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MAPPING THE CHANGES OF CSR STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS IN A CONTEXT OF ECONOMIC DEPRESSION IN SPAIN: AN APPROACH FROM COMMUNICATION AND GOVERNANCE

Joana Díaz-Pont

ABSTRACT

The chapter addresses the use of corporate social responsibility (CSR) as an indicator of social change and progress towards sustainability by analysing how stakeholders shift their CSR perceptions in different economic conjunc- tures between visions that are closer to communication or to governance as structures of network interaction. A matrix is presented that defines four models of CSR perception by integrating theoretical approaches of CSR framed by market or by society, by communication or by governance. Stakeholders' perceptions are then positioned in the matrix through qualita- tive analysis of the diverse definitions, constructions and positions with respect to CSR made and adopted by corporate agents, social stakeholders and communicators in their discourses. The study proves that changes in how actors perceive and explain self-governed CSR do not depend so much on economic factors as on the networks of stakeholder interaction through com- munication and governance. Mapping CSR stakeholders' perceptions indi- cates changes and limiting actors, but is not enough to isolate the triggers of those changes. The maps provide a starting point for further exploration of (de)politicization, framing, and understanding of CSR communication and governance, and for the analysis of the limitations of the current model of CSR self-governance. The theoretical approach and methodology provide a framework that integrates communication and governance as relational structures of network interaction in CSR.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility; communication; governance; networks; sustainability; stakeholders

INTRODUCTION

The chapter presents and analyses maps of social perceptions and discourses on corporate social responsibility (CSR) as constructed by different stakeholders, comparing changes produced between year 2007 and 2014, that is right before the economic crisis in Spain and right at the beginning of its alleged recovery. The representations are intended to understand and interpret the distant (or not so distant) perceptions of sustainability stakeholders and, at the same time, the structure of relations governing change towards sustainability in the business−society sphere. The analysis claims that changes in how actors perceive and explain CSR do not depend so much on economic factors as on the networks of interaction and the institutional and democratic quality on which these networks are built and operate. This approach is ultimately observing stakeholder interaction as a means to assess how CSR is perceived to contribute to sustainability in the current context of CSR self-governance.

The methodology used for the construction of the maps is based on qualitative analysis of the diverse definitions, constructions and positions with respect to CSR that were made and adopted by corporate agents, social stakeholders and communicators in their discourses. This analysis emphasizes the relational dimension of CSR since it rests on the idea of communication and governance as relational structures of stakeholder interaction. Building on unpublished work of the author under a thesis dissertation, the chapter compares results obtained from interviews and focus groups in 2007, with new data collected in 2014 in order to address further research questions concerning CSR governance and communication. In 2007, mapped perceptions revealed that the media were the most sceptical group of actors in the analysis, which led to conclude that there seemed to be communicational limitations to be resolved before CSR could become an effective tool in the promotion of governance for sustainable development (Díaz-Pont, 2007). That static, positional image has been compared with the situation in 2014 in order to test the hypothesis that CSR stakeholders' perception can act as an indicator of shifts in corporate strategies concerning structures of stakeholder interaction in governance for sustainability.

This hypothesis interrelates communication and governance in its approach to CSR. It aims at contributing to the knowledge of relational structures that govern sustainability strategies in the corporate and in the social sphere from a stakeholder perspective approach. As such, the hypothesis builds on the premise that CSR must be driven from stakeholder interaction in order to provide social and political value in terms of effective change towards sustainability decision-making. Although this is a mainstream assumption when discussing CSR from normative approaches, this work wants to contribute to a deeper analysis and understanding of how stakeholder interactions are constructed, whether closer to communication or to governance. The more informative or participative nature of stakeholder interaction can have different implications in effective progress towards sustainability governance and its democratic legitimacy. Ultimately, variations in different economic conjunctures can indicate whether the nature of CSR stakeholder interaction is a limiting factor to drive sustainability change in the current context of CSR self-governance.

THEORETICAL APPROACH

Governance for sustainable development implies that corporate, social and political actors of varying power, representation and capacity of influence participate in information exchange and in the creation of alliances to search for solutions aiming at mutual benefit (Hemmati, 2002). The company is considered one of all sustainability actors that participate in the discussion and resolution of environmental problems. The quality of the institutional and social framework in which the company operates contributes to define its behaviour in a process of interaction in networks of actors that has its reflection in CSR.

The concept of networks linked to communication and governance is central to my CSR analysis and is conceived as the sum of different aspects including: obtaining interdependent results in relationships that occur within stakeholder networks (Williamson, 1985); the creation of social networks as a result of dependence and resource organization, and as a result of the structure of rights and powers of the different stakeholders (Aoki, 1984; Jensen, 1993); the creation of networks arising from the company's concern to offer responses to external actors (Jensen & Meckling, 1976); and the theories of the moral community (Bowie, 1991; Deetz, 1995; Etzioni, 1995), as well as the stakeholder theory (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Freeman, 1984), which reinforce the importance of social and community networks in the performance of the company and its social responsibility.

In research on CSR, the very characterization of stakeholders has been conditioned by the structures within which interactions occur. Thus, in the first analysis of stakeholders made from communication studies, emphasis was put on the role of consumers (Jones, 1996; Makower, Elkington, & Hailes, 1993); on the differences between consumer perception and behaviour (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001); on the ability to generate and condition public opinion (Barone, Miyazaki, & Taylor, 2000; Kuhn & Ashcraft, 2003); or on the differences in the discursive strategies of CSR (Dobers & Springett, 2010; Kilbourne, 2004; Mah, 2004; Smith, 1999). In stakeholder analysis oriented by governance, reference is particularly made to network governance studies. Works developed under this scheme pay attention to reciprocity and interdependence (Mayntz, 1998; Rhodes, 1997; Scharpf, 1999); to the type of interaction, based on negotiation and deliberation (Kooiman, 1993; Marcussen & Torfing, 2003); or to the relations established within networks through communication (Casson, 1997; Schultz, Castelló, & Morsing, 2013; Wehmeier & Schultz, 2011; Wilson & Stoker, 1991).

