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**Title:** History in corporate social responsibility : Reviewing and setting an agenda

**Year:** 2021

**Version:** Accepted version (Final draft)

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**Please cite the original version:**

Stutz, C. (2021). History in corporate social responsibility : Reviewing and setting an agenda. *Business History*, 63(2), 175-204. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00076791.2018.1543661>

# **HISTORY IN CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: REVIEWING AND SETTING AN AGENDA**

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Forthcoming at *Business History*, October 2018

## **History in Corporate Social Responsibility: Reviewing and Setting an Agenda**

The integration of historical reasoning and corporate social responsibility (CSR) theorising has recently received remarkable cross-disciplinary attention by business historians and CSR scholars. But has there been a meaningful interdisciplinary conversation? Motivated by this question that presumes significant limitations in the current integration, I survey existing research for the purpose of sketching and shaping historical CSR studies, i.e., an umbrella that brings together diverse approaches to history and CSR theorising. Drawing from the recent efforts to establish historical methodologies in organisation studies, I first reconcile discrepant disciplinary and field-level traditions to create a meaningful intellectual space for both camps. Secondly, I provide a synthesis of the history of CSR from three different meta-theoretical perspectives in the context of three maturing knowledge clusters. To bridge past and future work, I finally set a research agenda arising from current research and drawing on different sets of assumptions about history and CSR.

**Keywords:** corporate social responsibility (CSR), ethics, business history, historical organisation studies

### **Introduction**

Business historians and CSR scholars have recently shown a remarkable interest in integrating history and CSR thinking, despite the discrepant disciplinary traditions of business history and the “business and society” field within management and organisation studies (MOS). In the business and society camp, it is fair to say that CSR scholars have largely neglected history (Booth & Rowlinson, 2006; Warren & Tweedale, 2002), i.e., broadly understood, an “empirical and/or theoretical concern with and/or use of the past” (Kipping & Üsdiken, 2014, p. 537). Although it is a received view that the social responsibilities of business take on very different forms and meanings across historico-institutional arrangements (Aguilera, Rupp, Williams, & Ganapathi, 2007; Brammer, Jackson & Matten, 2012; Campbell, 2007; Matten & Moon, 2008), CSR scholars have only recently made greater efforts to pay closer attention to

the work of historians (Husted, 2015; Stutz & Sachs, 2018). Beyond empirical concerns, Schrempf-Stirling, Palazzo and Phillips (2016) have likewise just introduced the notion of historic CSR that recognises history as “an important but underinvestigated element of organisational ontology” (p. 714; see also Mena, Rintamäki, Spicer, & Fleming, 2016). Applauding the intellectual novelty of this contribution, Godfrey and colleagues (2016) even speculated that it will come to be viewed as marking a “historic turn” in the field of CSR (Godfrey, Hassard, O’Connor, Rowlinson, & Ruef, 2016, p. 601).

In the other camp, mainstream business historians, concerned with the “study of the growth and development of business as an institution” (Wilkins, 1988, p. 1), have traditionally shown little interest in ethical questions of the CSR agenda (Amatori, 2009; Booth & Rowlinson, 2006). Recent developments, however, indicate that individual business historians are open to joining an interdisciplinary conversation (e.g., Bergquist & Lindmark, 2016; Jones, 2017; Reed, 2017), since business history is arguably undergoing an “organisational turn” to MOS more generally (Rowlinson, 2015, p. 71; see also Decker, Kipping, & Wadhvani, 2015; Friedman & Jones, 2017; Maclean, Harvey, & Clegg, 2017; Ojala, Eloranta, Ojala, & Valtonen, 2017).

However, although there is a remarkable emerging cross-disciplinary interest, the extent of the interdisciplinary nature of the existing research can be questioned. Arguably, a limited mutual understanding on the matters of both history and CSR have so far obstructed the realisation of a two-way dialogue between the disciplines. Instead of blending ideas of history and CSR theorising, most research has contented itself with borrowing some aspects (concepts, methods or data), while refraining from fully engaging with the source discipline (Oswick, Hanlon and Fleming, 2011). In particular, the existing work in business and management history seems hampered by an unreflexive application of “CSR,” due to limited proficiency in the distinct conceptual

languages. Conversely, in the CSR literature that incorporates aspects of “history,” history is mostly treated as a mere repository of facts for testing theoretical ideas (Rowlinson, Hassard, & Decker, 2014).

Based on these observations, I recognise the need for an assessment of the current integration of history and CSR in order to contour the conditions that would enable an academic conversation that produces insights beyond either discipline. As the general mission of a *Perspectives Article* serves the purpose of creating an overview of and recommendations for a research area, I hence survey the existing literature from both fields to provide the first synthesis and develop new perspectives for future research.

Essentially, I draw on the notion of historical organisation studies that describes a creative synthesis between history and organisation theory (Maclean, Harvey, & Clegg, 2016; see also Godfrey et al., 2016). For creating an intellectual space that is meaningful for both business historians and CSR scholars, I first lay the groundwork by recognising and reconciling discrepant disciplinary and field-level traditions. Based on this foundational work, I subsequently review a corpus of 75 relevant publications. Through my analysis, I am able to synthesise prior work focusing on three topics, i.e., the historical origins of CSR, its diffusion and globalisation, and the practising of social responsibility by business firms. To clarify the (implicit) positions of scholars within these knowledge clusters, I then set out to provide conceptual depth. Particularly, I differentiate three meta-theoretical orientations towards CSR (economic, critical, and the politico-ethical lens), which have been applied to firm-centric as well as to integrated studies at the business and society interface.

