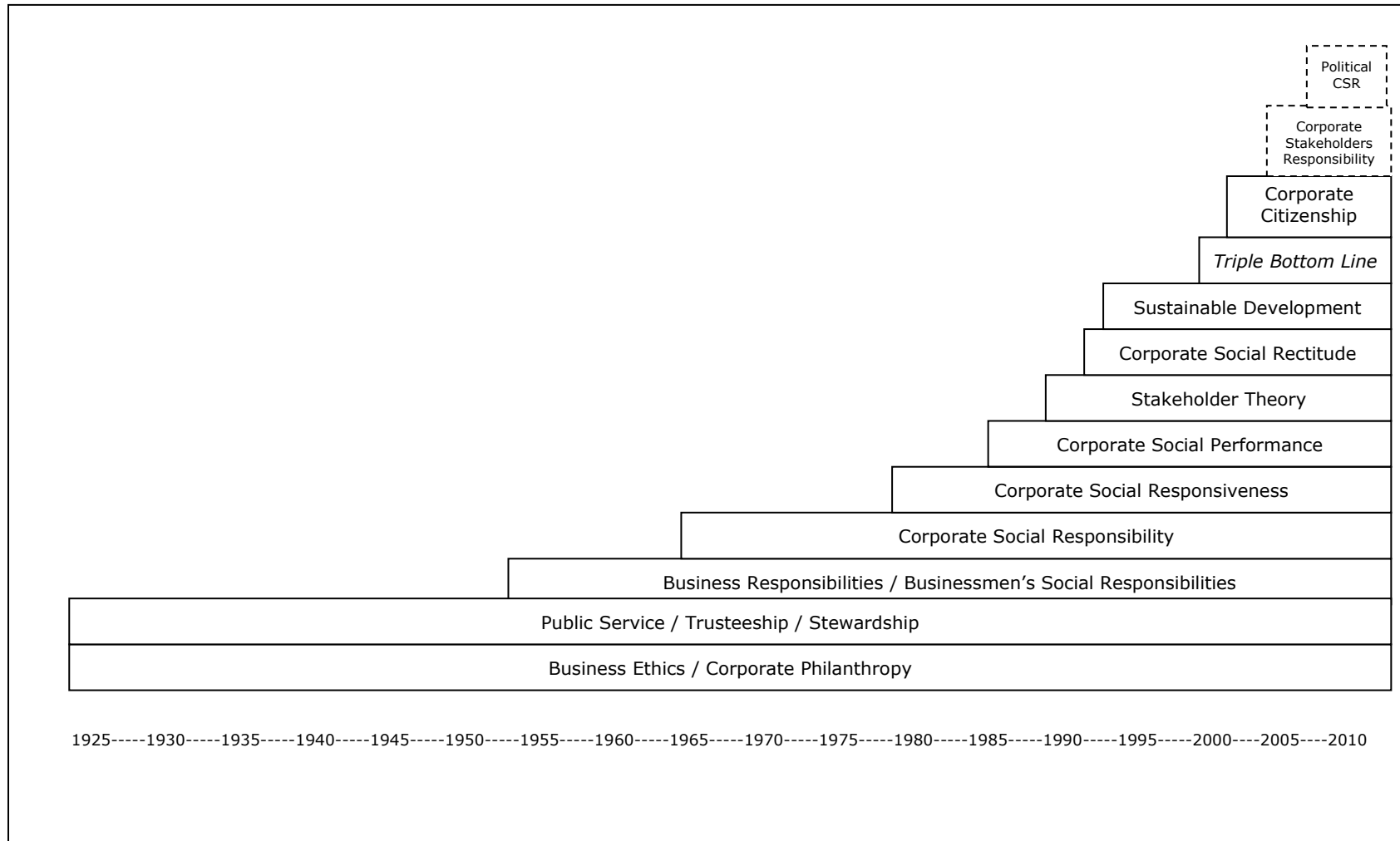
Second, the launch of a new concept or label does not necessarily aim at replacing prior concepts and its positioning between newer and older conceptualizations is not always clear. For instance, Matten and Crane (2005) showed that corporate citizenship has been described as sub-component of CSR, as synonymous with CSR and as an alternative to CSR.

Third, a few lasting conceptual changes seemed to have emerged over time, such as the tendency of the most recent definitions of CSR to borrow from the vocabulary of neighbouring disciplines, such as economics with the concept of 'externality' (e.g., Crouch 2006), political science with the concept of 'corporate citizenship' (e.g., Moon 1995; Moon, Crane and Matten 2005; Crane et al. 2008). Another noticeable change is the quasi-systematic use since the 1990s of the stakeholder concept for defining CSR (see, e.g., Basu and Palazzo 2008, Maignan 2001, Wood 1991)

However, a review of Table I suggests that old and new CSR definitions share a few recurrent and enduring features, such as the focus on activities that are beyond what is required by the law, and a focus on corporation and/or its management as the main unit of analysis. Yet, the succession of notions used to refer to social responsibility in practice, conceptual developments, definitional transformations and the rearrangements of frameworks leaves a somewhat complex picture as well as an impression of confusion (Garriga and Melé 2004). Clarkson (1995), for instance contended that "CSP, together with CSR 1 and CSR 2, carry no clear meaning and remain elusive constructs. They have defied definition [...]" (p. 92). One strategy to organize this complex picture consists in adoption a diachronic perspective on the successions of CSR conceptual waves, reminiscent of the waves of CSR issues reported by companies (Chapple and Moon 2005). Figure 1 provides such an overview, and

illustrates the successive piling of social responsibility managerial and academic concepts since the 1920s.

