

One Vision, Different Paths: An Investigation of Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives in Europe

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Abstract This comparative study explores 499 corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives implemented by 178 corporations in five distinct, institutionally consistent European clusters. This study provides an empirically grounded response to calls to develop comprehensive, nuanced pictures of CSR in the composite European business environment. In so doing, the article stresses three distinct, non-exclusive approaches that characterize the embedding of CSR considerations in corporations' strategies across Europe and the CSR challenges for corporations operating in different socio-political contexts. Furthermore, the study reaffirms the CSR notion as a contextualized concept, shaped by socio-political drivers, and contributes by bridging macro-level, socio-political facets of CSR with its meso-level, organizational implications.

Keywords Corporate social responsibility · Sustainability · Stakeholder management · Comparative analysis · Europe

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“But you know what the funniest thing about Europe is?...It’s the little differences.”—Vincent Vega (John Travolta), Pulp Fiction.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been a subject of discussion in business and academia in North America for some time (see Carroll 1999; Marinetto 1999); similar questions only more recently have started to be examined and dealt with using an overtly CSR lens in other socio-political contexts. European actors in particular gradually have taken hold of the concept in the past three decades, and CSR has gained rapid momentum across European industries, politics, and academia, despite continued disputes about its potential to address modern social and environmental challenges constructively (Banerjee 2009; Blowfield 2005; Fleming and Jones 2013). Resistance to the notion is at least partly due to the different meanings that CSR takes in different places, for different people, and for different purposes (Campbell 2007; García-Rosell 2013; Garriga and Melé 2004). Thus, substantial variations exist with regard to the adoption, management, and orientation of CSR, spanning distinct corporations and industrial sectors, as well as across regional and national contexts.

The composite European business environment, with its vast cultural, socio-political, and economic diversity, is no exception. Yet comparative, pan-European studies of actual CSR practices developed by corporate actors are scarce. Williams and Aguilera's (2008, p. 452) assertion that “comparative studies of CSR are relatively rare, certainly as contrasted with other related fields, such as comparative corporate governance or comparative corporate law” remains a valid portrayal of the state of the research in European contexts. Most practice-focused CSR studies provide a single-country analysis (e.g., Clarke and

Gibson-Sweet 1999; Perrini et al. 2007; Prado-Lorenzo et al. 2008); a few empirical studies integrate several European countries in systematic, comparative analyses to offer interesting but limited insights into the type and state of actual CSR practices implemented by European corporations (e.g., Maignan and Ralston 2002; Silberhorn and Warren 2007; Welford 2005). Scholars also have engaged in macro-level research efforts to analyze and compare the socio-political arrangements in which CSR practices get designed and implemented, as well as the changing roles of national governments and institutions in promoting CSR, using aggregated, broad, multi-country, mostly descriptive approaches (Habisch et al. 2004; Idowu et al. 2015; Perrini et al. 2006). In addition, some more integrated comparative analyses of the influence of different institutional and socio-political factors on the development of CSR across Europe progressively have emerged in recent years (Albareda et al. 2007; Gond et al. 2011; Jackson and Apostolou 2010; Midttun et al. 2006; Steurer et al. 2012). Comparative analyses such as the latter ones, however, rarely emphasize the nature and type of CSR practices and strategies that might be associated with national or regional environments characterized by distinct institutional and socio-political features. The influence of institutional and socio-political factors on the development of potentially varied CSR conceptions and practices by European corporate actors thus remains poorly understood (Jackson and Apostolou 2010; Midttun et al. 2006; see also Ioannou and Serafeim 2012), because empirical studies mostly rely on general corporate social performance scores compiled from existing indexes and databases rather than investigating actual CSR practices or strategies designed and adopted by corporate actors. These aggregated scores, even if multidimensional, typically do not reflect the full range of actual CSR behaviors and practices adopted by corporate actors in the field (Ioannou and Serafeim 2012).

Therefore, we explore and analyze 499 actual CSR initiatives undertaken by 178 corporate actors in 20 European countries that represent 5 distinct European clusters (Continental Europe, British Isles, Eastern Europe, Northern Europe, and Mediterranean Europe). The results highlight unique conceptions of CSR and actual CSR activities developed by these corporate actors across Europe. We help refine the empirical identification and analysis of the links among macro, regional institutional factors and meso, organizational CSR attitudes, and behaviors, in that we focus on the actual design and adoption of CSR practices and strategies by corporate actors. Furthermore, we conceptualize three non-exclusive approaches to CSR that appear, often in combination, in European corporations from distinct regional clusters: (1) process, capability-oriented, embedded approach; (2) market, outcome-oriented, embedded approach; and (3) discretionary, community-

oriented, non-embedded approach. Finally, we highlight the key CSR challenges that European social actors face, across different institutional and socio-political regional contexts. This study accordingly provides a more empirically grounded response to the call for a comprehensive, nuanced picture of the state of CSR practices in the composite European business environment; it also extends discussions of the connection of macro- and meso-levels of CSR analysis in regional and national contexts (Gond et al. 2011; Ioannou and Serafeim 2012; Jackson and Apostolou 2010; Midttun et al. 2006).

CSR in the Composite European Business Environment

Multidimensional, Institutionally Driven Notion

As Votaw (1973, p. 11) explains, “the term [CSR] is a brilliant one; it means something, but not always the same thing, to everybody.” Since the 1950s, the CSR field has developed considerably, to include a profusion of related approaches and terminologies—some of which are contested or conflict-ridden, and most of which are ambiguous and multifaceted (Frederick 2008; Garriga and Melé 2004). Across approaches and terminologies, a common idea is that corporations cannot be concerned merely with ever-increasing profits; in addition to their economic and legal duties, they have ethical and discretionary responsibilities to society, which reflect the requirements, expectations, and desires of multiple stakeholders in the industrial and societal environment in which they operate (Carroll 1979, 2004).

Corporate social responsibility thus represents a complex notion for corporate actors, and there is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all CSR solution (Argandoña and von Weltzien Hoivik 2009; Maon et al. 2009; Smith 2003). On the one hand, CSR-related questions and the resulting potential corporate responsibilities vary by industrial sector, type of business activities, and corporation size, such that they span a wide array of complex concerns related to economic, social, and environmental aspects of business processes and practices (Aguinis and Glavas 2012; Elkington 1997). On the other hand, stakeholders’ requirements, expectations, and desires are inconsistent, and often cannot be predicted by managers, and shift over time and place (Barnett 2007; Dawkins and Lewis 2003; Husted and Allen 2011).

Of particular interest for this study, stakeholders’ requirements, expectations, and desires appear to vary cross-nationally (Branzei et al. 2001; Doh and Guay 2006; Maignan 2001; Orpan 1987), as do the ways corporations pursue their social responsibilities. Corporations from

diverse national backgrounds exhibit substantial differences in the type of CSR concerns they address (Roome 2005; Welford 2005), their propensity and methods for disclosing CSR information to stakeholders (e.g. Hartman et al. 2007; Wanderley et al. 2008), their eagerness to be perceived as socially responsible, and the means they use to convey this image (Chapple and Moon 2005; Maignan and Ralston 2002). Such differences can be explained at least partly by the contextualized frames and routines that characterize the institutional environments in which corporations operate, such that “variation in socially responsible behavior is probably associated with variation in institutions and sticks and carrots they provide to constrain and enable such behavior” (Campbell 2007, p. 952). Different CSR conceptions and practices stem from historical institutional frameworks, so conceptions of CSR are institutionally dependent and “located in wider responsibility systems in which business, governmental, legal, and social actors operate according to some measure of mutual responsiveness, interdependency, choice, and capacity” (Matten and Moon 2008, p. 407; Chapple and Moon 2005; Waldman et al. 2006; Williams and Aguilera 2008).