In the discussion, I problematise this integration of history into CSR because this view overemphasises objective aspects of history and misconstrues interpretive

traditions of historical thinking. In particular, I propose that scholars are encouraged to embrace a wide range of traditions of historical theory that would serve as different intellectual starting points. To fuel the development of an interdisciplinary conversation, I finally cross-fertilise views of history and CSR theorising and develop a research agenda consisting of three avenues. Each avenue is designed to bring together different premises and approaches to historical research and CSR, reflecting the equal status of both disciplines in what I envision as historical CSR studies.

Taken as a whole, this article delivers three messages. First, I wish to encourage historians and CSR scholars to become involved in interdisciplinary inquiries. While previous research has reflected on the merits of a collective endeavour (Booth & Rowlinson, 2006; Warren & Tweedale, 2002), introduced empirical avenues (Husted, 2015), and outlined methodological opportunities for historical research (Stutz & Sachs, 2018), this article envisions distinct academic discourses, conceptual languages and methodological assumptions that might serve as the foundations for the emerging intellectual community of practice.

Second, CSR scholars may want to read this article as a general call for historical consciousness. As CSR has become institutionalised globally, there is a danger that “the CSR ideal may degenerate into a set of ideological practices that upholds the prominence of unsustainable CSR behaviours rather than challenging them” (Christensen, Morsing, & Thyssen, 2013, p. 387). I would argue that history is both the backdrop and a reflexive space to avert this risk. After all, this article problematises the history of the CSR ideal and thus provides historical depth and a background historical narrative for the ever-expanding CSR literature.

Third and finally, this article directly responds to and amplifies the call by Maclean and colleagues (2017), in which they conclude that “*it is time now to practice*

*what has been proposed*" (p. 24, *italics in original*). In particular, they portray engaging in organisation theory discourses as an opportunity for business historians to overcome empirical eclecticism (where case histories are treated in isolation) and to reach out to a larger community of potential readers and authors. By bringing together the methodological paradigm of historical organisation studies with the business and society field, this article may be read as a prescriptive example of how to infuse other sub-communities within MOS with history.

### **Shaping a new intellectual space**

Against the background of my understanding of the earlier and recent histories of both the business history and the CSR field (see Appendix 1),<sup>i</sup> my approach to conceiving an intellectual space meaningful for both camps is underlined by two main premises. I first suggest that difficulties in mutual understandings exist, which emanate from both different disciplinary traditions and unclear heterogeneous discussions at the field level. Secondly, to create a two-way academic discourse, both problems need to be overcome. I first turn my attention to how to map the disciplinary relations between history and organisation theory.

### ***Mapping the disciplinary relations***

Since the initial calls for a "historic turn" in MOS (Clark & Rowlinson, 2004; Kieser, 1994; Zald, 1993; see also Rowlinson, 2015), an emerging network of scholars have done much preparatory work to bring history and organisation theory (back) together, especially since 2014 (Kipping & Üsdiken, 2014; Maclean et al., 2016; Rowlinson et al., 2014; Vaara & Lamberg, 2016; Wadhvani & Bucheli, 2014; see Decker, 2016, for an overview). Arguably, this intellectual movement has successfully established a new methodological paradigm within MOS, called historical organisation studies (Godfrey

et al., 2016). This paradigm, as conceived by Maclean and colleagues (2016), informs research that “draws extensively on historical data, methods, and knowledge, embedding organising and organisations in their sociohistorical context to generate historically informed theoretical narratives attentive to both disciplines” (Maclean et al., 2016, p. 609; see also Godfrey et al., 2016, p. 592).

By using the idea of historical organisation studies, I rely on its key principles designed to relieve the disciplinary tensions between (business) historians and organisation theorists (Maclean et al., 2016). In particular, I regard the criteria of “dual integrity” as the most important, that is, the studies should be deemed authentic within both disciplinary realms (Maclean et al., 2016, pp. 617-9). By the dual integrity ideal, research stemming from historical organisation studies pursues the twofold ambition to develop theory and demonstrate historical “veracity” – achieved through different logics of historical reasoning and representations of the past (Rowlinson et al. 2014; Coraiola, Foster, & Suddaby, 2015).

Recognising the exceptional conceptual and empirical demands to be met, I hence presume that most existing research combining history and CSR has favoured one aspect over the other. Following Godfrey and colleagues’ (2016) categorisation, I expect that the existing business historical work in relation to CSR has had mainly historiographical concerns, without an explicit ambition to theorise (i.e., history-with-CSR). In turn, it is fair to suppose that the cross-disciplinary interest by CSR scholars had primarily theoretical interests, neglecting historians’ concern for historical veracity (i.e., CSR-with-history). However, I conceive the intellectual space for historical CSR studies at the intersection of history-with-CSR and CSR-with-history. At this borderland, scholars may genuinely cross-fertilise ideas and approaches of history and CSR rather than producing knowledge apt only for their disciplinary peers (see

visualisation in Figure 1). In sum, I propose that the assessment of the existing (cross-)disciplinary research is instrumental in creating this intellectual space.

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### ***Considering key assumptions at the field level***

Apart from the divergent disciplinary preferences that might produce interdisciplinary discussions of a cacophonous nature (Rowlinson et al., 2014), a second problem might arise at the field level where meaningful academic conversations occur. Both history and MOS are comprised of heterogeneous research communities “that neither ask the same questions nor have similar knowledge interests” (Ketokivi, Mantere, & Cornelissen, 2017, p. 638). At the field level, research communities are united by distinct academic discourses, conceptual languages, and methodological assumptions, by which the foundations, as well as the boundaries, of their collective interests are defined (Ketokivi et al., 2017). To create a new intellectual space at the intersection of two sub-communities, I thus suggest that the emergent research program must embrace key assumptions about the matters of history and CSR from the relevant discussions at the field level.