As a result of network interaction, certain stakeholders end up constructing CSR as a form of communication (or marketing), while others construct CSR as a form of governance (or decision-making strategies). The different construction of CSR, the discursive strategies developed by stakeholders, and the varied perceptions resulting from such processes eventually condition not only the reaction of businesses to the paradigm of sustainability, but also the response of other central players to this paradigm. Communication and governance are pillars of sustainability and are also requirements for any system, organization or institution that seeks to get closer to this model of development. Moreover, information and communication are requirements of governance processes and take special importance in governance for sustainable development. In network

governance, information flow facilitates building relationships of trust, and communication is often the strategy through which agreements are negotiated, and participation and dialogue are promoted. The provision of information is considered a first step to building networks of relationships (Cohen & Prusak, 2001; Hirst, 2000; Putnam, 2000; Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1993). Transparency and access to information are in the foundations of governance and joint decision-making capacity.

When it comes to governance and participatory processes in decision-mak- ing towards sustainable development there is a tendency to blend instruments of political management with communication instruments and classic tools of marketing, advertising or public relations (Mugabe & Tumushabe, 1999). In the particular case of CSR, literature insists both on the risks and the benefits of business involvement in 'external' decision-making processes of environmental governance − especially community governance. Risks and benefits have been analysed from the perspective of the company itself (Boehm, 2005; Burke, 2005; Wood & Logsdon, 2001) and from the perspective of the process of gov- ernance for sustainability (Blowfield, 2005; Clapp & Dauvergne, 2005). It is generally assumed that the positive or negative role of businesses will be deter- mined by the use of power and influence in the process of participation and by the scope, intensity and form that such participation adopts (Miller, Dickson, & Stoker, 2000; Osborne, 2000). In fact, participation is often channelled mainly through communication processes (Muir & Veenendall, 1996). In this case the company is assumed to establish a different relationship with its audi- ence. This relation is no longer based only on brand promotion but, instead, moves to go beyond purely commercial registers (Kilbourne, 1995; McDonagh, 1998; Wasik, 1996).

In order to explore the degree of understanding and social acceptance of these different roles of the company, the chapter analysis and compares percep- tions and discourses on CSR of the company and its stakeholders. Through an empirical study that contrasts perceptions and opinions expressed through dis- course, I want to know to what extent self-governed CSR is a model that clearly contributes to progress in sustainability governance. This will become apparent when analysing the evolution of perceptions on CSR between two dif- ferent periods, with distinct economic circumstances. The ultimate goal is not to establish how robust CSR is in the sense of preserving its principles intact despite the economic situation. The purpose is to place the actors of sustain- ability on a map drawn by the different positions and ideas of each other on the role that CSR can play in the sustainability paradigm. The objective is to determine if the related but different perceptions of CSR of managers, employ- ees, journalists, academics, governments or associations can provide guidance on the distances remaining to be shortened on the road to governance for sus- tainability, and on the efficiency of CSR as a vehicle to advance in that journey. Ultimately, stakeholders' perceptions must help us to better understand the structure of relationships governing change towards sustainability and its dem- ocratic legitimacy.

THE CONTEXT OF CRISIS

The analysis compares data obtained in very different economic circumstances. In a study oriented by the perspective of stakeholder theory, Ortas and Mosen̄e (2011, p. 315) analysed in the Spanish context, and for the energy sector, how economic instability affects corporate commitment to social and environmental performance in terms of stakeholder valuation. Among their findings they suggest that, in fact, this instability may favour a change in the model of both social and economic development. This idea is consistent with the stakeholder theory according to which social and environmental performance is a key factor for stakeholders. Moreover, the company is seen as a nexus of actors who participate according to various (and sometimes incongruent) corporate inter- ests (Freeman, 1984, 1991; Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). Under the stake- holder theory approach, this open and flexible nature of the company is constitutive of an active network of relations and interactions with stakeholders (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). A study by Garcı´ a-Benau, Sierra-Garcia, and Zorio (2013, p. 1539) that is also framed in the stakeholder theory confirms the relevance of CSR in Spain in times of crisis by concluding that companies 'per- ceive CSR reporting and assurance as a valuable investment in spite of its costs'. They point out that stakeholder trust is reinforced and that CSR becomes a differentiating strategy thus making the company more competitive.

My analyses of drifts of stakeholder perceptions in times of economic depression can help identify limiting factors in governance for sustainable development. Ellis and Bastin (2011, p. 304) claim that 'the recession has made an impact on the way corporate actors talk about CSR, with a shift to sustain- able business and more explicit references to efficiency being witnessed'. The authors support the idea that corporate language can have a limiting role in advancing governance for sustainable development. The hypothesis of my study takes this idea beyond in order to claim that CSR construction and discourse (both from the company and from stakeholders) can help identify where the limitations occur.

A METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL OF VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS

Can CSR stakeholders' perception act as an indicator of shifts in corporate strategies concerning structures of stakeholder interaction in governance for sustainability? To answer this, I break the question into different components. First, I identify perceptions as the differing constructions and definitions of CSR that are given by different stakeholders. Second, I demonstrate that each stakeholder group defends a group perception that can be positioned between the extremes of communication and governance. Third, I verify divides and shifts in CSR perception, and demonstrate that certain correlations can be established with changes in sustainability corporate strategies and relational structures of stakeholder interaction. The following sub-hypotheses are put forward:

H1. Stakeholder groups define and construct CSR between the extremes of communication and governance as their perception of how they interact with the company and of the sustainability outputs of this interaction structure.

