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THE POLITICS OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Rise of a Global Business Norm



campus

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Abstract

Why is it that the notion of the social responsibility of business is currently gaining so much prominence worldwide? During the last decade a plethora of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies, initiatives, and organizations were created. Now they are spreading CSR around the globe and creating new forms of global social policy.

This study explains the worldwide spread of CSR with the help of the sociological neo-institutional approach. It explores the history and nature of CSR and makes the claim that CSR is becoming institutionalised as a global business norm, which in turn is integrated into the emerging global welfare sector.

Using documents and interviews with actors from business, politics and intermediate sector organizations, the study reveals the reasons behind the current success of CSR, in light of its failure in the 1970s (when it was initially promoted by International Organizations). It points out that during the last four decades there has been a rise in interactions between business, political actors and intermediate sector actors. This increase coincided with a rising awareness of firms that CSR may support their business strategies. Spurred by globalization and organizational changes, business itself started to adopt CSR as a business norm and to disseminate it worldwide. This does not only go along with new management models but also with a growing business objective towards social policy aims

The study's main contributions are both empirical and theoretical. Empirically it provides a profound assessment of the diffusion of CSR by outlining the relevant actors, processes and mechanisms. Theoretically, it contributes to further developing neo-institutional theory by integrating business as a relevant actor in world polity processes; by combining constructivist and rational accounts on diffusion; and by integrating the role of time and process in neo-institutional theory (by developing a process model). It also offers new insights for global social policy research by applying the

welfare sector concept to the global sphere and thus outlining that business (as a global actor) is becoming a potential candidate for taking over social responsibility on the global level and thus contributes to the formation of a social policy beyond the nation-state.