CSR Conceptions in Europe

According to Vogel (1992, 2006), due to its origins in the North American business environment, CSR historically was met with cynicism in Europe and considered exemplary of “the reliance of America on private institutions, such as the corporation, in supplying a wide range of services that in Europe were traditionally delivered by governments” (Vogel 2006, p. 11). As a corollary of financial capitalism, CSR seemed socially non-embedded, whereas the capitalistic environments of Western and Northern Europe offered more socially embedded systems, in which businesses’ social responsibilities already were entrenched in existing, broad regulations and norms, and stakeholders other than shareholders exerted strong influences on economic processes and activities (Fiss and Zajac 2004; Hartman et al. 2007; Matten and Moon 2008). Matten and Moon (2008) suggest that a differentiation between explicit and implicit conceptions of CSR can reflect the ways that social responsibilities get allocated on each side of the Atlantic. On American shores, an explicit conception pushed the development of “corporate policies that assume and articulate responsibility for some societal interests,” (Matten and Moon 2008, p. 409), including the implementation of voluntary corporate programs that combine social and business values and address issues that seem linked to corporations’ activities. The implicit conception prevalent in Europe instead reflects countries’ formal and informal institutions, through which social responsibilities get established and assigned to corporate actors. Implicit

CSR characteristically relies on “values, norms and rules, which result in (mostly) mandatory requirements for corporations to address issues, which social, political and economic interests consider a proper and reasonable obligation upon corporate actors” (Matten and Moon 2005, p. 342).

In the past two decades though, the European business environment progressively has moved from a traditionally implicit perspective to a relatively more explicit form (Gond et al. 2011; Matten and Moon 2008; Steurer et al. 2012), such that CSR has become “a vital part of the business conversation” (Pearce and Doh 2005, p. 29), commonly used in European business settings without irony. The rates of CSR reporting by large corporations are consistently higher in Europe than in other parts of the world (Kolk 2008; KPMG 2005, 2013). This emerging European form of CSR represents a compromise, between market pressures for innovation and competitiveness and the traditional European social model (Delbard 2008). Unlike traditional European practices and active state interventions, European CSR embeds “the social dimension into civil society and self-regulatory market processes, with the state playing more of a facilitating and endorsing role” (Midttun 2005, p. 160).

Yet Europe does not constitute a single, homogeneous body from an institutional or CSR perspective. Even within the European Union, various cultural backgrounds coexist, with distinct economic and political ideologies, welfare state approaches, regulation models, and labor market types, all of which may lead to unique perceptions and governmental and corporate CSR-related policies and activities (Albareda et al. 2007; Albareda et al. 2008; Cuesta Gonzalez and Valor Martinez 2004; Steurer 2010; Steurer et al. 2012; Williamson et al. 2014). For example, in a typology of governmental CSR action in the former EU-15, Albareda et al. (2007) emphasize four models:

- (1) A partnership-oriented model in Nordic countries (i.e., Denmark, Finland, Sweden) and the Netherlands, where partnership is a strategy shared across sectors and stakeholders to meet social challenges, and social initiatives are implemented informally or implicitly, as a response to local expectations and demands.
- (2) A sustainability and citizenship model in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, and Luxembourg, in which corporations are expected to take their place as citizens in civil society, and governments promote CSR by supporting business organizations and political initiatives that boost CSR awareness, creating incentives to help corporations assume their social responsibilities, or invoking regulatory approaches.

- (3) An Agora model in Mediterranean countries, including Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain, where a strong multi-stakeholder orientation—such that governments seek to involve corporations, society, stakeholders, and political actors—leads to a conception of CSR that triggers the development of consensual solutions, mostly focusing on social issues in relatively less developed welfare states, compared with northern Europe.
- (4) A business in the community, explicit model of CSR in the United Kingdom and Ireland, with limited soft intervention policies, such that the public sector promotes change, facilitates dialog, and encourages corporations' involvement in social and governance challenges that affect the community.

Comparing CSR Activities Across Europe

When it comes to actual organizational practices implemented in the field by corporate actors, Crane and Matten (2004, p. 46) claim that “all levels of CSR play a role in Europe, but they have different significance, and furthermore are interlinked in a somewhat different manner [than in North America].” Ethical responsibilities enjoy a higher priority in Europe, but European corporations are less focused on discretionary and philanthropic responsibilities and associated initiatives than their North American counterparts (Bennett 1998; Palazzo 2002), in line with a somewhat implicit perspective on CSR. Moreover, European actors seem more inclined to focus on the impact of their activities and highlight practices that are more closely linked to their core business and production processes when trying to build a socially responsible image. That is, across industries and up to the present day, European corporations tend to converge on specific CSR issues that they consider strategic, such as those related to health and safety, environmental protection, or energy consumption (Perrini 2005). A cross-cultural study of communication about CSR activities in 16 U.S. and European corporations reveals that European corporations tend to incorporate both financial and sustainability elements in justifying their CSR activities, whereas U.S. corporations seem more concerned with financial justifications (Hartman et al. 2007).

However, CSR still can be considered an emergent field, “hampered by the lack of a consistent definition of the construct of CSR, as well as its operationalization and measurement” (Williams and Aguilera 2008, p. 452), and comparative, comprehensive, pan-European studies remain scarce, which makes it difficult to evaluate existing differences in CSR practices implemented in the field. A few empirical studies offer some insights: Maignan and Ralston (2002) suggest that U.K. corporations are more eager to

report on CSR and appear as good citizens than their French and Dutch counterparts. This finding is corroborated by Illia et al. (2010) study of CSR disclosure practices in six European countries, in which U.K. corporations provided the highest rate of disclosure, followed by Southern European (Spain and Italy), French, Danish, and Swiss corporations. Beyond CSR reporting, Welford's (2005) survey of CSR practices indicates that CSR activity is more important in the United Kingdom and Northern Europe than in Southern Europe.

In making an explicit link between macro-institutional factors and meso-organizational CSR behaviors, Midttun et al. (2006) highlight that in Western Europe, patterns of engagement in CSR by corporate actors tend to be shaped by regional and national institutional contexts. These authors also rely on empirical evidence of consistency within groups of countries on four measures of political economy and welfare state—namely, their varieties of capitalism (Hall and Soskice 2001), social corporatism (Schmitter 1981), gross domestic product (Katzenstein 1985), and social-political model (Sapir 2005). Thus, Midttun et al. (2006) establish four models at the European level: Nordic states, Anglo-Saxons, Mediterraneans, and Continentals. Then they apply a four-dimensional measure of CSR engagement and show that, on this basis, Nordic corporations score better on average than Continental European, Anglo-Saxon, or Mediterranean firms.

With corporate social performance data obtained from an independent asset management company, Jackson and Apostolakou (2010) explicate the link between macro-institutional factors and corporate social performance. Taking a varieties-of-capitalism viewpoint, they suggest that corporate actors in Anglo-Saxon, liberal market economies, where economic transactions are coordinated primarily by competitive markets and CSR frequently takes more explicit forms, achieve higher levels of CSR than corporations based in more coordinated market economies, such as Western, Latin, and Nordic European nations, where market mechanisms are supplemented by cooperation, networks, and collaborations and CSR is often more implicit. These results corroborate studies that suggest U.K. corporations are advanced when it comes to CSR (Aronson 2003; Welford 2005; Williams and Aguilera 2008) but contrast with Midttun et al. (2006) suggestion that Nordic and Continental actors demonstrate the highest levels of CSR engagement. Still, Jackson and Apostolakou (2010) highlight that varieties of capitalism associated differences have asymmetric effects on the development of CSR practices: They strongly influence the likelihood that corporations adopt minimum levels but have much less influence on the development of CSR best practices by European corporations.