**Figure 1. The Escalation of CSR Concepts**



*Adapted from Mohan (2003, p. 75)*

Our brief overview of CSR emergence confirms the inherently changing nature of CSR through the chameleon metaphor. As shown on Figure 1, CSR has been a chameleon in the managerial sphere before becoming an academic chameleon. In addition the transformations of CSR occur not only at the skin level—with a change of concept or acronym to capture and to specify this elusive notion of CSR (e.g. the move from CSR to corporate social responsiveness or corporate citizenship)—but that the CSR animal is also subject to multiple intracutaneous changes—the same label or acronym being transformed and redefined over time (e.g., the multiple definitions of corporate social performance or corporate social responsibility). However, the academic longevity of the CSR chameleon has yet to be explained, and in order for us to understand this process of transformation, we next turn to the underlying that factors that drive CSR conceptual dynamics.

### **THE LIFE-CYCLE OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: CSR AS A PERMANENT DEBATE**

An alternative metaphor to make sense of organization theory umbrella concepts such as CSR has been proposed by Hirsh and Levin (1999). These authors suggest approaching the development of academic concepts in organization theory through the marketing inspired metaphor of 'product life-cycle'. According to this view, constructs develop through the tension between two groups of scholars. On the one hand, 'umbrella advocates' push for the conceptual development of broad and relevant concepts that appeal to a large section of the community. On the other hand, the 'validity police' groups of "methodologically oriented researchers" seek to narrow the new concept's definition so that it could be operationalized and thus assessed for subsequent theory testing (Hirsch and Levin 1999, p. 200). A four stage process model of academic concepts development can be derived from the struggle between these two groups.