### ***The matters of history***

The first set of assumptions to be considered stems from the recent methodological literature that contoured historical organisation studies. In a ground-breaking article, Rowlinson et al. (2014) address the ontological and epistemological problems of representing the past, focusing on the status of explanation, the nature of evidence, and the treatment of time. For non-historians, it is often surprising to learn about the extent

of disagreement over what history is (Godfrey et al., 2016; Rowlinson et al., 2014; Suddaby, 2016). The ontological positions on the matters of history one can adopt range from the functionalist paradigm—history as objective truth—towards more postmodern understandings—history as an interpretive context (Coraiola, Foster, & Suddaby, 2015; Suddaby, 2016). The latter position acknowledges that the interpretation of the past evolves and is sedimented within pre-existing sensemaking patterns (Wadhvani & Bucheli, 2014).

As these contributions have laid a solid groundwork, the literature has further classified and developed a variety of methodological alternatives, built for instance on differences in onto-epistemological assumptions (Vaara & Lamberg, 2016) or in the epistemic purpose and mode of enquiry (Maclean et al., 2016). Taking into account the variety of assumptions about history and the methodological alternatives, I propose that historical CSR studies can make use of unique intellectual starting points likely leading to original scholarly insights. Next, I consider assumptions about CSR.

### *The matters of CSR*

In a classical definition, Carroll (1979) describes CSR as encompassing “the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary expectations that society has of organisations at a given point in time” (p. 500). From this early foundational contribution to CSR scholarship, most CSR scholars would suggest that the field’s knowledge has advanced within a scientific mode of inquiry, that is, that the “literature has developed from conceptual vagueness, through clarification of central constructs and their relationships, to the testing of theory” (De Bakker, Groenewegen, & Den Hond, 2005, p. 284). Also, this view is reflected in the meta-analyses of the CSR literature (Gond, Mena, & Mosonyi, 2017). Reviewers of CSR research are inclined to organise the field’s knowledge into coherent frameworks that link antecedents and processes of CSR with outcomes on

multiple levels (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Frynas & Yamahaki, 2016; Gond, El Akremi, Swaen, & Babu, 2017).

However, this representation of the literature obscures that there are rich traditions of CSR research underlined by other assumptions than those of the functionalist paradigm. For instance, a considerable stream of research has an inherent normative character, which emphasises ethical questions and prescriptive approaches (Freeman, Harrison, Wicks, Parmar, & de Colle, 2010; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007). Additionally, CSR is recognised as an “essentially contested academic concept” (Gond & Moon, 2011), that is, a concept upon which academics agree to disagree. Across time, scholars advocated and opposed CSR with reference to divergent ideological points of view (e.g., Berle & Means, 1934; Bowen, 1953; Friedman, 1970). Reflecting on this lack of accepted definitions, Brammer and colleagues (2012) reveal a “simple truth” for which I have sympathy from a historical perspective: “in as much as the ‘S’ in CSR differs in terms of societal institutions, we will also end up with different definitions and understandings of the concept” (p. 9).

Given this lack of conceptual coherence and empirical clarity, I propose that this is likely to cause confusion that inhibits a dialogue between scholars of different backgrounds—if not done from a sound stance. In this article, I wish to provide this groundwork.

## **Methods**

My review is guided by a systematic and comprehensive process recommended for conducting literature review studies (Aguinis, Ramani, & Alabduljader, 2017, p. 88-92). Table 1 specifies each step of my research process.

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### ***Step 1: Goal and scope of review***

Taking into account the goal of this review, I defined four scope conditions for conducting the literature search. First, because my review starts with the premise that a closer dialogue between business historians and CSR scholars is underway, I decided to select the leading specialist journals of both fields for my initial database search (while, at later stages, I also included relevant publications of other outlets). For choosing the leading specialist journals, I relied on the assessment of researchers within the communities, which is a known technique to select relevant journals for a review (Albrecht et al., 2010, see details in Table 1). Second, I narrowed down the time-period to cover items published between 1995 and today. The reason for this is that I suppose that the period of the initial calls for a historic turn (Kieser, 1994; Zald, 1993) marks a reasonable zero point to follow the traces of an eventual rapprochement since then.

Regarding the third scope condition, I applied a relaxed variant of the dual integrity principle for selecting the type of studies (i.e., to be included, the studies need to follow some historical research strategy). Finally, I added only publications to the corpus that explicitly use the term CSR (or a closely related notion). By limiting the scope of this research to studies that grapple with CSR, I acknowledge that my survey excludes rich traditions of business historical writing that could be interpreted as tackling issues and debates of CSR scholarship. However, my study complements Husted's (2015) prior efforts. He reviewed work by business historians to examine proto-CSR practices in the context of industrial paternalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This approach, distinct from mine, might guide further research that explores how historical CSR studies can build on earlier traditions of business historical scholarship (e.g., Cole, 1959).

***Step 2: Building the corpus of relevant studies***

To build the initial corpus of pertinent work, I began by conducting a keyword search in the electronic databases of the identified leading specialist journals of both the business history and the CSR field. The initial search resulted in a corpus of 135 publications, each of which I then screened by applying the parameter mentioned above to decide whether to omit or retain an article in the corpus. This examination reduced the number of items in the corpus to 27 journal articles. In a third phase, I systematically analysed the reference lists and citation patterns of the remaining publications in the corpus to find other potentially relevant work. In particular, I enlarged the corpus with articles of other journal outlets and studies published in publication formats other than journal articles. Given that monographs and edited volumes are highly appreciated in the business history discipline, this extension of the search, in addition to some handpicked suggestions I received at conferences and on other occasions, was instrumental in avoiding a silo view on historical CSR research. In Table 2, I describe the final corpus of 75 publications regarding published sources and periods. This overview indicates the collective interest in the relationship between history and CSR that cuts across traditional disciplinary boundaries. Also, I suggest that the accelerated numbers of publications over time confirm my initial impression that historical CSR studies can be considered an emerging area of research.