H2. CSR stakeholders' perceptions provide guidance on the distances remaining to be shortened on the road to governance for sustainabil- ity, thus demonstrating that CSR can be efficient as an indicator of change.

Perceptions and discourses refer to the ways in which the different stake- holders socially construct and defend CSR through language. However, this work does not only analyse perceptions, but also individual perceptions modi- fied by group interaction, by the context (economic and social situation), or by convincing or contradictory discourses. Furthermore, the aim is to 'place' the actors in a space of constructions and definitions of CSR, and also in a space of relations between actors. Therefore, I am interested in perception (how actors understand and assume CSR), vision (how the imagine it, how they think it should work), and discourse (how they defend it through language). All this has been integrated into the single concept of 'perception', but it must be understood as a position within the map at a certain time and context. That position shifts depending on the situations and it is subjected to gravities as a result of discursive effects (Carvalho, 2008).

Just as there is not an analysis of perceptions from a strict point of view, research does not focus only on discourse analysis, although reference is made to it on numerous occasions. Discourse is not studied only through text analy- sis, but it is used to highlight the socially constructed nature of narratives and their effects and political and social purposes (Foucault, 1977). Following the Foucauldian tradition, research shows how companies (and their stakeholders) use CSR to be 'recognised' as contributing to sustainable development. The study of discourse of the actors, when produced individually or in the context of group discussion, has served to clarify which social positions are institution- alized in the field of sustainability. This allows ordering the positions of social actors in the space defined by the type of relationships that govern CSR. These relationships are determined by the structures, instruments or strategies of interaction and integration among CSR actors, and have been defined between the extremes of governance and communication, as outlined in the theoretical framework of the previous section. The ends form a matrix that establishes four models of CSR as reflected in Fig. 1.

The matrix and the four associated models integrate theoretical approaches of CSR framed by market or by society, by language and discursive strategies or by networks and interdependence. The quadrant 'CSR as cosmetic image- making' presents a vision of CSR from marketing, with a structure of relations based on timely communication oriented by commercial purposes (Sen, Bhattacharya, & Korschun, 2006; Wasik, 1996). CSR perceptions situated within this area are mediated by market discourse and emphasis is put in con- tents, channels and discursive strategies that mould consumer behaviour (Barone et al., 2000; Kuhn & Ashcraft, 2003). The quadrant named 'CSR as

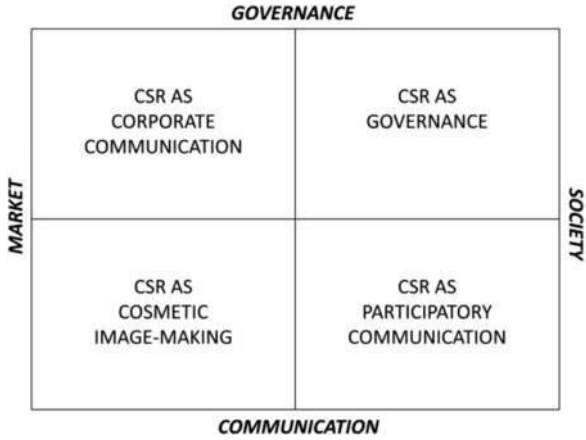


Fig. 1. Models of Social Perceptions on CSR. *Source:* Own elaboration.

corporate communication' is based on a vision of CSR from social communication, aimed at building relations with stakeholders and at the provision of information tailored to each social sector to build a favourable image of the company (Vilanova, Lozano, & Arenas, 2009). CSR is still conceived by a market-oriented vision but aiming at the creation of networks of interdependence and reciprocity (Cohen & Prusak, 2001; Schultz et al., 2013). In the quadrant 'CSR as participatory communication' the vision of CSR moves to society-ori- ented perceptions. A strategic component is introduced into communication to confer capacity for preventive risk and conflict management through planned relationships with stakeholders in order to incorporate their needs and visions (Etzioni, 1995). In this space there is a knowledge contribution to all stakeholders and a net contribution to building credibility and trust, but also commitment and a variety of perspectives (Christensen, Morsing, & Thyssen, 2015; Deetz, 1995). Finally, the quadrant labelled 'CSR as governance' presents an integrated vision of CSR (economic, political and social) where decision-making strategies incorporate the views of stakeholders and are influenced by them. The instruments used come not only from communication, but also from structured and formalized relations based on the ideas of interdependence, value creation and mutual benefit (Kooiman, 2000; Rhodes, 2000). Multi-stakeholder dialogue instruments are incorporated with no supremacy of one particular actor, but rather as processes that permeate society and have a direct impact on democracy (Banerjee, 2007; Willke & Willke, 2008). CSR is integrated in corporate governance and, in turn, it is part of the particular governance strategies of other social stakeholders and not only of the firm (Windsor, 2013).

The positions that different stakeholders occupy in the matrix, the closeness or distance between them, and the changes in all these positions between two

distinct time periods are intended to indicate trends. Dispersion or concentra- tion informs differences in social definition of CSR as being very consensual or very contradictory. Studying the relative positions between stakeholders and through time can also be used to interpret these results in terms of the degree of consensus and progress towards sustainability. The methodological design builds on the unpublished thesis dissertation of the author that can be accessed through the university's database in Catalan language (Díaz-Pont, 2007). For the dissertation in 2007, transcriptions of interviews and focus groups with managers, journalists, employees, public agents, NGOs, local community repre- sentatives and academics were coded in order to locate each stakeholder group at a given point of the matrix in Fig. 1. In 2014 new techniques were developed totalling 9 semi-structured interviews and 4 focus groups involving 76 partici- pants. Stakeholders for both periods participated as representatives of Spanish companies, institutions and associations state-wide.