**Figure 2. The Life-Cycle of Corporate Social Responsibility**

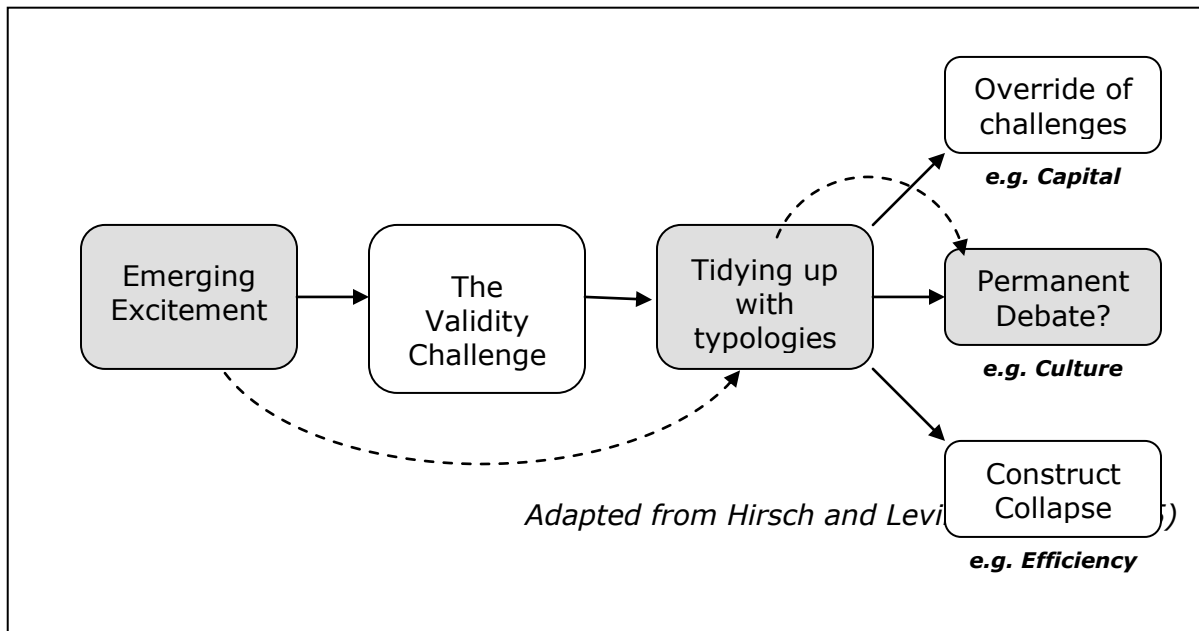


Figure 2 depicts the process proposed by Hirsch and Levin (1999) to account for a concept life cycle and the dotted arrows represent the somewhat curious trajectory that CSR seems to have followed during its career. Stage one corresponds to the 'emerging excitement' of scholars for a new construct usually broadly defined by 'umbrella advocates' and regarded as the paradigm for the field or the ultimate construct to be studied. Empirical studies burgeon as a result. The second stage of 'validity challenge' emerges when the 'validity police' engage with the concept and call for more systematic and rigorous assessment of prior empirical studies. These scholars usually take stock of a multiplicity of empirical studies relying on a variety of assessment methods and complain of the difficulty in consolidating this research. The third stage of 'tidying up with typologies' corresponds to the conceptual effort for making sense of the plurality of measures that have been used in the empirical literature and that may refer to various facets or dimensions of the umbrella construct. These typologies typically take the form of developments or specifications of various facets or approaches to the concept. At the final and fourth stage, three paths are possible. One path is 'construct collapse' if scholars decide for instance to focus on a sub-dimension of the prior construct they judge more promising (e.g. 'effectiveness' in organizational behaviour). A second path is that the construct 'overrides challenges' of empirical validation and categorization,

resulting in a consensus among academics on a specific definition of the construct (e.g., 'capital' in economic theory). The third and last possible path is a consensus of scholars on the difficulty or impossibility to find a consensus, that is, when scholars agree to regard the construct as a '*permanent issue*' (e.g. 'culture' in sociology or anthropology).

Where does CSR stand in this process? CSR went through stage one as, arguably, there was much academic excitement about CSR in the 1950s and the 1960s (Carroll 1999, 2008, Heald 1970), and each subsequent wave of conceptual developments—around corporate social performance from the late 1970s to the early 1990s, or corporate citizenship more recently—has generated its own genuine enthusiasm in its respective time. In line with these developments, the various CSR concepts have grown under the leadership of scholars who have conceptualized and re-conceptualized 'umbrella concepts' (e.g., Carroll 1979, Frederick, 1978, Wood 1991).

However, CSR in its various forms has hardly been directly challenged in terms of empirical validity (stage 2), at least until a recent period. The more specific case of corporate social performance recently reviewed by Gond and Crane (2010) through the perspective of Hirsch and Levin (1999)'s framework is a telling illustration of a broader trend in the CSR field. In the case of corporate social performance (CSP), conceptual developments have largely been driven by logics disconnected from the empirical studies—these latter being once described through the Pirandellian metaphor of 'data in search for theory' (Ullmann, 1985). Most empirical research has focused on the financial impact of CSP, and following the 'logic of expediency' (Gond and Crane 2010), relied on available secondary data as proxy for testing this relationship without linking their measure to specific dimensions of the broad CSP construct. This stream of research—that represents the vast majority of empirical work published under the CSR banner—can thus hardly be seen as having overcome the validity challenge. Recent meta-analytical efforts have consolidated prior results about the CSP-FP relationship yet these studies do not suggest that the CSP is an especially sound concept from an empirical viewpoint, and all point to various weaknesses in the ways CSP has been assessed (e.g., Orlitzky et al. 2003, Margolis, Elfenbein and Walsh 2007). Hence, CSR—together with its various conceptual declinations—seems to have been largely immunized from the 'validity challenge' stage, a fact that makes analytically driven

researchers conclude that CSR is 'much ado about nothing' (van Oosterhout and Heugens 2008). As shown with the bottom dotted line on Figure 1, it seems that CSR has moved directly from 'emerging excitement' to the third stage of 'tidying up with typologies'.

Researchers have long been busy organizing and reorganizing the various components of CSR, arranging them into meaningful typologies and other 'integrative concepts'. It is not by chance that some of the most influential papers of the CSR field are exemplary attempts at 'tidying up with typologies'—see, for instance the four levels pyramid of CSR provided by Carroll (1979) or the CSP model proposed by Wood (1991). This trend has intensified and diversified in recent years, with new attempts at integrating the most recent developments into unified concepts (e.g., Carroll and Schwartz 2008) and numerous works aiming either at 'mapping the conceptual territory' synchronically (e.g., Garriga and Melé 2004, Secchi 2007) or at diachronically presenting the historical development of the CSR academic field (e.g., Carroll 2008, Lee 2008, Walsh, Weber and Margolis 2008).

But a last question remains: what is the path to be followed by CSR at the stage four of its development? Will CSR override challenges, be maintained as a permanent debate or collapse definitively? The intensity and recurrence of quarrels about CSR *per se* (e.g., Oosterhout and Heugens 2008, Scherer and Palazzo 2010) or its decline through corporate citizenship (e.g., *Business Ethics Quarterly* 2008; Crane et al. 2008) or CSP (e.g., Gond and Crane 2010, Rowley and Berman 2000) together with the relative empirical immaturity of CSR research suggest that CSR, as a concept is far from having overcome its methodological challenges. On the other hand, recent reviews and bibliometric analyses of the CSR field highlight a growing and sustained development in the use of CSR over the last 15 years (de Bakker et al. 2005, Lockett et al. 2006) suggesting that CSR does not collapse either. The CSR concept thus seems to be following the third path and promises to remain for the years to come "permanent debate" or one in a 'continuing state of emergence' (Lockett et al 2006, p. 133), that is a concept academic agree to disagree on. Such an assumption can be studied in relying on the notion of "essentially contested concept".