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***Step 3: Analytical procedures***

My analytical reading of the corpus was guided by standard coding techniques of qualitative research, which is appropriate for reviewing a body of mostly fragmented

texts (Lamberg, Ojala, & Peltoniemi, 2017). I started to read and analyse the corpus by an initial set of attributes, such as research object(s), geographical foci, research periods, methods, level of analysis, and used theories, whereas other categories emerged at later stages of my investigation. For instance, in my initial phase of reading, I realised that the diversity of historical research approaches in relation to CSR had to be clarified. With this in mind, I further understood that the corpus could not be described as contributing to a coherent and unifying conceptual terrain. Instead, the literature seemed to be underpinned by different perspectives on the social responsibilities of business, which was not surprising, given the contested and historically contingent nature of the CSR concept and the various paradigmatic positions in the CSR field (Gond & Moon, 2011; Scherer & Palazzo, 2007). To deal with these issues, I found it useful to complement my initial set of attributes with two interpretive categories, i.e., “assumptions about history” and “assumptions about CSR”. This helped me to develop an understanding of how CSR has been defined and used so far, which I will discuss below as the first finding to emerge.

As I proceeded with the analysis of the corpus using the extended set of categories, I started to create an Excel spreadsheet to mark the specification of the categories for each publication. If I failed to establish a spec, I tagged the item for further discussion with a colleague with expertise in historical research. At an advanced stage of analysis, I began to interpret the individual studies as parts of larger knowledge clusters, in the same way as historians use hermeneutics to analyse and situate a text as an instance of broader social discourse (Taylor, 2015; see also Stutz & Sachs, 2018). Creating visualisations of the relationships between the categories, based on the Excel spreadsheet, was helpful to identify academic discourses within the corpus. In particular, I delineated three main clusters, which can be characterised as connecting

ideas and research findings to enhance historiographical or theoretical knowledge progressively. Also, I classified some individual studies as pertaining to the cluster “others”, such as work that is concerned with the historical evolution of the CSR construct in academic discussion.

In sum, the process of building and analysing the corpus helped me to think about the weaknesses and strengths of the extant literature. Furthermore, the analysis brings me to a position to discuss ways forward, building on my reflection on both emergent themes with only limited existing research and current calls for action.

## **Analysis**

This section presents the findings. I first introduce a framework to depict how previous literature defines and uses CSR from a historical perspective. Then, I synthesise the three main knowledge clusters.

### ***A framework for approaching CSR from a historical perspective***

The first finding to emerge from my analysis clarifies *what* is meant by CSR when researchers write about it from a historical perspective. In Table 3, I present some representative examples of CSR definitions that I found within the corpus. I distinguish the definitions by two dimensions that build a basic framework: First, my study suggests that the interpretations provided by the scholars tend toward particular meta-theoretical perspectives that frame the phenomenon of interest, i.e., an economic, a critical and a politico-ethical orientation. Second, and most important for the ontological understanding of the subject matter, researchers embrace either a firm-centric definition of CSR, by focusing on practices of business, or an integrated view of the interface between business and society. In what follows, I explain the two dimensions of the framework in more detail.

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*The meta-theoretical understandings*

To untangle the competing logics of CSR, I follow Heikkurinen & Mäkinen (2018) who make use of the Rawlsian concept of the “division of moral labour” to distinguish an economic, a critical and a politico-ethical orientation of addressing the responsibilities of business. The Rawlsian notion helps to unravel the distinct ways in which scholars view the social, political and economic responsibilities divided among different political and socio-economic institutions and actors operating within these structures (Heikkurinen & Mäkinen, 2018, p. 590).

According to Heikkurinen and Mäkinen (2018, p. 591-592), the dominant position in the CSR field derives its assumptions from a classical-liberal conception of an appropriate moral division of labour, which presumes an axiomatic separation between public and business responsibilities. By the logic of classical liberalism, which has been developed and took root in Britain and the United States in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, business firms are mainly considered economic actors—and public agencies may deal with resulting externalities. That is why the topic of *voluntarism* is almost taken-for-granted in this perspective to CSR. Rey-Garcia and Puig-Raposo (2013), for instance, follow in their historical analysis the official definition of a white paper by the European Commission and regard CSR as “a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a *voluntary* basis” (p. 1038, *italics added*). Also, emphasising the clear-cut tasks of value creation by business firms, this literature views CSR as a useful instrument for advancing economic goals. A case in point is Michael Porter and

Mark Kramer's (2011) notion of creating shared value (CSV), which tackles pro-social business strategies as "a source of opportunity, innovation, and competitive advantage" (p. 80). This instrumental approach to CSR, however, was already discussed by practitioners in the inter-war period (1918–1939) in the US and was (re)introduced into the academic debate with the (early) work of Archie Carroll (1979), Tom Jones (1995), Donna Wood (1991) and others (cf. Ireland & Pillay, 2010; Marens, 2010). In sum, this is the prevailing view in mainstream research, embedded in the functional paradigm of studying organisations (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012).