Unlike other methodologies of similar structure but individual basis, this research seeks representative, dominant views of a group of specific characteris- tics. Therefore, a criticism that could be made to this analysis is the fact that certain internal homogeneity of the group is assumed. In other words, the inte- grated analysis somehow ignores the fact that each group analysed is formed by individuals from different backgrounds regarding their companies or organi- zations of origin, and business sectors or geographic location. Perspectives of gender or age are also ignored. Despite having this information, in this analysis the focus is on the discourses of individuals when they defend their position in their role as employees or managers or journalists or activists.

This assumption is consistent with the available data on changes in certain professional profiles. In particular, in the Spanish context, and for IBEX 35 companies, studies on professional profiles of CSR managers in large compa- nies confirmed that changes from 2008 have been mild and focused on training, links with the company, and the functions performed (Argandoña, Fontrodona, Pin, & Garcı´a Lombardı´a, 2008; Ruiz & Castillo-Esparcia, 2015). Another study that reinforces my hypothesis shows that there is a weak impact of company-specific communication on consumers' perception (Singh, De Los Salmones Sanchez, & Del Bosque, 2008). The study suggests that there are very slight differences between consumers in the United Kingdom and Spain con- cerning their perception of CSR strategies, for four leading consumer products manufacturers. These data allow supporting the idea of distinct discourses for each group of stakeholders assuming an internal shared position of the mem- bers of each group. In other words, all the individuals that form a group of sta- keholders share and assume a common role in their interaction with other groups of stakeholders. For example, when an individual participates as a jour- nalist in a group together with other peers, he/she assumes his/her role as such in front of the rest of groups formed by managers or activists or policy makers.

MAPPING PERCEPTIONS IN THE CARTESIAN SYSTEM OF CSR

The conducted analysis is based on the study of the meanings, that is the discourses in their contexts, the possible contradictions, the different definitions of concepts in different situations, and the adaptation or 'modification' of dis- course after interaction with other agents. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups addressed issues such as self-perceived group representation, perceived centrality of specific actors, priorities in stakeholder identification, CSR objec- tives in theory and practice, value given to CSR activities, as well as value given to different forms of stakeholder interaction within CSR. Following the methodology developed in 2007, results for the 2014 period have been managed using a text analysis program (WinMax97 pro). The transcriptions were seg- mented into fragments coinciding with distinct interventions. These fragments were coded to sort and identify common, conflicting, contradictory or ambigu- ous visions. In the coding process, lexicon was taken into account but also fac- tors such as the role assumed by each individual and his/her performance in the debate (leader, dominant, observer, neutral, passive, indifferent); the dynamics of the interaction (active or passive, constructive or negative); the context in which the meaning of the discourse was constructed (to defend a position against environmentalists, to build a discourse of legitimacy as actors in CSR,

to reinforce a vision as a block − as a company or as society − or to combat a vision as a block) (Dı´az-Pont, 2007). Finally, there was a counting of encoded fragments and a simple mathematical procedure was applied to calculate the values of the *X* and *Y* coordinates that allow representing each group of actors on the surface drawn by the governance-communication and society-market axes. I calculate *X* as a variable between Society and Market. And I calculate *Y* as a variable between Governance and Communication. These values (*X*, *Y*) determine the Cartesian coordinates of the points representing each group of actors. A summary of this procedure is presented in Fig. 2. Graphical represen- tations of these results are then presented and discussed.

DRIFTS IN STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS IN A CONTEXT OF ECONOMIC DEPRESSION

The first maps that are presented show the starting position of managers and communicators in individual interviews. For the coding process there was a segmentation of interviews into fragments matching each intervention or, rather, each response by the interviewed subject. Thus, there was a characterization of the overall discourse of each respondent by assigning each of his/her interven- tions to one of the four categories established in the methodology according to the coding strategy. Once the results were processed, the representation that

STAKEHOLDER GROUP	PERSPECTIVES					FREQUENCY
	COMMUNICATION *C*	GOVERNANCE *G*	MARKET *M*	SOCIETY *S*	TOTAL *P*	*A*
MANAGERS	14	18	6	18	56	44
MEDIA/JOURNALISTS	6	0	26	0	32	30
EMPLOYEES	4	24	4	18	50	42
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION	16	12	2	4	34	28
LOCAL COMMUNITY	2	8	12	2	24	18
ORGANISED INTERESTS	4	0	6	6	16	12
NGOs	20	22	8	10	60	46
UNIVERSITY	26	24	0	6	56	48
Total	*92*	*108*	*64*	*64*	*328*	*268*

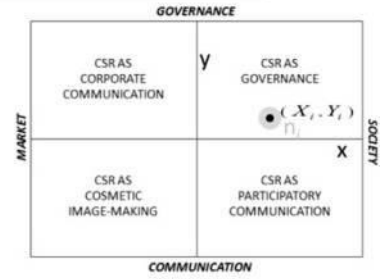
X - Abscissa: Market and Society
Y- Ordinate: Communication and Governance

$$X_i = (S_i - M_i) / P_i \text{ where } i \in \{1, 2, ..., 11\}$$

$$Y_i = (G_i - C_i) / P_i \text{ where } i \in \{1, 2, ..., 11\}$$

Where:

S_i: Number of perspectives of group *i* coded as Society
M_i: Number of perspectives of group *i* coded as Market
C_i: Number of perspectives of group *i* coded as Communication
G_i: Number of perspectives of group *i* coded as Governance
P_i: Total number of perspectives provided by group *i*
(There can be several perspectives present in one given intervention)
A_i: Frequency of interventions/fragments
(Total number of interventions/fragments - gives idea of the activity of group *i*)



$$n_i = \frac{A_i}{\min(Ai)}$$

n_i: Dimension of each group in relation to others (Relative weight of group *i* interventions in relation to the rest, represented by the colored area of the point)

Fig. 2. Counting of Encoded Fragments and Procedure for Determination of Coordinates. *Source:* Own elaboration.

was obtained provided a graphic image of the average position of managers and journalists as seen in Fig. 3.