Drawing from a national business systems institutional framework (Whitley 1997, 1999) and a multidimensional corporate social performance index from Thomson Reuters ASSET4, Ioannou and Serafeim (2012) highlight, for a seven-year sample of firms from 42 countries (20 European), that political systems, labor and education systems, and the cultural system are the most important institutions in terms of their impact on corporate social performance, more so than the financial system. For example, in countries where laws and regulations promote greater shareholder protection, corporate actors typically score lower on their corporate social performance. Firms in countries with a leftist political ideology score lower on corporate social performance, suggesting that CSR development might represent a substitute for institutional forms (Jackson and Apostolakou 2010).

We build on these prior studies that seek to link macro-institutional features with meso-organizational, CSR-related behaviors and outcomes to explore how the characteristics of the regional environments surrounding European corporate actors relate to the design and adoption of actual CSR initiatives. Unlike previous studies (Ioannou and Serafeim 2012; Jackson and Apostolakou 2010; Midttun et al. 2006), we do not focus on CSR performance indexes or measurements, because they rarely include the full range of behaviors that organizations engage in and that underlie corporate social performance (Ioannou and Serafeim 2012). Instead, we address the types of CSR initiatives and strategies implemented by European corporate actors, and particularly the practices that the corporate actors themselves consider best, to understand the varying conceptions and types of CSR that different actors, in distinct regional environments of the European continent, regard as particularly relevant. We thereby provide a practice-based perspective on the relationships of institutionally specific regional and national contexts and CSR engagement behaviors. To some extent, we also complement Jackson and Apostolakou's (2010) work by focusing on the development of CSR best practices and pioneering efforts, rather than minimum levels of CSR engagement.

Methodological Elements

Sample Data

We analyze a set of CSR initiatives gathered by a leading European business network. Since 2005, the corporate members of this network, spanning more than 25 national partner corporations across Europe, have contributed input to a CSR initiatives database, reflecting their experiences in managing critical CSR-related issues and implementing CSR initiatives. The database thus does not represent a

systematic picture of the state of CSR practices around Europe; rather, it exemplifies activities and programs that European corporate actors consider advanced, stimulating, and worth sharing with others. It also describes CSR initiatives developed in different institutional, socio-political environments that corporate actors operating in the various environments highlight as their own best practices, so they should describe the potentially varying CSR-related conceptions and perceived priorities of these actors.

At the time of our study, the database featured 650 CSR initiatives proposed by corporate actors that endeavored to signal their significant attention to CSR and that represent a broad range of industries. Considering our focus on European corporate actors, we deleted initiatives proposed and developed by national CSR-related networks themselves and non-profit associations, as well as those that reflected the efforts of corporate actors with headquarters outside Europe. When the CSR initiatives were not fully comprehensible or the information in the database was too limited, we checked corporate websites to find more information. If no substantial information was available, we excluded that particular solution from the analysis.

Our final sample includes 499 CSR initiatives put forward and developed by 178 corporate actors originating from 20 different European countries and 10 different industries, according to the *Industry Classification Benchmark*. The proportions of CSR initiatives in the data set ranged from 4.4 % for basic materials firms and 6.6 % in the oil and gas industry sector to 13.4 % for consumer goods and 14.8 % in the industrial sector. Furthermore, 63.7 % of the initiatives were implemented in one European nation, 6.6 % indicated a multinational or pan-European perspective, and 20.6 % were worldwide initiatives.

Data Coding and Analysis

Figure 1 summarizes the data coding and analysis processes underlying the development of this study.

We first classified the various CSR initiatives proposed and developed by corporate actors across Europe according to the institutional, socio-political backgrounds of the corresponding corporations or subsidiaries (Table 1). In line with a fourfold typology of governmental CSR action in Europe (Albareda et al. 2007) and building on the four related political economy and welfare state European CSR models (Midttun et al. 2006), we established four consistent regional clusters: Continental (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, and Switzerland), Nordic (Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden), Mediterranean (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain), and British Isles (U.K. and Ireland). As Albareda et al. (2007) suggest, and in line with Kjaer et al. (2003), we include the Netherlands in the Nordic regional cluster due to the

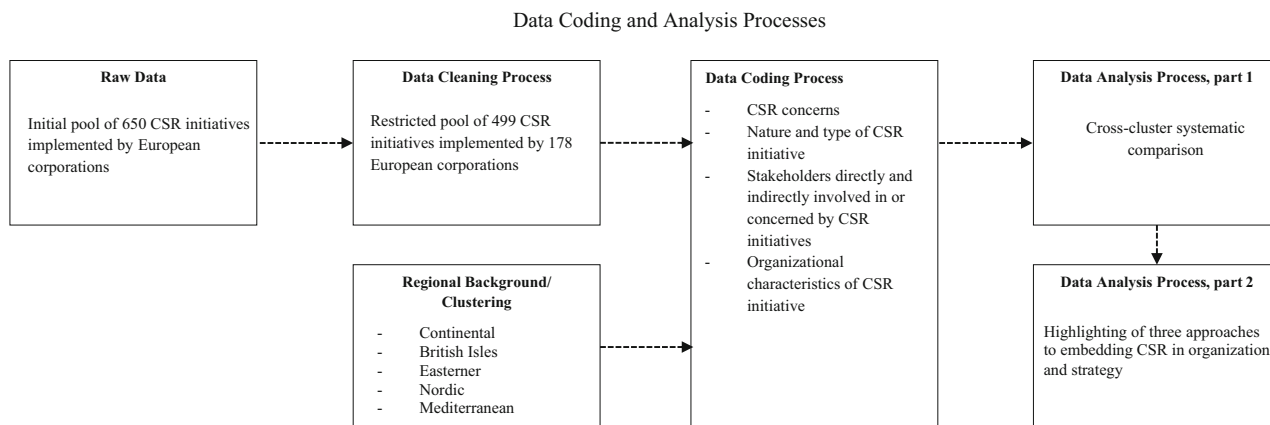


Fig. 1 Data coding and analysis processes

Table 1 Regional background/clustering

| Regional background | National background of corporate actors | No. of CSR initiatives ($N = 499$) | Proportion within total sample (%) | Examples of corporate actors |
|---------------------|---|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Continental | Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxemburg, Switzerland | 207 | 41.5 | Accor, ArcelorMittal, BASF, Novartis, Belgacom |
| British Isles | Ireland, United Kingdom | 102 | 20.4 | Lloyds TSB, BT, Rolls Royce, Bank of Ireland |
| Easterner | Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, | 42 | 8.4 | Orlen, Telekomunikacja Polska, Západoslovenská Energetika, Mucos Pharma CZ |
| Nordic | Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden | 41 | 8.2 | Novozymes, Stora Enso, Hydro ASA, ABN Amro, Vattenfall |
| Mediterranean | Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, | 107 | 21.5 | Telefonica, Delta Cafés, Titan Cement Group, Conad, Bank of Cyprus |

inclination of Dutch policies and actors to adopt co-responsibility and build partnerships with other key actors in developing CSR-related initiatives and programs.

As suggested by Steurer et al. (2012) a fifth group included CSR initiatives from Eastern European actors, to offer a more comprehensive picture of the CSR panorama. The CSR initiatives from Eastern Europe all originate from three, somewhat comparable countries, namely, Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. This group thus does not include the entire range of countries usually included within Eastern Europe, which differ enormously from one another.