The critical perspective, in turn, departs from the "null hypothesis" (Djelic & Etchanchu, 2017, p. 641) inscribed in the debates. It *criticises* the classical-liberal starting point, which naturalises a strict boundary between public and economic realms. Instead of seeing them as separated, proponents of this position view the voluntary and strategic self-regulation of firms through CSR as a way to serve the interest of business at the expense of civil society (Heikkurinen & Mäkinen, 2018, p. 593). Abdelrehim and colleagues (2011), for instance, (implicitly) follow this logic in their historical study and interpret "CSR as a mechanism of corporate control" (p. 829). This position, inspired by the emergence of postcolonial theory and other theoretical approaches, has been articulated by researchers such as Ronen Shamir (2004), Bobby Banerjee (2008), Gerard Hanlon and Peter Fleming (2009).

The third perspective, the politico-ethical, attempts to conceptualise CSR to "re-domesticate" economic rationality within societal rules and norms (Heikkurinen & Mäkinen, 2018). This stance builds upon many different philosophical traditions that conceive of the economic, the social, and the political as deeply intertwined. To fulfil its promise that rather seeks to ameliorate than transform the system (Ireland & Pillay, 2010), CSR is viewed as a means to advance social causes and a legitimate end in itself.

Kaplan and Kinderman (2017), for instance, use the influential definition of CSR offered by Matten and Moon (2008), who understand explicit CSR as “clearly articulated and communicated policies and practices of corporations that reflect business responsibility *for some of the wider societal good*” (p. 14, *italics added*). This position has been advocated by business ethicists since the 1980s (Freeman et al., 2010) and authors that argue for a political conception of CSR (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007), following the globalisation of the notion in the late 1990s.

Table 4 sums up the relevant characterising features of the three meta-theoretical perspectives. In the discussion section, I will suggest that the proficiency of these conceptual terrains is the main precondition to engage in a meaningful two-way dialogue.

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*The subject matter*

My analysis further indicates that existing historical CSR studies are concerned with firm-centric as well as with integrated issues at the business-society interface, following the distinction by Brammer, Jackson and Matten (2012). The firm-centric position focuses on the study of socially responsible practices of business firms, with diverse understandings of what this “responsibility” constitutes. This is the focus that prevails in the third knowledge cluster—practising social responsibility—, which I will present below. By contrast, other scholars employ an integrated study of the interface between business and society. By embracing the whole relationship and interactions between business and society, scholars have adopted a broad, historically rather insensitive view, which considers CSR a useful umbrella term to study *any* business and society

relationships, irrespective of time and place. A narrower view, in turn, situates CSR in specific socio-historical contexts. By restricting the scope in this way, Scholars analyse CSR as a particular historical form of business-society interaction reflecting certain institutional and cultural conditions, associated with US-American corporate capitalism and the contemporary period of neoliberal globalisation (Djelic & Etchanchu, 2017; Hanlon & Fleming, 2009; Ireland & Pillay, 2010). This finding motivates me to present the discourse cluster about the origins and diffusion of CSR in relation to a narrow – and historical cognisant (Kipping & Üsdiken, 2014) – understanding of the subject matter in what follows.

To summarise, this section has argued that historical CSR studies are underpinned by theoretical ideas and assumptions of three distinct traditions of CSR thinking, and the subject matters embrace firm-centric issues as well as integrated studies of the business-society interface. While the existing research mainly adopts a historical lens to uncover historical truths (and/or to test theory against these “facts”), I will argue in the discussion section that there is much promise for more interpretive understandings of history, expanding the possible subject matters of historical CSR studies.

### ***Existing knowledge clusters***

In the following, I will first present the three main knowledge clusters that emerged in the analysis and reveal the operation of the different meta-theoretical understandings of CSR in the historical accounts.

#### *The genesis of CSR in the USA*

The first cluster I identified conceives of CSR as a historically and contextually embedded phenomenon and is concerned with the genesis of the idea and the

concept(s). Most research of this cluster follows a “history as narrating” methodological approach, which Maclean and her colleagues (2016, p. 614) render useful to explain the forms and origins of significant contemporary phenomena. In the literature, some consensus is reached that the idea of social responsibility as we understand it today was institutionalised in mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century USA. Its genesis is seen as a result of developments that scholars have traced back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In exploring different critical moments in the evolution of important institutions in relation to CSR, the largest group of research aims to challenge CSR’s “creation myth” (Brammer et al., 2012, p. 21), which was shaped by Milton Friedman’s strong opposition against the then unfolding CSR practices. Although Friedman’s *New York Times* essay published in 1970 does not cover the matter of the origins of CSR, his position influenced the popularly held belief that regards CSR as a hostile invention imposed on business to nudge the economy towards collectivism (Acquier, Gond & Pasquero, 2011, p. 631).

Summarizing the collective efforts to deconstruct this economic narrative, Rami Kaplan (2015) suggests that research brought forward a “civil regulation” and a “corporate power” rationale. The first narrative, articulated in the historical work of Archie Carroll and his colleagues (2015), plots the genesis of CSR similar to Friedman’s understanding. Carroll and colleagues, however, interpret these emerging mechanisms to nudge business to become socially responsible affirmatively, as a counterforce in the context of the increasing power of corporations. In contrast to this rationale that reflects a politico-ethical perspective on the genesis of CSR, the critical “corporate power” narrative argues that “it is essentially business that brings CR [corporate responsibility] onto the scene as a mechanism for *regulating its regulation* by society” (Kaplan, 2015, p. 126. *Italics added*). According to this rationale, the

“corporate capitalist elite” invented the idea not to just defer to societal pressure but to act as a buffer against anti-corporate political threats and to seize on political opportunities to advance the liberalisation of the economy.