The maps in Fig. 3 indicate that managers are marginally closer to strategic approaches to society than to marketing in their perceived interpretation of CSR in both periods. In 2007, they adopted an absolutely neutral discourse concerning the structure of relationships that should govern CSR, but they seem to have shifted towards governance visions in 2014. In other words, there seems to be a consistent orientation to competitiveness through social value rather than to commercial strategy in their vision of CSR. But it was not until after the crisis when the vision of managers regarding CSR moved slightly away from positions that focused on communication and transparency to mod- erately focus towards instruments of dialogue and participation of stake- holders. Although it could be argued that these positions publicly defended by managers could hide other interests in practice, the results are consistent with studies that claim that recession has shifted corporate language aligning it with sustainability (Ellis & Bastin, 2011).

In the case of the media, the movements are much more apparent and there needs to be a detailed analysis of discourse to assess whether these changes are

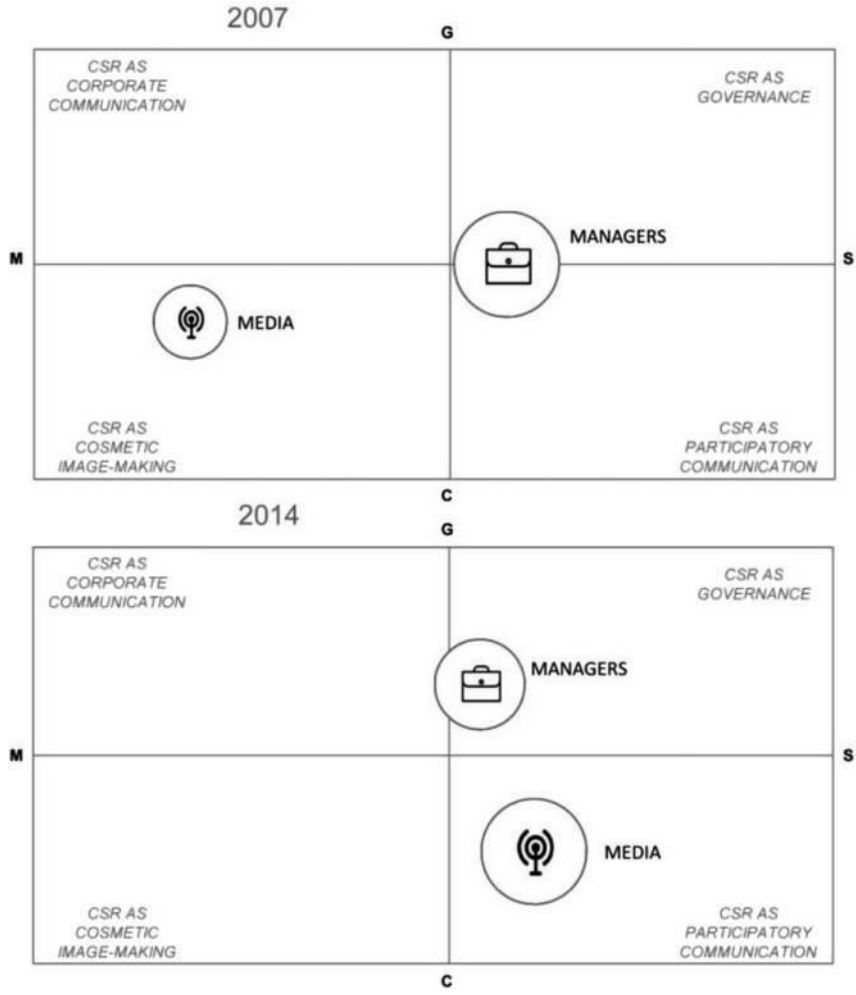


Fig. 3. CSR Perception Maps for Managers and Journalists/Communicators (Individual Interviews) 2007 versus 2014. *Source:* Own elaboration.

due to the recession or to other factors. In 2014, the media maintain their location in the hemisphere of communication, but their discourse has mutated and contains much more language of participation than marketing. The pre- eminence of social networks and the Internet as well as the deep changes in the media in recent years may have played a key role in transforming journalists' discourse, concealing other issues (Oliveira & Capriotti, 2014). In both maps, the position of the media is very similar in the governance-communication axis,

with a slight shift away from the vision of governance in 2014 compared to 2007. But what is striking is the abrupt shift in the market−society axis, with a discourse clearly more oriented to society in 2014 compared to 2007. This change is all the more striking if we consider that there have not been important or evident transformations in discourses of the rest of stakeholder groups during the time period, perhaps with the exception of the local community and employees. This shift demonstrates my hypothesis that CSR perception reveals actual changes occurring within relational structures of stakeholder interaction. Further analysis is required to unravel the nature of these changes, but the hypothesis is supported by literature on the role of the internet in CSR (Branco, Delgado, Sa´ , & Sousa, 2014).