In line with existing CSR literature, our coding scheme features six main codes. The first category deals with the *type of CSR concerns* that characterize CSR initiatives. To describe these concerns, we applied a triple bottom line thematic perspective to account for the (1) economic and/or commercial, (2) environmental, and (3) social dimensions

of CSR (Elkington 1997; Savitz and Weber 2006). Because the social dimension of CSR reflects a wide variety of issues and is difficult to capture with a single variable or construct (Chapple and Moon 2005; Fortanier et al. 2011), we used two separate sub-themes, such that the third dimension of CSR comprises (a) the social dimension relative to workers (including supply chain workers) and (b) the social dimension relative to the community and society (Hess et al. 2002). These four concerns are not mutually exclusive; in our coding scheme for example, when the Italian energy provider *Enel* developed software to monitor CSR integration in its corporate strategy, it reflected all the CSR-related concerns.

The second category pertains to the *nature and type of CSR initiatives* designed and implemented. To capture the variety of initiatives designed and implemented by European corporations, and in line with existing categorizations of CSR actions (Lantos, 2001; Venn et al. 2010), we

distinguished between CSR initiatives that relate to the development of products and services, organizational and business processes, and philanthropy-oriented CSR initiatives that relate to charity and community involvement practices and activities. To better reflect the content of the pool of initiatives, we added another category of internal initiatives, related to addressing the challenges in making employees aware of CSR. That is, the four categories pertaining to the nature and types of CSR initiatives designed and implemented by European corporations relate to (1) development of internal CSR-related awareness, (2) development of CSR-related products and services, (3) CSR-related organizational processes and capacities, and (4) charity and community involvement practices. The subcategories again are not mutually exclusive. For example, the Switzerland-based engineering corporation *ABB* aimed to provide electricity to poor areas, without damaging the environment, which represented three categories: CSR-related products and services, CSR-related processes and competences, and community and society involvement.

A third category accounts for the *type of stakeholders* primarily involved in or concerned by the CSR initiatives. We distinguished between internal and external stakeholders (Cavanagh and McGovern 1988; Mitroff 1983), as employees, managers/sites, and unions *versus* suppliers, business partners, clients, customers, public authorities, local communities, non-profit associations, public and educational entities, other businesses, and the media.

The remaining two categories fall under an umbrella grouping pertaining to the *organizational characteristics of CSR initiatives*. Thus, we code the thematic fit, or congruence among the CSR issue addressed by the initiative being proposed by the corporation and the business activities of the corporation (Du et al. 2010), as low, moderate, or high. For example, a thematic fit of a CSR initiative aimed at fighting illiteracy in South-East Asia and designed by a European energy corporation is coded as low, while an initiative by the same corporation aimed at encouraging the use of renewable energies is coded as high. Then we code the implications of the CSR initiative in terms of strategic integration and alignment (Grayson and Hodges 2004; Maon et al. 2010; Porter and Kramer 2006), again as low, moderate, or high. A CSR initiative that is ‘built-in’ and can be considered as constituting an integral part of business strategy and operations (e.g., an initiative that will make production operations more eco-friendly and/or affect the social and environmental properties of product) is coded as high. Conversely, a ‘bolt-on’ CSR initiative that is disconnected from core operations of the corporation (e.g., initiatives linked to financial or material donations, sponsoring, campaigning, or volunteering initiatives by employees of the corporation) is coded as low.

CSR Practices Across Europe: Findings

Types of CSR Concerns

Among the 499 proposed CSR initiatives, 61.1 % linked directly or indirectly to community and society, manifested as social concerns related to human well-being and relations outside the organization, such as education, health, or community (Table 2). Social concerns involving or pertaining to workers in the corporation or the supply chain characterized 46.3 % of the initiatives; 39.9 % of CSR initiatives reflected environmental concerns. Finally, 35.7 % of the CSR initiatives related directly to economic and/or commercial concerns, such as efforts to source or procure resources responsibly or market products and services according to CSR ideals.

Significant differences appear across the types of CSR concerns targeted by European corporations in different regions (Table 2). Initiatives pertaining to environmental concerns are more common among Nordic and Continental corporations than among Mediterranean or Eastern European ones. Worker-related issues garner greater attention among Nordic and Continental corporations than among their Eastern European, Mediterranean, and British Isles counterparts. Conversely, corporate actors from Eastern Europe tend to target issues related to the welfare of society and community much more than do corporations anywhere else in Europe, even though such social issues constitute the most important area for CSR initiatives among Nordic, Mediterranean, and British Isles corporate actors. In contrast, Eastern European corporations are much less inclined to focus on economic and/or commercial concerns. Finally, more than half of the CSR initiatives proposed by the Nordic firms included some commercial dimension, in parallel with other CSR concerns.

Nature and Type of CSR Initiatives

Across the total sample, the development of CSR-related processes and capacities constituted the most frequent type of proposed CSR initiatives (56.9 %), followed by the development of community and society involvement practices (48.5 %). Conversely, CSR-related awareness programs within the organization (18.0 %) and CSR-related products and services (15.6 %) appeared much less frequently (Table 3).

In terms of regional differences, Continentals (24.6 %) and Nordics (22.0 %) appeared more prone to propose and implement initiatives directly or indirectly associated with the development of internal CSR-related awareness than Easterners (9.5 %) and Mediterraneans (9.3 %). A potential explanation relates to the historical influence of unions

Table 2 CSR concerns

| CSR concerns | Total (<i>N</i> = 499) | Regional background | | | | | Difference test |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | | Contin. (<i>N</i> = 207) | Brit. Isles (<i>N</i> = 102) | Easterner (<i>N</i> = 42) | Nordic (<i>N</i> = 41) | Med. (<i>N</i> = 107) | |
| Economic and/or commercial concerns | 178 35.7 % | 77 37.2 % | 34 33.3 % | 5 11.9 % | 21 51.2 % | 41 38.3 % | $\chi^2 = 15.430, df = 4, p < .01$ |
| Environmental concerns | 199 39.9 % | 90 43.5 % | 38 37.3 % | 10 23.8 % | 25 61.0 % | 36 33.6 % | $\chi^2 = 15.280, df = 4, p < .01$ |
| Social concerns (workers) | 231 46.3 % | 112 54.1 % | 40 39.2 % | 13 31.0 % | 24 58.5 % | 42 39.3 % | $\chi^2 = 15.718, df = 4, p < .01$ |
| Social concerns (community and society) | 305 61.1 % | 108 52.2 % | 62 60.8 % | 35 83.3 % | 28 68.3 % | 72 67.3 % | $\chi^2 = 18.299, df = 4, p < .01$ |

Categories of CSR concerns are not exclusive and a CSR initiative may relate to more than one CSR concern

Contin. Continental; *Brit. Isles* British Isles; *Med.* Mediterranean

and employees as key stakeholders in both Continental and Nordic countries. Similarly, Nordic (70.7 %) and Continental (66.2 %) corporate actors emerged as more inclined to orient their CSR efforts toward building CSR-related processes and capacities than Easterners (21.4 %). Corporate actors from the Mediterranean (56.1 %) and British Isles (48.0 %) instead showed moderate patterns.

Corporate actors from Eastern Europe seemed less prone to integrate CSR concerns in their business processes and day-to-day activities, as illustrated by the absence of Eastern CSR initiatives related to the development of CSR-related products and services. Such initiatives instead were relatively well-represented in other regional clusters (from 14.7 to 24.4 %). Eastern European corporate actors concentrated their CSR efforts on developing community and society involvement practices.

Regional predispositions with respect to the development of CSR-related processes and capacities clearly demand further nuance though, especially when we consider the subcategories of initiatives in Table 3. Whereas no significant differences emerged for CSR-related training processes, CSR-related sourcing and procurement practices received much greater attention among Nordic corporate actors (24.4 %) than among Eastern (7.1 %), Mediterranean (8.4 %), or British Isles (8.8 %) actors. The development of CSR-related codes of conduct and frameworks for corporate action arose more commonly among Nordic (53.7 %) and Continental (48.3 %) (and to some extent Mediterranean [37.4 %] and British Isles [37.3 %]) corporate actors than in Eastern Europe (11.9 %).