Scholars have explored different critical events in the development of this business-led invention and its further evolution in the United States (Englander & Kaufman, 2004; Spector, 2008). Hoffman (2007) sees the preconditions of CSR emerging in the 1920s, including the full development of the modern corporate enterprise, which came to dominate the leading high-tech industries of the time, and the establishment of managerial control of business firms. In Marens’ (2010; 2012; 2013) work, the defeat of the labour movement by the emerging American giant corporations is the critical juncture in the development of CSR. Unlike its industrial rivals elsewhere, American corporate managers were able to preserve their autonomy in managing employment relations. Whereas European managers were constrained by both corporatist forms of democracy and strong labour movements, their American counterparts were successful in dominating the political arena with the interests of business and block unionisation efforts of its employees. This “victory” came at a price, as Marens (2012) shows. He (2012; 2013) suggests that American managers introduced voluntary initiatives—(proto-)CSR practices—to be viewed as “responsible employees” legitimising its power in the eyes of society.

In sum, research has provided much evidence that the institutional conditions of the 1920s gave rise to a version of CSR, which presumes high managerial discretion to define and implement social responsibility. This conception shares many features with today’s successor.

### *The diffusion and globalisation of CSR*

The second cluster is concerned with the spread and globalisation of CSR. A good deal of research exploits the capacity of the “history as explicating” methodological approach to “reveal the operation of transformative social processes” (Maclean et al., 2016, p. 613). Again, this cluster is underpinned by the different meta-theoretical assumptions: In an economic narrative, Rey-Garcia and Puig-Raposo (2013) use insights of institutional theory and exposes the operation of isomorphic pressures on corporations to adopt CSR. By contrast, scholars holding a politico-ethical perspective tend to portray the process of CSR as a legitimate expectation of society on business conduct (e.g., Schneider, 2014). The critical rationale, in turn, stresses the role of CSR in legitimating neoliberal transformations of business-and-society relationships (e.g., Kaplan & Kinderman, 2017; Kinderman, 2012).

Exploring different empirical contexts and periods, this stream of literature can be divided into three main categories: First, scholars have studied the changes and rearrangements of particular institutional frameworks in the long run. Antal, Oppen and Sobczak (2009), for instance, explore the ways in which social responsibility was conceived of and practised *implicitly* in the German context before the CSR concept entered the country. They build upon Matten and Moon’s (2008) crucial distinction between US-American “explicit” and European “implicit” CSR, which ascribes this divergence in explicitness to historically grown differences in the respective national institutional frameworks. Antal and colleagues (2009) find that implicit forms of CSR have remained stable in Germany for many years, encapsulated in laws, societal norms and industrial relations agreements, but that these structures were challenged in past decades (see also Hiss, 2009; Lohmeyer, 2017). Similar trajectories of how institutional frameworks eroded and gave way to more explicit CSR forms—as an “imperfect substitute” (Brammer et al., 2012) for institutionalised social solidarity—were studied

in different European (Antal & Sobczak, 2007; Argandoña & von Weltzien Hoivik, 2009; Ihlen & von Weltzien Hoivik, 2013; Kang & Moon, 2012), non-European (Jammulamadaka, 2016), comparative (Gond, Kang, & Moon, 2011) and global contexts (Jones, 2013, 2017).

The second group of research is more directly concerned with the dissemination of the concept from the United States to other countries and the adoption processes by business firms. According to the accumulated work of Daniel Kinderman (2012), Rami Kaplan (2015) and their cooperation (Kaplan & Kinderman, 2017), the concept first travelled to the global south (Venezuela, 1962-1967; the Philippines, 1970; South Africa, 1976) before arriving in Britain (1977), the first foreign country of the global north. In their research, they delineate two crucial conditions for the early adoption of the concept by business firms in foreign contexts, that is, a strong tie to the United States and a crisis of corporate capitalism on a national level threatening business interests. In the case of Britain, where the post-war economic boom was coming to a dramatic end in the 1970s, Kaplan and Kinderman (2017, p. 33) interpret the pro-active adoption of CSR by business firms in two different ways: to pre-empt regulative attempts and to seize the opportunity to step up a further liberalisation of the economy (where private social initiatives substituted public policies) (see also Marinetto, 1998; Kinderman, 2012).

The contemporary wave of CSR since the 1990s represents the third phenomenon of interest, assuming that, while national business systems globally moved towards more shareholder-oriented forms of corporate governance, business increasingly adopted CSR (Brammer et al., 2012; Höllerer, 2013). In the recent past, CSR has been institutionalised globally through codes of conduct, standards and audit schemes as a voluntary but “necessary” issue for business firms (Avetisyan & Ferrary,

2013). “It may be, then, that even if CSR began to diffuse through corporate channels as a corporate strategy, from a certain point on, civil, governmental, and intergovernmental actors ‘kidnapped’ CSR and turned it ... into a mechanism of regulation”, as Kaplan and Kinderman (2017, p. 38) reflect. On the other hand, research suggests that the rise of CSR in recent periods is because multinational corporations take on a state-like role in contemporary vacuums of global governance, and CSR practices intend to re-establish a sense of legitimacy for multinational corporations (Djelic & Etchanchu, 2017, see, e.g., Scherer & Palazzo, 2007).

In sum, a good deal of research has convincingly shown how diverse actors, favouring either mandatory or voluntary approaches, contributed to CSR’s legitimisation and its institutionalisation on the global level.