## **CSR AS AN ESSENTIALLY CONTESTED CONCEPT**

We now turn to apply to CSR a philosophical concept, the 'essentially contested concept' (ECC - Gallie, 1955-1956), in order to explain why we see it as being overlapping, dynamic and contextual, and why it may remain in "a continuing state of emergence" (Lockett et al. 2006, p. 133). Although this concept has previously been applied to CSR (e.g., Moon 2002, Moon et al. 2005, Crane et al. 2008) and with reference mainly to Connolly's (1983) rendition of the idea, we now turn to investigate this proposition with reference to its original formulation (see also Okoye 2009).

Philosopher W. B. Gallie (1955-1956) introduced the term ECC to distinguish a class of concepts over which there is *in essence* contest about their meaning and application. In Gallie's terms this means that the 'ECCs inevitably involve endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users' (Gallie 1955-1956, p. 169). Whilst this might seem like an invitation to a futile terminological debate, in fact it links CSR with a wider set of concepts which have also been classed as ECCs which are nevertheless regarded as highly important, even indispensable to human flourishing and progress, such as democracy, justice and liberalism. Furthermore, by exploring the ways in which CSR is an ECC we can more clearly understand the dynamic, overlapping and contextual character of CSR to which we have already alluded and to which we will return as we introduce our four Volumes.

At the outset it should be made clear that being an ECC is fundamentally different from the simple incidence of some parties (be they managers, firms, stakeholders, commentators or academics) being for and others against a principle whose definition is basically agreed and which is often subject to technical specification (e.g. international aid, an industry standard). The point of Gallie's class of ECCs is that those who are basically agreed about the thing in question, in our case CSR, have ongoing disagreement about its underlying assumptions, motivation, scope and application.

He illustrates this with reference to, what he calls an artificial example, disagreements over which is the best team in a particular sport. The disagreements will stem from the fact that spectators and commentators will have different views as to the specific attributes entailed in playing the game in question to the highest level. Thus, in the



case of cricket, these attributes could vary between batting, bowling and fielding qualities. They could even vary among each of these qualities as there are various batting qualities that might be prized (e.g. not getting dismissed, amassing a large score, fast scoring), various bowling qualities (e.g. number of wickets taken, economy of bowling, and among types of bowling - spin, swing and fast), and various fielding qualities (e.g. restricting the batting side's scoring, making great catches and run-outs). Moreover, others may prize the attribute of overall attitude to the game, again among which there is variety (e.g. competitiveness, sportiness, generosity). The point here is that there is essential contest among lovers of the same game as to what makes a great team which is quite apart from debates as to whether cricket is a waste of time, whether soccer is more fun, more democratic or whatever.

Gallie further illustrates the point about essential contestedness with reference to art, democracy and religion. He demonstrates that adherents of each of these concepts will *necessarily* disagree as to, respectively, the artist merits, democratic reach and religious orthodoxy of new developments in each field. One only has to reflect on the controversies ignited by impressionism, female suffrage and Christian dissent to see the point. Each development was *both* opposed and advocated with reference to a seemingly common fund of artistic, democratic and religious criteria, and this is quite apart from those who criticised impressionism, female suffrage and Christian dissent on other grounds. But what is it about these ECCs that distinguishes them from issues which are either simply subject to arguments for and against without reference to such seemingly common criteria or which are subject to verdicts on logical, technical or scientific grounds?

In general terms, Gallie sees ECCs as relating to 'organized or semi-organized human activities' (1955 – 1956, p. 168). However, at the heart of his argument he offers seven closely related criteria for ECCs.<sup>iii</sup> We will show how these apply to CSR. First, Gallie observes that ECCs must be 'appraisive' or that they signal a valued achievement (and in invariably Gallie sees the appraisal as positive (1955 – 1956, p. 171). Very clearly, CSR is appraisive in that no company covets a reputation for being socially *irresponsible* and this would apply even those who prize maximising return to their investors, for example. Moreover, companies claiming to enact CSR policies or to behave responsibly do so in the expectation that they will be approved of for so doing,

and possibly even rewarded (e.g., by employees, consumers, investors, business customers). Thus the term CSR is not used simply descriptively. The fact that there are awards and indexes for CSR reinforces its appraisive character. Similarly, the concept of CSR is often used by those who criticise companies. It is not necessarily that the critics are against responsible business.<sup>iv</sup> Rather they might use the term CSR in criticising business for using it as window-dressing to hide their irresponsibility – as in the use of the term ‘greenwash’.

Secondly, Gallie defines ECCs as ‘internally complex’ (1955 – 1956, pp. 171-172) in that it consists of many parts whose relationships are not always self-evident. This is manifestly the case in CSR, first with respect to the question of motivation. For example, for Friedman (1970) an action described as CSR such as investment in social amenities in the vicinity of business operations, cannot be described as CSR if it ostensibly has a business purpose such as to win the loyalty of the workforce. We would argue, however, that the deciphering and alignment of motivation is in itself much more complex than Friedman would allow. This complexity of relationship between short-term sociability and long term self-interest is manifestly evident in the concept of social capital (Coleman 1990, Ostrom 1990, Putnam 1990) which has also been applied to CSR (e.g. Habisch and Moon 2006 , Moon 2001). The internal complexity of CSR is further illustrated by the variety of approaches to and conclusions about whether CSR increases profits (Margolis and Walsh 2003, Orlitzky 2008).