Finally, in terms of community and society involvement practices, we found no significant differences in practices related to sector and cross-sector expertise sharing or external awareness raising and promotion of societal issues (i.e., campaigning) by corporate actors. But differences did

arise, in that Nordic (2.0 %) and Continental (8.2 %) corporate actors, in comparison with the others (17.6–50.0 %), demonstrated a very low inclination to develop practices related to philanthropy and employee volunteerism. Conversely, along with corporate actors from the Mediterranean basin (19.6 %), Nordics (20.3 %), and Continentals (26.8 %) were more prone to engage in initiatives to meet communities' specific and previously unmet needs through business activities (e.g., initiatives at the base of the pyramid) than corporations from the British Isles (12.7 %) and Eastern Europe (4.8 %). Thus our analysis suggested the coexistence of two visions of corporate involvement: an Eastern vision (close to the British Isles one), with a higher propensity to engage in initiatives decoupled from business operations, and another vision shared by Nordic, Continental, and Mediterranean actors that develop a more business-oriented perspective on community involvement. This distinction partially reflects their highlighted tendencies for developing CSR-related product and services.

Type of Stakeholders Involved in or Affected by CSR Initiatives

The CSR initiatives proposed by European corporate actors involve and affect both internal and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders include employees (49.3 % of initiatives) and managers (and subsidiaries/local operations; 27.1 %), as well as, to a much lesser extent, labor unions (4.4 %). These rates mimic the substantial skepticism European unions express toward CSR (Preuss 2008). For employees, though the greater focus of Continental and Nordic corporate actors on internal social issues seemingly suggest a higher level of concern for employee-related issues and involvement, we found no significant cross-regional differences. Yet managers (and subsidiaries) were

Table 3 Nature and type of CSR initiatives

| Type of initiative | Total (N = 499) | Regional background | | | | | Difference test |
|---|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| | | Contin. (N = 207) | Brit. Isles (N = 102) | Easterner (N = 42) | Nordic (N = 41) | Med. (N = 107) | |
| Development of CSR-related products and services | 78 15.6 % | 31 15.0 % | 15 14.7 % | 0 .0 % | 10 24.4 % | 22 20.6 % | $\chi^2 = 12.272, df = 4, p < .05$ |
| Development of Internal CSR-Related Awareness Programs | 90 18.0 % | 51 24.6 % | 16 15.7 % | 4 9.5 % | 9 22.0 % | 10 9.3 % | $\chi^2 = 14.433, df = 4, p < .01$ |
| Development of CSR-Related Business and Organizational Processes and Capacities | 284 56.9 % | 137 66.2 % | 49 48.0 % | 9 21.4 % | 29 70.7 % | 60 56.1 % | $\chi^2 = 35.320, df = 4, p < .01$ |
| Training | 75 15.0 % | 38 18.4 % | 9 8.8 % | 3 7.1 % | 6 14.6 % | 19 17.8 % | $\chi^2 = 7.545, df = 4, p > .05$ |
| Sourcing and procurement | 65 13.0 % | 34 16.4 % | 9 8.8 % | 3 7.1 % | 10 24.4 % | 9 8.4 % | $\chi^2 = 11.669, df = 4, p < .05$ |
| Codes of conduct and frameworks for corporate actions | 205 41.1 % | 100 48.3 % | 38 37.3 % | 5 11.9 % | 22 53.7 % | 40 37.4 % | $\chi^2 = 23.140, df = 4, p < .01$ |
| Charity and Community Involvement Practices | 242 48.5 % | 86 41.5 % | 48 47.1 % | 31 73.8 % | 21 51.2 % | 56 52.3 % | $\chi^2 = 15.616, df = 4, p < .01$ |
| Employee volunteerism and philanthropy | 81 16.2 % | 17 8.2 % | 18 17.6 % | 21 50.0 % | 1 2.4 % | 24 22.4 % | $\chi^2 = 53.920, df = 4, p < .01$ |
| Expertise sharing | 80 16.0 % | 28 13.5 % | 17 16.7 % | 5 11.9 % | 11 26.8 % | 19 17.8 % | $\chi^2 = 5.314, df = 4, p > .05$ |
| Campaigning | 66 13.2 % | 22 10.6 % | 15 14.7 % | 10 23.8 % | 6 14.6 % | 13 12.1 % | $\chi^2 = 5.690, df = 4, p > .05$ |
| Business in the community | 89 17.8 % | 42 20.3 % | 13 12.7 % | 2 4.8 % | 11 26.8 % | 21 19.6 % | $\chi^2 = 10.050, df = 4, p < .05$ |

Categories of initiatives are not exclusive and a CSR initiative may relate to more than one category

Contin. Continental; *Brit. Isles* British Isles; *Med.* Mediterranean

much less involved in or concerned by CSR initiatives developed by Eastern European firms (7.1 %) than by others (24.3–32.9 %) (Table 4).

For external stakeholders, civil society organizations were the most frequently involved in or affected by CSR initiatives (46.5 %), followed by local communities (41.7 %), commercial stakeholders such as suppliers and business partners (20.0 %), clients and customers (17.4 %), public authorities (13.8 %), other businesses (9.0 %), and the media (3.0 %). Corporate actors from Eastern Europe (66.7 %), the British Isles (51.0 %), and the Mediterranean basin (49.5 %) demonstrated a higher propensity to develop initiatives about or involving civil society organizations than corporate actors from Continental Europe (38.6 %), with the Nordic firms in the middle (46.3 %). In the same way, Easterners (66.7 %) and, to some extent, British Isles (52.9 %) corporate actors were more disposed to develop initiatives for or involving local communities than were Nordic (26.8 %) and Continental (34.3 %) actors. Conversely, Easterners appeared much less prone to

develop CSR initiatives pertaining to business stakeholders (e.g., suppliers, business partners, customers) than all their European counterparts.

Organizational and Strategic Characteristics of CSR Initiatives

The analysis of the thematic link between CSR initiatives and the nature of business activities of corporate actors revealed that Easterners proposed CSR initiatives that linked less directly to their business activity than did other European actors (Table 5). Specifically, 47.6 % of Easterners' CSR initiatives demonstrated a weak link with business activities; less than 16.8 % of the other regions' CSR initiatives did so.

Finally, most CSR-related initiatives remained somewhat disconnected (with low or moderate implications) from the general strategic goals of the corporations (i.e., 75.8 % of CSR initiatives). Eastern European corporate actors in particular developed initiatives poorly connected