The above results refer to discourse of two key groups of actors in their 'starting' positions in the social debate on CSR, that is their position in the interviews without interaction with other stakeholder groups. When these actors interact with other stakeholders in the working groups, their positions remain almost unaltered both in 2007 and 2014. This is consistent with H1 and the idea that stakeholder groups tend to build and defend their respective CSR perceptions in a particular space of the matrix with little or no influence of discursive strategies and constructions of other stakeholders. The drifts in their respective positions are thus mediated by factors that transcend group interaction through language and discourse and are dependent on circumstances that are external to texts (Carvalho, 2008). Group discourse reflects steady group positioning independently of group interaction, and it reveals meanings and interpretations, although this cannot escape a certain degree of adaptation, as will be indicated in the following paragraphs.

When the adaptation factor can be isolated, CSR perception becomes a proper indicator of changes in stakeholder interaction structures. This exercise could be done for journalists. In 2007 journalists maintained their distancing from mainstream positions even in the working groups, while in 2014 some neutralizing effect of discourse in working groups is perceived (Fig. 4). In other words, journalists' discourse has been neutralized at different levels: on the one hand, it has approached the mainstream position in 2014 compared to 2007; and on the other hand, more neutralization is observed when discourse is built in group work (Fig. 4) than when built in individual interviews, with no interaction with other stakeholders (Fig. 3). This appreciation contributes to validation of H2 as it implies that CSR construction by journalists contains different perceptions in the two periods that are a reflection of changes both in sustainability governance and stakeholder interaction structures. During economic recession, journalists' position has moved closer to mainstream perceptions that concede strategic value to CSR, and the same conclusion can be put forward for managers in consistency with literature review concerning the context of crisis (Ortas & Mosen˜e, 2011). But these movements cannot be explained only by economic factors, as we have seen in the case of journalists and the role of the internet. CSR acts as an indicator of changes in different dimensions, and it

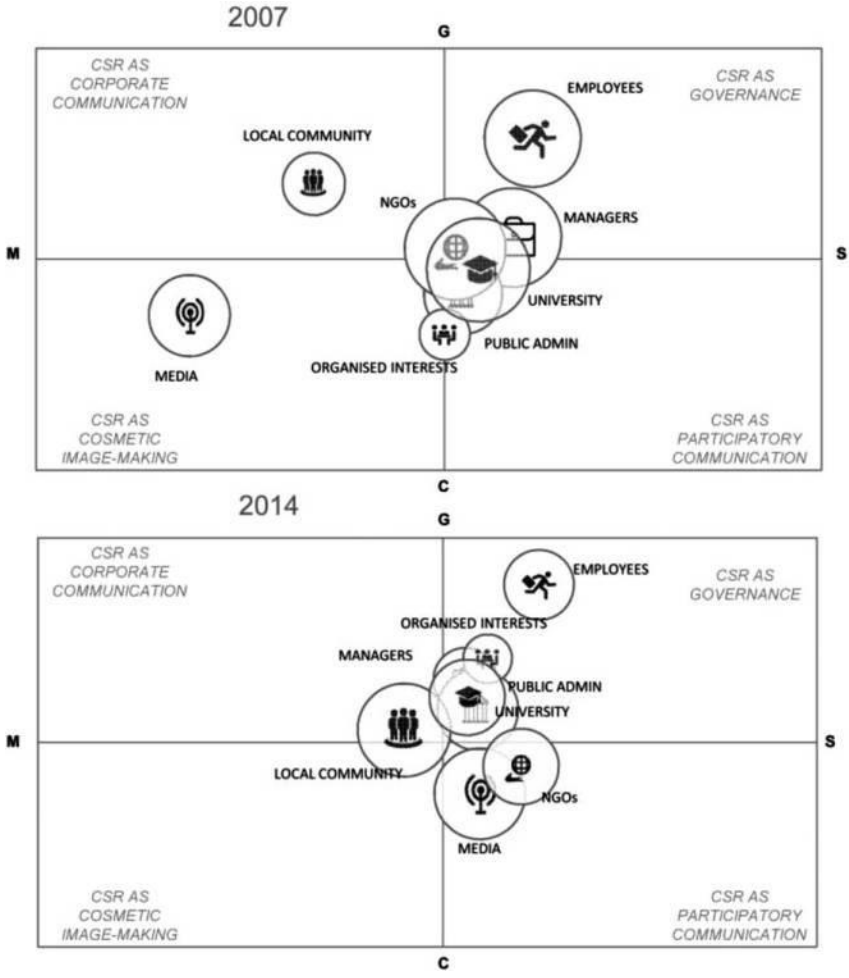


Fig. 4. CSR Perception Maps for All Stakeholders (Working Groups), 2007 versus 2014. *Source:* Own elaboration.

proves itself efficient to identify groups of actors that have a limiting role at a certain time and context. But it is not sufficient in order to isolate the triggers of those shifts, at least in the current model of self-governed CSR.

Joint visual representation of the various groups of actors in all the working groups also gives us guidance on the dominant perspective in relation to CSR, and indicates which stakeholders move away from this mainstream perspective (Fig. 4). Fig. 4 displays the neutrality of social discourse on CSR. Somehow it seems as if no one wants to explicitly commit to a certain view of CSR. The

only groups that are distanced from the centre are the media clearly in 2007. Distancing can also be seen with representatives of the local community and employees in 2007, and with employees in 2014, although detailed study indicates that the divide between these groups and mainstream perception responds to specific characteristics of discourse construction in each context, and not to a categorical position of the stakeholder group, as did occur in the case of the media in 2007.