Thirdly, and relatedly, Gallie sees ECCs as entailing disagreement about ‘the normative significance of the concept’s various elements’ (Abbey, 2005, p. 465 describes this more clearly than Gallie, 1955 - 1956, p. 172). Again, it is clear that CSR is characterised by such disagreement not only around the questions of motivation and consequences, noted above, but also over the relative significance of CSR’s different elements. There would be a variety of evaluations put on the CSR of any particular company depending on whether one gave greatest weight to, for example, the elements of stakeholder engagement, citizenship, value of impact be it on social, environmental or political.

Fourthly, Gallie argues that what is valued in the ECC is open to modification in the light of changing circumstance and thus cannot be predicted. He calls this an ‘open’

character and notes that this will necessarily result in some ambiguity and vagueness (1955 - 1956, p. 172, see note 1). This is a well-known frustration on the part of CSR practitioners and academics as well as those new to the concept. As we noted above (e.g. Table 1, Figure 1; see also Chapple and Moon 2005, Carroll 2008) CSR has developed in ways which would not necessarily have been predicted, often as a result of the emergence and analysis of cases of business irresponsibility (e.g., major industrial accidents such as the 1984 Bhopal explosion, the 2010 BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico; financial controversies such as the Enron collapse or the Parmalat scandal).

This leads to Gallie's fifth criterion, that those engaged in the use of the ECC recognise that their own use of, in this case CSR, is contested by others. Moreover, for Gallie, the ECC is consciously used against other conceptualisations in the knowledge that one's own use will be contested by others. This is obviously the meat and drink of academic users of CSR who have engaged in controversies about such topics as to whether CSR can be aligned with business advantage or can reflect public policy or can extend to quasi-governmental activities. It is also grist to the mill of companies intending to use their CSR to support strategies of differentiation.

Despite the contestation that Gallie's fourth and fifth criteria signal, Gallie's sixth criterion is that the parties to the contest are nevertheless united in recognising some 'true line of descent' (1955 - 1956, p. 178) of the concept over which they are agreed. This underlines the point made above that ECCs are not those over which there is straightforward difference between those who are for or against them. In the case of CSR, there is a high level of agreement among those in the field that social responsibility of business is a distinct, identifiable and significant concept. More specifically, Dahlsrud (2008) has demonstrated that, notwithstanding all the differences in understandings and uses of CSR, there is a high degree of overlap in CSR definitions around the stakeholder, social, economic, voluntariness and environmental dimensions.

However, as captured in Gallie's seventh criterion, despite this consensus on the basic genealogy of the concept, there is no general or authoritative method for settling the contest (1955-1956, p. 178). On the contrary, the uses and definitions of CSR are open and thus myriad companies, business associations, civil society organisations, governmental organisations, academics and consultants are free to add their angle on

the definition. As Connolly put it in his (1983) discussion of ECCs, their meaning is always part of the debate about their application (see Moon 2002 on Connolly's analysis of ECCs and CSR). And this is why we have seen CSR as having a chameleon like character and having a life-cycle status of 'permanent debate'. As CSR has been applied in new ways, often over-lapping with cognate concepts, and in different contexts, its appearance and substance have been transformed and this re-energises debate about the consistency and appropriateness of claims that a certain behaviour or company is responsible or otherwise.

We now turn to introducing the four volumes in our collection. In so doing we flesh out the organising principles that inform the selection of papers in each. In keeping with the sense-making perspective we offer four different perspectives or cognitive maps of CSR. The first, in Volume 1, we describe as genealogical and these present CSR as emerging from early testimonies and contestations, through the development of practices consistent with the espoused values and commitments, to the establishment of theoretical foundations.

We describe the second set of perspectives as strategic and thus Volume 2 opens with what has become a leading CSR theoretical orientation, stakeholder theory, which itself combines strategy and ethics. This volume continues to present CSR as consisting of a set of strategically informed stakeholder relations. It concludes with the rather under-studied end-point of strategy, the implementation and then with the attempts to estimate the extent to which CSR's aspirations to contribute financial success are realised.

Our third set of perspectives is comparative and global and Volume 3 accordingly presents papers which conceive of CSR as the products of nationally-embedded regulatory and ethical practices and norms which both contribute to and are threatened by certain common global CSR features. In addition, CSR is seen not simply as a by-product of wider governance systems but also as part and parcel of new global governance.

Our final perspectives on CSR are critical and the papers in Volume 4 deconstruct CSR, first, as a set of practices and as a concept, and secondly as a discourse. Relatedly,

another set of papers offers a transformed sense of CSR informed by overlapping academic disciplines. Finally, and relatedly, two papers reconceptualise CSR as a global governance phenomenon... a perspective which the authors of the early testimonies of CSR in Volume 1 might barely recognise as CSR.