Table 4 Stakeholders directly and indirectly involved in or concerned by CSR initiatives

| Categories of stakeholders | Total (<i>N</i> = 499) | Regional background | | | | | Difference test |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | | Contin. (<i>N</i> = 207) | Brit. Isles (<i>N</i> = 102) | Easterner (<i>N</i> = 42) | Nordic (<i>N</i> = 41) | Med. (<i>N</i> = 107) | |
| Internal stakeholders | | | | | | | |
| Employees | 246 49.3 % | 110 53.1 % | 56 54.9 % | 19 45.2 % | 17 41.5 % | 44 41.1 % | $\chi^2 = 6.650, df = 4, p > .05$ |
| Managers and/or sites | 135 27.1 % | 68 32.9 % | 26 25.5 % | 3 7.1 % | 12 29.3 % | 26 24.3 % | $\chi^2 = 12.601, df = 4, p < .05$ |
| Unions | 22 4.4 % | 11 5.3 % | 5 4.9 % | 0 .0 % | 1 2.4 % | 5 4.7 % | — ^a |
| External stakeholders | | | | | | | |
| Non-profit associations, public and educational entities | 232 46.5 % | 80 38.6 % | 52 51.0 % | 28 66.7 % | 19 46.3 % | 53 49.5 % | $\chi^2 = 13.216, df = 4, p < .05$ |
| Local communities | 208 41.7 % | 71 34.3 % | 54 52.9 % | 28 66.7 % | 11 26.8 % | 44 41.1 % | $\chi^2 = 24.481, df = 4, p < .01$ |
| Suppliers and business partners | 100 20.0 % | 51 24.6 % | 19 18.6 % | 1 2.4 % | 12 29.3 % | 17 15.9 % | $\chi^2 = 14.362, df = 4, p < .01$ |
| Clients and customers | 87 17.4 % | 36 17.4 % | 18 17.6 % | 0 .0 % | 11 26.8 % | 22 20.6 % | $\chi^2 = 12.112, df = 4, p < .05$ |
| Public authorities | 69 13.8 % | 27 13.0 % | 10 9.8 % | 5 11.9 % | 10 24.4 % | 17 15.9 % | $\chi^2 = 5.843, df = 4, p > .05$ |
| Other businesses | 45 9.0 % | 22 10.6 % | 7 6.9 % | 3 7.1 % | 5 12.2 % | 8 7.5 % | — ^a |
| Media | 15 3.0 % | 4 1.9 % | 3 2.9 % | 4 9.5 % | 0 .0 % | 4 3.7 % | — ^a |

Categories of stakeholders are not exclusive and a CSR initiative may relate to more than one category of stakeholders

Contin. Continental; *Brit. Isles* British Isles; *Med.* Mediterranean

^a Not enough data to do the difference test

to their core strategic goals and general business orientation (81.0 %), though Nordic (31.7 %), Mediterranean (28.0 %), British Isles (26.5 %), and Continental (23.7 %) actors offered somewhat greater proportions of initiatives requiring strategically integrated approaches to CSR.

Discussion

The results of our analysis suggest, initially, that the regional background of corporate actors echo the variations and different orientations for proposing and developing CSR-related initiatives, as suggested in Table 6.

On the one side, Nordic corporate actors tend to graft CSR issues and societal concerns onto the root of their business activities, by proposing and developing business-integrated, strategic initiatives targeted at or involving a broad range of their internal and external stakeholders. That is, through the initiatives they propose and develop, corporate actors from Northern Europe appear to take on the whole scope of CSR challenges in the most

comprehensive way among the regional groups we analyzed, through initiatives and programs that reflect their strategy and aim at aligning with their key stakeholders' expectations. Our results thus contribute by empirically substantiating the notion that in the Nordic context, which is characterized by the progressive move from implicit to explicit CSR (Carson et al. 2015) but also is associated with a political culture of consensus and participation, engagement in CSR by corporate actors reflects a "preference for cooperative agreements and consensus between different types of organizations" (Albareda et al. 2007, p. 401). This preference, as illustrated in our study, is embodied in the use of strategic, effective, multi-stakeholder efforts, and initiatives (Strand et al. 2015).

On the other side, CSR-related initiatives proposed and developed by corporate actors from Eastern Europe exemplify a less entangled CSR model, focusing primarily on philanthropic initiatives in collaboration with local communities and non-profit organizations. In line with previous analyses, which assert that corporations from Eastern Europe do not use a wide range of CSR practices

Table 5 Organizational characteristics of CSR initiatives

| Intrinsic characteristics of the CSR solution | Total (<i>N</i> = 499) | Regional background | | | | | Difference test |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| | | Contin. (<i>N</i> = 207) | Brit. Isles. (<i>N</i> = 102) | Easterner (<i>N</i> = 42) | Nordic (<i>N</i> = 41) | Med. (<i>N</i> = 107) | |
| CSR fit/thematic link with core business activities | | | | | | | $\chi^2 = 54.570$, <i>df</i> = 8, <i>p</i> < .01 |
| Low | 78 15.6 % | 25 12.1 % | 13 12.7 % | 20 47.6 % | 2 4.9 % | 18 16.8 % | |
| Moderate | 81 16.2 % | 23 11.1 % | 26 25.5 % | 8 19.0 % | 10 24.4 % | 14 13.1 % | |
| High | 340 68.1 % | 159 76.8 % | 63 61.8 % | 14 33.3 % | 29 70.7 % | 75 70.1 % | |
| Implications for strategic alignment | | | | | | | $\chi^2 = 42.948$, <i>df</i> = 8, <i>p</i> < .01 |
| Low | 198 39.7 % | 66 31.9 % | 44 43.1 % | 34 81.0 % | 11 26.8 % | 43 40.2 % | |
| Moderate | 180 36.1 % | 92 44.4 % | 31 30.4 % | 6 14.3 % | 17 41.5 % | 34 31.8 % | |
| High | 121 24.2 % | 49 23.7 % | 27 26.5 % | 2 4.8 % | 13 31.7 % | 30 28.0 % | |

Contin. Continental; *Brit. Isles* British Isles; *Med.* Mediterranean

and tend to lack long-term thinking or strategic depth in their approach to CSR concerns (Csafor 2008; Elms 2006), our study suggests that corporate actors from these economically emerging countries continue to lag behind their counterparts in terms of embedding CSR concerns in their operations and strategy, despite some evidence of their willingness to commit to the idea (Koleva et al. 2010; Mullerat, 2013). With a very strong focus on community-oriented practices, they appear predisposed to consider CSR an add-on activity, disconnected from their business processes and strategic objectives. The restricted range of stakeholders typically involved in CSR activities represents another significant feature of the way corporate actors from Eastern Europe engage in CSR. In addition, environmental concerns remain a rather neglected dimension of CSR-related commitments.

The Continental, Mediterranean, and British Isles corporate actors fall between these two extremes, though somewhat closer to the Nordic orientation than the Eastern one. Our study implies that corporate actors from Continental Europe maintain an internal focus when implementing CSR: They improve their organizational processes and capacities in line with CSR-related concerns and expectations. They are somewhat less inclined to consider CSR through a product- and service-related, market angle, even though the CSR initiatives they develop tend to be closely related to their core business activities from a thematic perspective. Such results reflect a certain Continental European culture that despite its variations is only

limitedly driven by results but appreciative of the intrinsic value of activities (Sison 2009).

The Mediterranean actors we studied tend to focus slightly more on the potential market implications of their CSR commitments and on external stakeholders such as local communities and non-profit associations but relatively less on internal CSR-related capacities, frameworks, and technical competence, relative to their Continental Europe counterparts. Still, the initiatives adopted by Continental and Mediterranean actors in our sample suggest their rather comparable approaches to CSR development and implementation, despite their different socio-economic conditions and the relatively later incorporation of CSR into institutional agendas in Mediterranean countries (Steurer et al. 2012). Nevertheless, Mediterranean corporations of our sample are comparatively more inclined to overlook the environmental challenges of the twenty-first century.