### *Practising social responsibility*

The largest cluster of research in the corpus is interested in the practising of social responsibility by business firms. Most of the work, namely business historical, falls into the category of “history as narrating”. By formulating (theoretical) ideas about the responsibilities of business that remain “embedded within the story being told” (Maclean et al., 2017, p. 612), researchers explore “responsible” business conducts through case histories in a wide variety of geographical settings and periods, with CSR actually occurring only later in time.

A recent example that takes an economic perspective of CSR is Ann-Kristin Bergquist and Magnus Lindmark’s (2016) article on the adoption of proactive environmental strategies by a Swedish-based mining company in the 1920s. They (2016, p. 223) argue that their “case” is best explained as an example of Porter and Kramer’s (2011) CSV concept, which seeks to find win-win situations (profitability and “doing good”) through creative problem-solving. By contrast, a vast amount of studies

examine within the politico-ethical paradigm how responsible attitudes and norms for furthering social causes are explicable by a company's historical development or the founder's legacy. Parker (2014), for instance, investigates four Quaker businesses of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and finds that the industrialists' actions and accountabilities for the common good were driven by their philosophical and religious beliefs. In a similar vein, Da Silva Lopes' (2016) and Kininmonth's (2016) recent company case studies show how religious values provide a strong sense of responsibility to work for the betterment of society. As another example contributing to the politico-ethical perspective, Reed's (2017) case study examines how the organisational identity of the American multinational Cummins Inc. enabled its management to take a stand for LGBT rights (as a form of political CSR) at a time when the larger American society still fuelled prejudices about sexual orientations other than the heterosexual "norm".

Abdelrehim and colleagues (2011), in turn, exemplify a critical position on CSR by studying how corporations exert social control through CSR. Interested in business practices that fall under today's definition of CSR policies (e.g., investments in education by endowing Tehran University), they examined how the management of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company retained control of its valuable assets in the face of threats from nationalism and organised labour (1945-1953).

In sum, while the individual case histories, mainly by business historians, are fascinating, I doubt that this research has tapped its full potential. In what follows, I will discuss my concerns and develop a clear trajectory for upcoming empirical historical research under the label of historical CSR studies.

## **Discussion**

In the findings section, I revealed the operation of three different meta-theoretical assumptions of CSR in the context of three maturing knowledge clusters. This section

now discusses the state of the art of the existing literature, emphasising the patterns of engagement between the sub-communities so far. Following from this discussion, I will outline three research avenues to fuel the development of the conversation.

***Establishing a new pattern of engagement: From borrowing to blending***

In arguing for a more profound integration of history and CSR theorising, I have sketched a map that conceives historic CSR studies at the intersection of history-with-CSR and CSR-with-history (see Figure 1). My central premise for historic CSR studies is that scholars of both fields make use of this intellectual space to genuinely cross-fertilise ideas and approach of history and CSR. Against this background, I find it useful to discuss the prior literature by exploiting insights from Oswick and colleagues (2011) who conceptualise the exchange of ideas between scholarly fields. In particular, I employ the notions of borrowing and blending. According to Oswick and colleagues (2011, p. 328), borrowing refers to the practice of using discourse elements from outside the home discipline. In blending, on the other hand, scholars invert the focus of inquiries by seeking to engage directly with the source literature (Oswick et al., 2011, p. 329), which suggests a cross-fertilisation and diffusion of knowledge beyond a single discipline.

Reading and evaluating my corpus against this backdrop, it is fair to say that the primary mode of engagement between the disciplines has been one-sided borrowing without much cross-fertilisation. In this pattern, business historians have mainly “domesticated” foreign theoretical ideas, that is, they streamline and modify the original concepts so that they fit with the empirical problems at hand (Oswick et al., 2011, p. 328). A recent article published in *Business History*, paradoxically written by management scholars, exemplifies this scholarly practice predominating the business history cohort of the corpus. Loison and colleagues (2018), interested in responsible

business practices before the emergence of the academic notion of CSR, derive from what they regard as the modern CSR literature the view that the environmental, social and economic concerns of business make up CSR. They then apply this interpretive lens to organise their historical account of responsible policies developed by a French subsidiary between the 1950s and the 1980s.

By deducing such structuring devices from the CSR literature, most of the business historical works cite some of the pivotal CSR articles but demonstrate a somewhat limited acquaintance with relevant discussions. “Out-of-date definitions are brought forth as though they were fresh and new, and ambiguity is asserted where specificity has already been demonstrated”, as Wood and Logsdon (2016, p. 7) criticised “foreign” scholars publishing on CSR topics. A case in point is Bergquist and Lindmark’s (2016) study in which they set the CSV concept over and against CSR (especially, p. 223). CSR scholars, in turn, view CSV as nothing more than one among many contesters of an economic perspective to the social responsibilities of business (Wood & Logsdon, 2016, pp. 18-9).

To move away from borrowing and engage in blending, I thus suggest that the major challenge for business historians is posed by what Maclean and colleagues call the principle of “theoretical fluency”, that is, the command of conceptual terrains. This principle requires scholars to mobilise resources to gain proficiency in new literature and conceptual languages, which is costly in cognitive and political terms for any scholars (Kaplan, Milde, & Cowan, 2017).