## **MAKING SENSE OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: GENEALOGICAL, STRATEGIC, COMPARATIVE, CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES**

### **Volume 1 – Genealogical Perspectives**

Our brief overview of CSR emergence through three lenses pointed to the challenges inherent to accounting for the history of CSR which was both a changing managerial idea and an essentially contested academic concept. We propose four perspectives reflected in the four sections of Volume 1 to tackle these challenges and provide some pictures of the CSR from both a practitioner and an academic viewpoint. The idea that managers, businessmen, businesses or corporations may have responsibilities beyond their economic or legal duties was already discussed in disciplines before CSR crystallized as an umbrella academic concept and a dedicated field of study emerged. The first section of this Volume, *Early Testimonies and Emerging Contestations*, captures such a CSR “pre-history” in presenting early academic controversies that would provide CSR with its “essentially contested” nature (Levitt, 1958, Friedman 1962). This section not only reconstructs the ‘received’ intellectual legacy of our field, in showcasing seminal contributions by Frank Abrams, John Maurice Clark, Howard Rothman Bowen or Keith Davis. It also sheds light on some of their neglected contributions, such as Bowen’s (1978) paper in which he sceptically reflected on his 1953 book and the concept of social responsibility twenty five years later. Finally, we bring back into the field works from prominent scholars who have addressed crucial CSR issues but whose ideas have faded from the debate with early works by Nobel Prize-winners Kenneth Arrow (1973), John Kenneth Galbraith (1967) or Friedrich Von Hayek (1960). Our hope is that this set of early contributions will help in the reconsideration of received ideas about the economics foundations of CSR that have been too often equated solely with the contribution of Milton Friedman (1970), whereas other prominent economists such as Arrow or economists working in the institutionalist tradition (e.g. Bowen, Clark, Galbraith) have provided insightful, nuanced and balanced analyses of CSR.

The second section, *Historical Emergence of CSR practice*, reflects a complementary perspective in tracking the history of CSR in managerial practice. Although CSR is sometimes described as an “academic product” (e.g., Porter and Kramer 2006, Shamir 2008), early CSR thinkers such as Abrams, Bowen or Friedman relied on the observations of corporate practice of their time and usually refer in their writing to managerial discourses reflecting the *zeitgeist*. The two contributions of this section by Carroll (2008) and Heald (1970) resituate the historical and social context within which the notion and practice of social responsibility emerged and account for the process whereby managerial and religious ideas have shaped the social responsibility “doctrine” at its early stages of development.

Once these disciplinary and practical foundations were laid, the field of CSR could advance theoretical concepts. The third section of this volume, *Theoretical Foundations: CSR Concepts and Frameworks*, includes some of these contributions that aimed at specifying the academic concept of CSR, usually in coining a new label or in providing a framework. Because the concepts are so numerous in the field (see Figure 1), we could only provide a partial account of the conceptualizations that were developed between the 1950s and the 2000s and focus on the five key constructs of ‘corporate social responsiveness’ (Ackerman 1973, Frederick 1978), ‘principle of public responsibility’ (Preston and Post 1981), ‘corporate social performance’ (Carroll 1979), ‘corporate social issues’ (Mahon and Wartick 1994), and ‘corporate citizenship’ (Crane, Matten and Moon 2008).

In the fourth and final section of Volume 1, *Analysing and Mapping CSR Research*, we assemble a set of contributions that picture the CSR academic field at various points in time: Preston (1975), Wood (1991) and Garriga and Melè (2004). We also include the contribution by Walsh, Weber and Margolis (2003) which provides a longitudinal perspective on the institutionalization and development of the social issue in management field over the last 60 years.

## **Volume 2 Strategic Perspectives**

One of the most contentious aspects of the debate about CSR has been the relationship of social responsibility to wider company strategy. This volume addresses this theme

from four perspectives: *Stakeholder theory, Stakeholder relations, Implementation and Competitive advantage and financial performance.*

Since Freeman's *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* (1984), CSR has been increasingly presented in stakeholder terms by academics and managers alike and thus this has become a major instance of CSR overlap. Notwithstanding Freeman's contention that stakeholder theory is not synonymous with CSR (Phillips, Freeman and Wicks 2003), he consistently advances its combination of the ethical and the strategic. This view is explored and extended by Donaldson and Preston (1995) in broad terms and by Mitchell et al. (1997) in respect of stakeholder identification. The paper by Agle et al. (2008) brings together recent research and questions in the field further reflecting stakeholder theory's own essentially contested character.

The second section applies the stakeholder approach to CSR strategy through a set of single stakeholder orientations and their relationships to business and social strategies. Hess et al. (2002) show how community is emerging as a strategic dimension to CSR beyond the traditional business benefit of 'the social license to operate', noting how companies increasingly align core values and competences with CSR, and assess, evaluate and communicate this to wider stakeholders. Likewise, Gond et al. (2010) identify a growing fit of CSR with human resource strategies, reflecting its potential impact on financial performance via its positive influence upon employees' attitudes and behaviours. Bhattacharya and Sen (2004) suggest that CSR directed at consumers tends to yield 'internal' (e.g. awareness, attitudes, attributions) consumer benefits and that the benefits can also be spread to the company itself and the social issues entailed. Rivoli (2003) investigates whether socially responsible investment yields competitive returns to the investors and positive social impacts. She does so through literature review and a theoretical discussion of corporate governance and social screening and argues that the main impact of SRI inclusion is the expansion of the firms' investor base. The Bhattacharya and Sen (2004) and the Rivoli (2003) papers both stress the contingency of CSR, with the former pointing to the variety of consumer reactions to CSR and the latter to the likelihood that SRI membership would be particularly attractive to specific types of business. The final two papers bring a stronger practitioner perspective to the relationship between the social and business benefits. Hart (1997) offers an early and powerful argument for companies not just to take