Finally, corporate actors from the British Isles present a singular, explicit CSR profile, characterized by corporate actors' high level of employee-related attention and strong propensity to engage and collaborate with non-profit associations and local communities, in line with the rise of CSR as a voluntary, liberal concept under right-wing U.K. governments in the last quarter of the 20th century (Steurer 2010). Corporate actors from the British Isles share with their Continental counterparts a tendency to grant somewhat less attention to CSR-related market opportunities. Finally, our results indicate that corporate actors from the

Table 6 Summary of regional comparative view of CSR initiatives

| Regional, institutional background | National origin of corporate actors | CSR concerns | Nature and type of CSR initiatives | Stakeholders directly and indirectly involved in or concerned by CSR initiatives | Organizational characteristics of CSR initiatives | Approach to embedding CSR |
|------------------------------------|--|---|---|---|--|---|
| Continental | Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Switzerland | Balanced | Preponderantly focused on developing CSR-related organizational processes and capacities | Stronger focus on (1) employees; (2) non-profit associations, public and educational entities; (3) local communities; (4) managers and/or sites | High CSR fit/ thematic link with core business activities Moderate implications in terms of strategic alignment | Dual combination of strong capability, process-oriented embedded and relatively milder discretionary, community-oriented non-embedded approaches to CSR |
| British Isles | Ireland, United Kingdom | Fairly balanced; relative emphasis on social concerns (community and society) | Preponderantly focused on developing CSR-related organizational processes and capacities and on charity and community involvement practices | Stronger focus on (1) employees; (2) local communities; (3) non-profit associations, public and educational entities; (4) managers and/or sites | High CSR fit/ thematic link with core business activities Low to moderate implications in terms of strategic alignment | Dual combination of discretionary, community-oriented non-embedded and capability, process-oriented, embedded approaches to CSR |
| Easterner | Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia | Unbalanced; strong emphasis on social concerns (community and society) | Preponderantly focused on charity and community involvement practices | Stronger focus on (1) non-profit associations, public and educational entities; (1bis) local communities; (3) employees | Low CSR fit/ thematic link with core business activities Low implications in terms of strategic alignment | Simple strong discretionary, community-oriented non-embedded approach to CSR |
| Nordic | Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden | Balanced | Preponderantly focused on developing CSR-related organizational processes and capacities | Stronger focus on (1) non-profit associations, public and educational entities; (2) employees; (3) managers and/or sites; (3bis) suppliers and business partners; (5) local communities; (5bis) clients and customers | High CSR fit/ thematic link with core business activities Moderate to high implications in terms of strategic alignment | Triple combination of strong capability, process-oriented, embedded and discretionary, community-oriented non-embedded approaches to CSR and relatively milder market, outcome-oriented, embedded approach to CSR |
| Mediterranean | Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain | Fairly balanced; relative emphasis on social concerns (community and society) | Preponderantly focused on developing CSR-related organizational processes and capacities and on charity and community involvement practices | Stronger focus on (1) non-profit associations, public and educational entities; (2) employees; (3) local communities | High CSR fit/ thematic link with core business activities Low to moderate implications in terms of strategic and cultural alignment | Dual combination of capability, process-oriented embedded and discretionary, community-oriented non-embedded approaches to CSR |

British Isles demonstrate a somewhat lower propensity to develop CSR-related organizational capacities and formal frameworks than other regions' actors, except Easterners. In this sense, our results suggest that institutional objectives, related to centering CSR efforts on competitiveness and core business processes (DTI 2004), might be achieved only partly. The results also add some nuance to existing assertions about U.K. corporate actors' leadership role in CSR (Aaronson 2003; Welford 2005; Williams and Aguilera 2008).

Three-way European Combinatory Approach to CSR Practices Development

Beyond these dissimilarities and divergences, our study results show some analogies in the way corporate actors from different regional backgrounds approach and engage strategically in CSR initiatives development. At another level, we can relate the features of the CSR initiatives proposed and developed by European corporate actors in our sample to three broad approaches for embedding CSR in corporations' organizations and strategy: (1) a capability, process-oriented, embedded approach; (2) a market, outcome-oriented, embedded approach; and (3) a discretionary, community-oriented, non-embedded approach. These distinct but non-exclusive approaches seemingly echo corporations' CSR-related behaviors across Europe, though with varying intensity in each regional cluster. That is, each regional cluster can be regarded as characterized by a specific combination of these approaches to CSR (Table 6). We describe these respective approaches to CSR next, together with relevant examples developed in recent years across Europe in the banking sector, which helps to clarify the contrasts across the different approaches.

Capability, Process-Oriented, Embedded Approach to CSR

This approach comprises CSR-related processes, CSR management frameworks (including extra-financial measurement and reporting), and CSR-related competencies and skills within the corporation. The corporate focus on business processes and competencies receives support from dialogical, collaborative practices with internal stakeholders, and the development of cooperative relationships with business partners such as suppliers and some customers. Thus it entails the integration of CSR-related concerns at various levels of the organization. However, in this approach, the objectives of the pursued CSR policies and initiatives still mainly relate to cost and risk reductions, as well as business value maintenance through incremental improvements, rather than to value creation.

Corporations adopting this approach design and implement CSR-related initiatives in an effort to measure and

limit the negative environmental and social impacts of their activities, so they innovate technical improvements, risk mitigation programs, pollution prevention schemes, extra-financial reporting frameworks, and codes of conduct for employees and suppliers. A substantial portion of the CSR initiatives proposed by Continental, Nordic, and Mediterranean corporate actors (as well as some British Isles corporate actors) fall into this category.

An interesting example comes from *Nordea Bank*, which has actively contributed to the development of a multi-corporate CSR working group founded in 2007. In this context, *Nordea Bank* joined with other financial services operators and worked together with academics to initiate a standardized CSR evaluation framework for the banking sector. From the start, the objective of this initiative was to ensure a more efficient provision of CSR information, at both corporate and industry levels. It also focused on issuing more relevant, better data to recipients (e.g., analysts, rating agencies), while consolidating widely dispersed, complex, competing international CSR reporting schemes. Such an initiative aims to contribute positively to the debate about productive stakeholder dialogs.

Market, Outcome-Oriented, Embedded Approach to CSR

In this approach, the emphasis is on outcomes rather than processes. Corporate actors focus on developing products and services with an apparent or indirect CSR dimension, to meet specific stakeholders' expectations and desires. Corporations endeavor to demonstrate that society's expectations matter, such that they listen to external stakeholders' voices and opinions and develop multi-stakeholder dialog processes that include both customers and secondary stakeholders such as non-profit associations. Continuous interactions with external stakeholders increase stakeholder confidence in corporate activities, products, and services, as well as reduce the risk of greenwashing accusations.

Corporations adopting such an approach have a clear understanding of CSR-related, market-driven trends and typically consider CSR a value creator, achieved through "improved community relations, legitimacy, and brand reputation" (Hart and Milstein 2003, p. 62). Various CSR initiatives proposed by Nordic corporate actors (and, to some extent, by Mediterranean, British Isles, and Continental ones) constitute this approach, which nevertheless appears less common than the other two among European corporate actors, including Nordic ones.

The initiative implemented by the Italian *Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena* focused on underserved potential customers and innovated special banking offers for people who lacked access to legal property guarantees. Various products and services were made available at low costs to

migrants; fixed-term workers also could suspend their loan repayments temporarily during periods of work inactivity. Creating market chances for these underserved, potential customers, in collaboration with a variety of public and non-profit institutions in Siena, significantly enhanced the value of the bank's customer base, which was a core strategic objective in its business plan.

Discretionary, Community-Oriented Non-Embedded Approach to CSR

Finally, by dedicating corporate resources to discretionary actions that seek to contribute to local communities, improve quality of life, promote and improve human welfare, and achieve environmental stewardship, CSR is a collection of discretionary practices, mostly peripheral to core business processes and activities. Corporations thus might develop CSR initiatives through employee volunteer programs, philanthropic donations, or sponsorships; CSR offers them a means to enhance their corporate license to operate, rather than an opportunity to create or strengthen their business value in the long run.

Most CSR initiatives proposed by Eastern European corporate actors included in our sample reflect this approach. The CSR initiatives proposed by many corporations in other European regions also could be classified as non-embedded, despite the systematic, thematic links between the CSR initiatives and the core business activities of these corporations.