A limitation of the study was appreciated when analysing results for the academics stakeholder group. This group was found to be more sensitive to con- text than others, or either have a more evident predisposition to adapt their discourse and change their positions on CSR depending on the audience and context. University representatives adjusted their 'expert' perception on CSR to context requirements. Interestingly, before managers they are positioned in the perspective of governance. However, when faced with contextual actors such as local community or NGOs they move to the end of communication. The main conclusion drawn from a detailed analysis of these results is that academic experts tend to reinforce the weakest perspectives. Given that social actors have a 'strong' vision of CSR as governance, academic actors seem to assume that participatory perspectives are well understood, and they insist on the impor- tance of information and communication. Before corporate actors, academics seem to assume that the language of communication and its tools are internal- ized and therefore their discourse insists on governance, and dialogue and par- ticipation are prioritized. It could also be argued that the expert discourse continues to build on the parameters of the deficit model of science communica- tion (Durant, Evans, & Thomas, 1989) that focuses on scientists and empha- sizes a sort of one-way communication from experts to laypersons. According to the deficit model, the expert is in a position of superiority in knowledge rather than seeking peer positions to ensure dialogue that is constructed from common knowledge. Further data is necessary to contrast whether this specific role of university during the study invalidates H1 or simply indicates that cer- tain groups still participate as outsiders in the CSR debate. This last assertion, on the other hand, would validate H2 as it would unmask distances and limita- tions in governance for sustainability

As for the other actors, it can be concluded that, in general, their discourse and perception on CSR is much more consistent although it does not escape a certain degree of adaptation to the different contexts and situations in which it is elaborated. In the graphical representation of the positions of all stakeholders in the matrix, we have seen that it is difficult to give more weight to one or another quadrant (Fig. 4). In fact, when an average position of all stakeholders is tested, we find it located practically in the centre. Even excluding the media from the calculation, as being the only really distanced group of actors, the sta- tus of the debate on CSR remains fairly central (neutral) in both 2014 and 2007 maps (Fig. 5). Nevertheless, it seems that there is a (slight) tendency to place discourses in the quadrant of CSR as governance, contrary to what might have

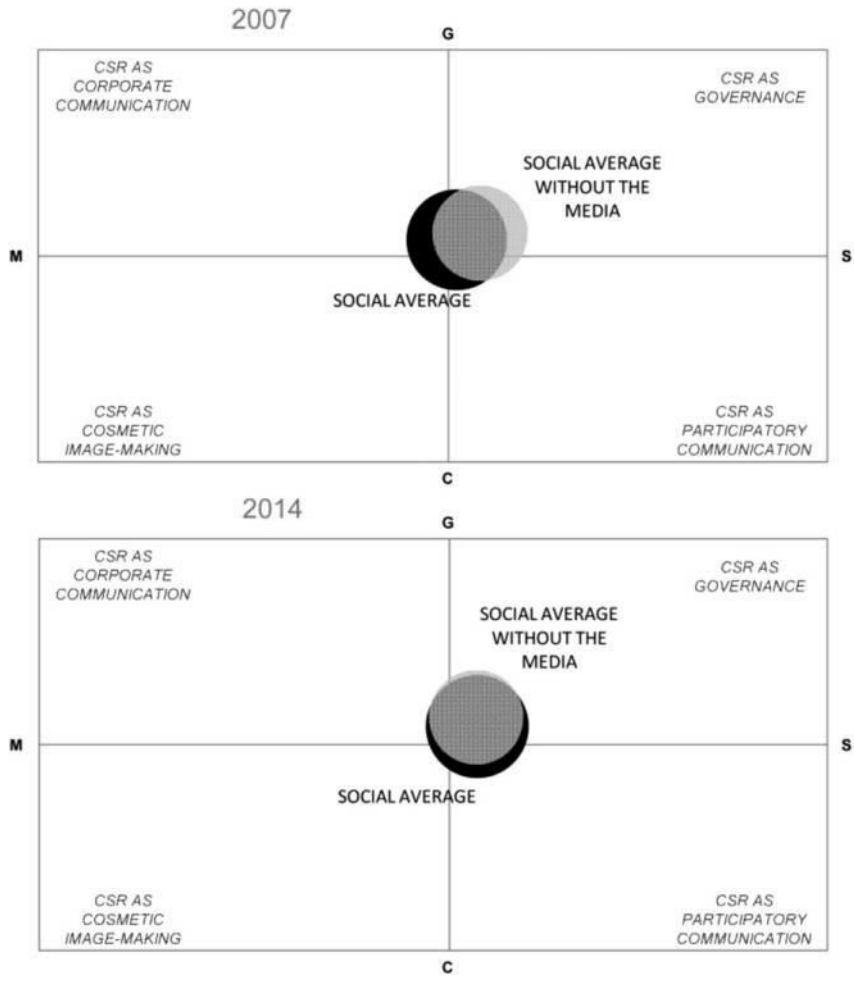


Fig. 5. Social Average CSR Perception Maps (with and without the Media), 2007 versus 2014. *Source:* Own elaboration.

been expected, since intuitively there is a tendency to believe that everyone sees CSR as 'cosmetics'.

As part of the discussion of these results, some contradictions of the studied context are highlighted. On the one hand, social movements are demanding more participation in decision-making processes, in an attempt to blur the boundaries between public and private spheres, being more accessible a priori the former and less the latter. On the other hand, directors and managers try to

protect their autonomy while at the same time engaging in the construction of public order, assuming roles originally reserved for the State (Hemmati, 2002).

This chapter suggests that the ambiguity of CSR is the product of these gaps and that the rapprochement of positions regarding how to define and deal with it will be central to building a new economic and socio-political framework, compatible with the model of sustainable development. The proof of this ambiguity is the centrality of the average of the positions of all stakeholders on the map (Fig. 5). The fact that CSR is defined in a neutral centre is the result of the struggle between forces that finally offset at a midpoint. There are no clear trends, only some intuitions about the direction that social perception of CSR is taking: closer to governance/society than to communication/market, regard- less of the economic situation.