responsibility for the environment but to do so strategically. Frenkel and Scott (2002) evaluate different strategies in dealing with international supply chains. All these operationalisations of the strategic-cum-social stakeholder perspective highlight key contingencies to straightforward axiomatic relationships, reinforcing our portrayal of CSR as essentially contested.

One of the most neglected areas of CSR research is implementation, which may itself be a function of contingency and the difficulty of generalisation. Both our selected contributions to this section take a developmental perspective with Mirvis and Googins (2006) drawing on findings from case companies and Maon et al. (2010) reviewing the extant CSR literature. Both stress the importance of dynamic and contextual factors.

Our final section in this volume addresses the question of CSR and competitive advantage and financial performance. The papers by Burke and Logsdon (1996) and by Porter and Kramer (2006) both suggest a strategic approach to CSR based on a broad understanding of its pay-offs. The papers by McWilliams and Siegel (2001) and by Barnett (2007) both investigate how and why CSR might contribute to financial performance according to differential firm and stakeholder characteristics, respectively. The papers by Margolis and Walsh (2003) and by Orlitzky and Swanson (2008) both offer lessons based on reviews of the now copious literature on corporate social and financial performance.

### **Volume 3 Comparative Perspectives**

The papers presented in Volume 3 vividly illustrate the contextual, dynamic and overlapping nature of CSR. The first and second sections, *Conceptualisations of Comparative CSR* and *CSR in Countries and Regions*, focus on the geographical contexts of responsible business which not only raise the question of CSR differing from one business system to another, but also differing in their dynamics and overlap with such cognate themes as business ethics and corporate governance which are, of course, also contextualised (Rossouw 2005, Aguilera and Jackson 2003). Moreover the third section, *CSR and Global Governance* adds to this recipe for essential contestation the overlap of CSR with societal governance and government.



The questions of comparative conceptualisation themselves often arise as a direct result of CSR's essential contestedness. This is illustrated in Moon and Matten's (2008) opening conundrum: if CSR was much more of a US management concept until the last decade or so, does this mean that business in Western Europe was necessarily *irresponsible*? They address the questions of difference and convergence of CSR in these two spheres with reference to the literatures on national business systems and on new institutionalism. They offer the implicit / explicit CSR formulation which distinguishes that responsibility which is entailed in a business's membership of a particular governance / ethical system from that which is a distinctive product of the corporation in question. Another comparative framework is offered by Aguilera et al. (2007) who build in extra-corporate actors, employees, stakeholders and governments into their analysis of CSR and social change in different organisational spheres.

The second section, CSR in Countries and Regions, offers a short international tour of CSR with papers which engage either wholly or in part with CSR in Europe, the USA, the OECD countries, various parts of Asia, and a range of developing countries. A variety of methodologies are deployed. Some papers analyse company self-presentations (Maignan and Ralston 2002; Chapple and Moon 2005), one analyses international indexes of CSR (Gjølberg 2009), one uses data from international agencies and corporations (Kolk and van Tulder 2006) and another analyses and integrates literature on the countries in question (e.g. Dobers and Halme 2009). Notwithstanding some evidence of convergence, the overwhelming message of the papers is of the significance of national context and contingency of integration.

Some of the papers in this section are what might be described as implicitly comparative rather than cross national in design. Thus, Strike et al. (2006) investigate the behaviour of US companies operating outside their home country, Kolk and van Tulder (2006) investigate the specific theme of poverty alleviation, Balasubramanian et al. (2006) and Moon et al. (2010) examine the specific role of government in reflecting the contextual, and contributing to the dynamic, aspects of CSR.

The third section of this volume picks up where the Moon et al. (2010) paper leaves off regarding how CSR fits into emerging systems of global governance. The opening papers by Donaldson and Dunfee (1994), and by Ruggie (2004) offer broad theoretical

frameworks for this issue through social contract theory and the global public domain, respectively. Scherer et al. (2006) consider alternative theorisations of the firm through instrumental stakeholder theory and corporate citizenship in order to consider corporations' interest in being, and duty to be, globally responsible. Two of the papers examine the contributions of CSR to global governance, the United Nations Global Compact (Rasche 2009) and codes of conduct (Sobczak 2006), whilst Kobrin (2009) analyses the theme through the lens of one key issue, human rights. Vogel (2010) offers an evaluation of the contribution of business self-regulation to global corporate conduct.