The “Yes I help” corporate voluntary program established by the leader of the Polish short-term loan market, *Provident Polska*, illustrates this discretionary pattern. Its main objectives are to stimulate local communities, provide equal opportunities, and combat discrimination in Polish society. The program includes a system for gathering employee and representative proposals, then selecting the best initiatives. The corporation covers the related costs and insurance and provides training and support for employee volunteers. Thus *Provident Polska* constitutes a discretionary agenda that supports the corporation's declared values and its brand, focused on “People Helping People.”

The three approaches to embedding CSR in corporations' organization and strategy that we emphasize here are not exclusive; they must be considered as complements that help corporations develop constructive CSR programs and policies to meet society's expectations comprehensively, in line with existing business objectives and imperatives. The development of CSR-related capabilities and technical competencies that typically characterize process-oriented, embedded approaches ideally should aim to support and foster the development of innovative, valuable products and services, as typifies a traditional

market, outcome-oriented, embedded approach to CSR. Thus they can ensure the sustainability of the business activities in the long run, in accordance with stakeholders' concerns. Beyond economic, legal, and ethical responsibilities, it is important (if not requisite) for corporate actors to perform consistently with the philanthropic and charitable prospects of their environment and “to assist voluntarily those projects that enhance a community's quality of life” (Carroll 2004, p. 41), in line with a discretionary, community-oriented, non-embedded approach.

In our sample, Nordic corporations typically engage more comprehensively in CSR through a triple combination of these approaches; corporations from Eastern Europe instead focus on a single, discretionary, community-oriented, non-embedded approach. Corporations in the three other regional clusters mostly can be characterized by distinct, dual combinations of capability, process-oriented, embedded and discretionary, community-oriented, non-embedded approaches to CSR. The intensity of their prevalence varies, depending on the regional cluster. For example, the capability, process-oriented, embedded approach to CSR is more prevalent among corporations from Continental Europe, which also tend to adopt a community-oriented, non-embedded approach to CSR less than their Mediterranean and British Isles neighbors.

The Road Ahead: CSR in the European Business Environment

This analysis of 499 CSR-related initiatives, designed, adopted, and presented as best practices by 178 member corporations of European CSR business networks, contributes to a better understanding of the state of CSR development in the European business environment. Specifically, the analysis of this sample of CSR initiatives by European corporate actors that seek to be perceived as proactively responsible highlights how they conceive of CSR and differentially engage in embedding CSR concerns and ideas into their strategies and business operations. By adopting a necessary, yet rare focus on actual CSR initiatives developed by corporate actors across Europe, our study provides a more practice-based focus to determine the influence of institutionally laden, regional contexts on the CSR-related behaviors of field actors. It complements existing, empirically based, comparative CSR studies at the national level that have linked institutional and socio-political factors with CSR engagement behaviors of European corporate actors by using aggregated corporate social performance scores that could not specify the actual CSR activities underlying these performance levels.

In line but distinct from previous works, we thus substantiate that CSR actions continue to be characterized by strong differences that distinguish regional clusters, despite

some cross-national convergence in policies, norms, and rules (e.g., Global Reporting Initiative guidelines, EU Green Paper on Corporate Social Responsibility, EU Lisbon Strategy) that create regional and global isomorphic pulls and can trigger some harmonizing effects in corporations' approaches (Christmann 2004; Gond et al. 2011). The differences may narrow with time, but our study reemphasizes the need to create awareness about CSR policies and activities in the composite European business environment. It also empirically illustrates the relevance of a comprehensive, nuanced, practice-based understanding of the state of CSR in Europe for business actors, CSR experts, and advocates. European and international corporations that wish to develop their activities in multiple European regions can expect to face changeable customs and inconsistent institutional expectations with regard to the affirmation and demonstration of their social and environmental responsibilities. Cross-regional differences in CSR practices and approaches, therefore, demand specific consideration by corporations and their managers, to constructively address the regional, CSR-related peculiarities identified in this study. Key explanations for regional variations can stem from the recognition that CSR initiatives often are instrumental responses to a specific institutional and cultural environment, characterized by the expectations of diverse stakeholders (e.g., Doh and Guay 2006; Park and Ghauri 2015). European and international corporations should consider "targeted stakeholder dialogue or processes of internal consultation including the subsidiaries involved" (Fortanier et al. 2011, p. 692) to develop relevant CSR initiatives that can help them reach the potential rewards associated with CSR in the various environments in which they operate.

By stressing three distinct, non-exclusive approaches that characterize the way CSR considerations are embedded in corporate actors' organization and strategies across Europe, our study also contributes a more nuanced, practice-based understanding of the state of CSR development across the composite European business environment. Both CSR experts and advocates across sectors need to foster wider diffusion of CSR knowledge and know-how to influence businesses across Europe, as well as their stakeholders and public policy. We acknowledge that there can be no universal set of best CSR practices, but fostering the development of more comprehensive recognition and understanding of potential approaches to CSR might facilitate the emergence of innovative practices and mindful reforms across European regional clusters.

We suggest, in this sense, that merely focusing on a single, community-oriented, non-embedded approach to CSR (as corporate actors in Eastern Europe seem to do) appears insufficient to address the complex challenges emerging at the interface of business, society, and the

natural environment though. The adoption of a combination of community-oriented, non-embedded and process-oriented, embedded approaches, without seriously engaging in complementary, outcome-oriented considerations of actual product- or service-related features also might hinder capacities to achieve ambitious CSR-related goals. This dual approach is common among the Continental, Mediterranean, British Isles, and, to some extent, Nordic corporate actors in our study, and it might offer benefits in terms of risk management, cost savings, and stakeholder relationships. However, it is unlikely to foster the successful "development of new markets," generation of new "opportunities for growth," or maximization of "the creation of shared value" for all stakeholders and society at large (European Commission 2011, pp. 3, 6).

The proposed CSR initiatives in our sample suggest that Nordic corporate actors address the CSR concerns most comprehensively, though their focus on a market, outcome-oriented, embedded approach remains less prevalent than the two other approaches. Our study thus empirically substantiates, through the analysis of field practices, that Nordic actors build on increasingly explicit, strategic engagements with CSR issues, deep-rooted traditions of stakeholder engagement (Midttun 2005; Morsing et al. 2007; Strand et al. 2015), and "social actors (corporations, trades unions, and social organizations) assuming co-responsibility in the building of a more inclusive society" (Albareda et al. 2007, p. 400), such that they lead CSR engagement in Europe. It makes no sense to call for other regions to copy the Nordic model; the relations of business and society are structured differently and depend on cultural, historical, socio-economic, and legal aspects, as well as the power balance of relevant social actors in each context (Berthoin Antal et al. 2009; Jackson and Apostolakou 2010; Matten and Moon 2008; Midttun et al. 2006). Still, Nordic corporations represent uniquely inspiring models of CSR development. From this perspective, corporate and social actors in other regional clusters might benefit from drawing inspiration from their Nordic peers and developing innovative actions to address CSR issues in a more comprehensive, strategically embedded fashion.

The specific nature and range of our data set, combined with the complexity of the focal organizational phenomena, mean that our study might not be fully representative of the wide array of CSR-related corporate practices across Europe and the different variables that influence their design and adoption by corporate actors. In addition, we acknowledge that variation in regional- and national-level institutional environments is not the only aspect that affects CSR development; industry- and firm-level factors matter significantly, but we could not control fully for these industry and organizational determinants. In this sense, this article primarily offers constructive insights that extend

and add nuance to previous studies by providing an exploratory, empirically grounded analysis of actual, CSR-related priorities, conceptions, and practices across various distinct, institutionally laden, regional contexts that constitute the European business environment. Ultimately, we hope this study fosters continued research, insightful dialog, and political and corporate practices that contribute to advance CSR ideas in the European business environment.

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