CONCLUSIONS

An idea that synthesizes this work is the multinuclear but unified nature of social positioning on CSR. Movements of the social positioning validate the use of CSR as an indicator of change and its direction, but also unveil the lim- itations of self-governed CSR as an effective tool to identify the triggers and nature of those movements. All actors have their place and their dynamics and therefore represent a core, and defend a distinct position in the debate on CSR and sustainability. But, taken as a whole, the positions are not far away from each other, and even seem to move in the same direction, or tend towards the same ideas. Probably, from above we would see a single unified mass, a thick fuzzy point drifting awkwardly (almost imperceptibly) to the northeast of the grid of social positions on CSR, that is the governance-society quadrant. All actors discuss actively within their niche of knowledge and action. But in inter- action with each other, the debate is stuck in the cultural power of issues such as innovation, economic progress, globalization and governance for sustainable development (Christensen et al., 2015; Wehmeier & Schultz, 2011). The analysis in the form of maps of group perceptions contributes to a better understanding of the social debate on CSR and the path that this debate is taking, as well as the type of stakeholder relations that it conceals. But, at the same time, the analysis is not sufficient to identify where the limitations for sustainability gov- ernance lie.

As already said, this research has not studied actual practices but social positions. The mapping methodology has proved efficient to characterize and position stakeholder groups according to their perception on the type of interaction that drives CSR (governance or communication), thus validating H1. But there is only partial validation of H2: mapping perceptions demonstrates that CSR can be efficient as an indicator of change, but it is insufficient to provide

guidance on the distances remaining to be shortened and obstacles on the road to governance for sustainability.

The drifts in CSR perceptions between 2007 and 2014 indicate that the chances of progress are very slow and they can become erratic when a group (core) moves away from the rest. Surprisingly, this pattern has not undergone major changes throughout the situation of economic crisis in the Spanish terri- tory except, perhaps, the role of the media. Detailed analysis of CSR discourse in the period previous to the economic crisis showed that mainstream CSR per- ceptions viewed the media as key actors. Interestingly, the media were far away from this general perception, adopting a posture that seemed to reject the role that other stakeholders insisted in attributing to them. In other words, the maps showed the insistence of virtually all social sectors in the centrality of the media. Instead of assuming their own communicative responsibility and capac- ity, businesses and organizations struggled to set the agenda and influence media headlines in their obsession to obtain coverage and echo for their demands. At the other end, the media adopted the most sceptical of all CSR postures analysed. These results on the centrality of the media in CSR for the pre-crisis period were interpreted as a reaction of rejection of journalists and communication agents to the role that other social actors tried to attribute to them in governance for sustainable development (Anderson, 2002; Dı´ az-Pont, 2007; Díaz-Pont, Anderson, & Hansen, 2002).

The constant development of new technologies and the redefinition of the role of communication in the process of building knowledge and decision-mak- ing on sustainability are factors that have provoked that the mass of nuclei (Fig. 4), seen as the plasmodium in cytology, undergoes some convulsions in its amoeboid movement. The different nuclei move in their positions and re-shape the mass, but they continue to be part of it. In fact, the positions on CSR do not show different degrees of progress towards sustainability. They just high- light who the limiting actors are for sustainability in a certain social context and time. For the groups and specific periods of study of this work, it could be suggested that new technologies and the economy of knowledge had not yet spurred in 2007 a clear change in communication strategies of (private, public and social) organizations that would lead to alternative and more efficient for- mulas for decision-making. This change does seem to have occurred in 2014, a fact that has led to a process of 'neutralization' of the discourse of journalists and communicators. Their discourse has now become part of the plasmodium in a process of de-radicalization of the perception of the media regarding CSR, or at least of the role attributed to the media in CSR. The perspective given by the compared analysis in two different time periods allows validating the hypothesis that CSR stakeholders' perception is a useful indicator of changes in structures that condition sustainability. Nevertheless, the results in this study also unmask one limitation of this thesis as it is confirmed that CSR stakeholders' perception cannot escape certain bias as a consequence of group interaction (in focus groups), regardless of their starting group position

(in individual interviews). This particular limitation could be further explored through studies of (de)politicization, framing and understanding of CSR communication and governance, a field of study that has been very fertile in climate change communication (Bolsen, Druckman, & Cook, 2015; Delicath, Elsenbeer, & Depoe, 2004; Nisbet, 2009).

The study contributes to a clarification of the distinct CSR perceptions manifested through discourse by stakeholder groups before and after the Spanish economic recession. The shifts in CSR perceptions point to changes in communication and governance for sustainability. In 2007 results pointed to a divide between the media and other stakeholders of sustainability because of the central role that the latter attributed to the former, and the relative rejection of the media to accept such responsibility. All in all, mainstream perception on CSR was quite neutral concerning its structure of relations. In 2014, the struc- ture of relations governing CSR continues at neutral positions with a slight shift to society-oriented strategic governance, with no obvious divides between stakeholder groups. The media have moved to neutral positions, closer to other stakeholders' groups. In the detailed study of discourse this shift in position of the media seems attributable mainly to changes in communication strategies and not to CSR itself or to its interaction structures. Thus, social perceptions of CSR alone seem not to be sufficient to help us determine which actors lead the change towards sustainability, not even if we compare very different eco- nomic circumstances. Positions of stakeholders of CSR suggest that cultural ambiguity of the concept of sustainability remains as a relevant limitation in the debate that seems to hinder progress towards governance for sustainable development. CSR in its current context of self-governance, operating mainly in networks of communication and stakeholder participation at different levels, does not yet provide enough guidance as to the challenges we face in progress towards sustainable development.

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