#### **Volume 4 Critical Perspectives**

The purpose of this volume is to reflect critically on the most recent developments in the CSR field and, in so doing, to speculate intellectually on emerging trends and prospects for future theoretical developments. This exercise is delicate and necessarily subjective as the global trends described in Volume 3 are also at play in CSR academia, with an increased globalization—and, specifically, “Europeanization”—of CSR studies over the last 15 years, and as the co-editors of this Handbook would define themselves as “transatlantic” yet primarily “European” scholars. Such an internationalization of the CSR debate has several consequences for CSR theory-building. It has pushed conceptual developments beyond a functionalist tradition that dominated the concept historically anchored in US academia (and which is well reflected in Volumes 1 and 2) and it tends to “re-politicize” the CSR concept while bringing in new perspectives from a broader set of disciplines; specifically anthropology, sociology, political science and economics. Though fruitful intellectually, this movement leads to a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, and according to numerous indicators (e.g., number of books, conferences, consultancies, academics, or journals dedicated to the study of CSR), the field has never been as vivid and flourishing as it is nowadays. On the other hand, voices have emerged to provide alternative perspectives, criticize CSR managerial practice and academic discourse, deconstruct its foundations and propose new conceptualizations. This tension confirmed the contested nature of CSR yet makes difficult any assessment of current trends without the historical perspective needed to evaluate the level of contribution of these works. Our (modest) aim here was to specify a few structuring trends in current CSR conversations that may shape future debates on CSR.

The first section of this Volume, *Deconstructing CSR Practice and Concept*, provides a set of papers that reactivate the early political contestations surrounding CSR. These works aim at “deconstructing” taken-for-granted CSR views in both academia and managerial practice. They do so either in pointing to processes whereby corporations co-opt and hence defuse the critical potential of CSR practices through commodification (Shamir 2005) or manipulation (Banerjee 2008) or in analyzing how notably irresponsible organizations such as the Sicilian Mafia have mobilized practices similar in nature to maintain their legitimacy (Gond et al. 2009). These critiques are accompanied by analyses of CSR academia that stress the shortcomings and limitations of CSR theoretical developments. According to Richard Marens a new “great betrayal” (Benda 1927) occurred through the academic institutionalization of CSR as authors have lost the normative purposes of this notion and turned CSR into a tool serving solely corporate interests. Rowley and Berman’s (2000) paper offers a more conceptual yet sharp deconstruction of the core CSR construct of Corporate Social Performance (see also Gond and Crane 2010).

The second section on *Constructing CSR: Discourse and Objects* reflects another important emerging trend that moves the field: the import of more qualitative and constructivist methods of analysis to explore CSR as a process of social construction. This occurs through the mobilization of discourse and narrative analyses as exemplified empirically by the papers from Humphreys and Brown (2008) or Caruana and Crane (2008), or in mobilizing insights from actor-network theory to highlight the materiality of CSR concepts such as “stakeholder” as in the case investigated by Cochoy and Vabre (2007) or the description of the marginalization of a CSR initiative proposed by Acquier (2010). Basu and Palazzo (2008) provide a complementary lens in using the concept of sensemaking for analyzing CSR, an approach that structures recent conceptual developments in the CSR field.

The contemporary transformations of the CSR field are nurtured by conceptual imports from neighbour fields such as social psychology or political science. The third section on *Identity, Social Movement and CSR Behaviours* provides a few illustrations of this tendency with three papers that focus on the notion of identity to renew the conceptualization of corporate social responsibility or stakeholder management, either in cross-fertilizing the psychological concept of organizational identity with CSR, as in

the case of Brickson (2005), or in borrowing from social movement theory and psychology to conceptualize the ideological dimension of stakeholder management as illustrated by Rowley and Moldoveanu (2003) and den Hond and de Bakker (2007).

Finally, the last section on *Reconceptualising CSR in the Global Context* points to papers that exemplify the theoretical challenges and potential of reconstructing a CSR theory in a globalized context. They both aim at providing fresh conceptualizations of CSR and its management means in our increasingly complex contemporary societies. They both demonstrate the potential of relying on social theory resources - Gramsci in the paper by Levy (2008), various works by Habermas in the paper by Scherer and Palazzo (2007) - to renew CSR conceptual developments. These two pieces of scholarship highlight how CSR debates can be moved beyond the circle of management scholars and contribute to broader conversations on the role of corporations and the issues raised by their (lack of) global regulation in our post-national world.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>ii</sup> References to papers in this collection appear in the Contents pages. References to papers which are not included in the collection appear at the end of this introductory chapter.

<sup>iii</sup> Gallie (1955) variously refers to these criteria as: 'characteristics' (p.171); 'necessary conditions' (p.172); 'defining' characteristics (p.172); 'conditions' (p.173); 'necessary pre-conditions' (p.174) and 'further conditions' (p.180) but these distinctions need not trouble us here.

<sup>iv</sup> This is not to say that CSR is without criticism for its own sake. There are such criticisms which may be inspired by a view that CSR adds up to corporatisation of social or political life (e.g. Hertz 2002). But in this context neither we nor Gallie (1955) would judge CSR to be an ECC. It would be like a criticism of the extension of the suffrage based on an argument of undermining traditional sources of power i.e. the criticism comes from outside the paradigm of democracy and does not, therefore, illustrate the ECC.