On the other side, CSR scholars have also borrowed some aspects of history. While business historians mostly make use of concepts, CSR scholars borrow data or “historical facts” from historiography. For instance, Djelic and Etchanchu (2017) build their comparative case study on company histories and historiographical syntheses by

historians. However, in many such uses, history receives a subordinate role. If CSR scholars give history a greater role, they tend to rely on neo-institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; see, e.g., a special issue by Brammer et al., 2012). This theoretical lens—the second most used perspective in the CSR literature after stakeholder theory (Frynas & Yamahaki, 2016)—has been mainly used to explain that firms adopt CSR practices for the purpose of obtaining legitimacy or passing as normal (institutional isomorphism). In these studies, history, however, has been mainly relegated to a mere repository of facts to test a theoretical idea (Rowlinson et al., 2014).<sup>ii</sup>

Likewise opposed to the idea of “dual integrity”, my analysis has detected many instances that would not meet the state of the art of methodological approaches developed for organisational history. Indeed, many pieces by CSR scholars had no theoretical ambitions but historiographical concerns. Antal and colleagues (2009), for instance, narrate the development from “implicit” to more “explicit” forms of CSR in Germany, without even one methodological note. However, given that the methodological knowledge about historical research practices has only recently been made available to organisation theorists, it is encouraging to see examples that already blend history and organisational theorising.

Kaplan and Kinderman (2017), for instance, choose a *conceptualising* approach to history (Maclean et al., 2016) to provide both a significant contribution to CSR historiography and develop a theory of business-led diffusions of management practices. Further, scholars have begun to differentiate the subject matter of historical CSR studies by incorporating interpretive understandings of history. Acosta and Pérezts (2017), for instance, apply the “geological metaphor of sedimentation”, which “look[s] beyond [time’s] literal sense as a linear chronology of events and understands it as a

constructed temporal frame” (p. 4). They explore the history of CSR in Colombia in the long run and suggest “unearthing different strata of business and society relations” of today’s business-society interface (p. 1).

In sum, both disciplines have prevalingly engaged in one-sided borrowing. Consequently, I suggest that it is necessary for research to move on from this practice and commence blending history and CSR scholarship.

### *Promising avenues for a dialogue*

In what follows, I sketch three research avenues that I regard as most promising for a closer dialogue between business historians and CSR scholars. The first research avenue applies interpretive historical theory to CSR theorising (Mena, Rintamäki, Fleming, & Spicer, 2016; Schrempf-Stirling et al., 2016), which is analogous to the emerging “uses of history” approach within the broader field of MOS (Suddaby, Foster, & Quinn Trank, 2010). I then unpack two prior calls by CSR scholars for which an interdisciplinary author team is appropriately positioned to contribute to, that is, to tackle big-picture questions in business and society research (Marens, 2016; Waddock, 2016) and to rethink the historiography of CSR thought (Crane et al., 2015). Essentially, each avenue of the research program draws from different sets of assumptions about history and CSR. Table 5 summarises the features of these research avenues.

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### *Historic CSR and uses of history*

The first emergent cluster stems from the recent contributions by Schrempf-Stirling et al. (2016) and Mena et al. (2016) that both investigate, albeit taking different paths, how

organisations take responsibilities for past actions. Schrempf-Stirling and colleagues (2016, p. 41) introduce the concept of historic CSR for the analysis of how contemporary managers engage with criticism on past wrongdoings, which may periodically flare up in public, and how this affects the legitimacy of the current business. In turn, Mena and colleagues (2016) conceptualise how organisations deliberately engage in instrumental activity to shape how larger audiences view events of past corporate irresponsibility. What both articles have in common is that they presume that there may be some objective truths of past wrongdoings, but highlight that history will be differently interpreted, remembered, and, eventually, fall into oblivion (Godfrey et al., 2016). In doing so, their research shares many assumptions with the uses of the past approach, which gains prominence in organisational history (Mordhorst, Popp, Suddaby, & Wadhvani, 2015). This type of research has typically examined how organisations deploy their history strategically (Suddaby et al., 2010). However, the importance of both articles is to remind us that history should not be limited to a strategic asset of corporations. It is also a contested space that societal actors may enter “for moral and moralising purposes” (Godfrey et al., 2016, p. 601).

Future research might build on these initial contributions to further explore how organisations take responsibility for history, including its constitutive elements for sensemaking as well as its objective elements of historical truth. Given the conceptual nature of the beginning of this discussion (see also Booth, Clark, Delahaye, Procter, & Rowlinson, 2007; Janssen, 2013), empirical historical research is best suited to push the boundaries. Historical CSR research should investigate particularly striking empirical instances in which companies have been challenged by historical accounts of their past, in order to substantiate and generate new theoretical ideas. Important issues to tackle are, for instance, the meaning of organisational legacy in doing good or wrong. What

long-term effects have an (ir)responsible past for different stakeholder relations (Brunninge & Fridriksson, 2017)? Future research is also needed to understand how globally operating corporations should deal with memory cultures that differ from their home country. Then, who can legitimately accuse organisations of their past wrongdoing? In turn, building on Mena and colleagues' insights, if managers engage in instrumental forgetting work that has clear benefits for the focal organisation, what are the adverse outcomes for society in general, especially regarding repeated mistakes and harms? Also, are managers cognisant of ethical issues when using, re-interpreting and shaping history? In sum, this research avenue is exciting as it points towards the contemporary relevance of history while also allowing for critical historiographical work.

#### *Tackling larger issues*

Another way to incorporate history into CSR theorising is to investigate larger, historiographically relevant, big-picture issues. Marens (2016) has recently criticised CSR scholarship for its overreliance on the experimental science model of building parsimonious theory and called for examining puzzling empirical phenomena that are more contingent on historical circumstances. He essentially argues that the development of historical-empirical theories is better suited to account for emerging critical issues of the CSR agenda in light of all the problems that contemporary capitalism faces, including growing inequalities both within and between societies, continual environmental exploitation, and the current rise of authoritarian regimes.

Fundamentally, blending history and CSR theorising may motivate engagement in tackling broader societal "grand challenges" (George, Howard-Grenville, Joshi, & Tihanyi, 2016), that is, a "specific critical barrier(s) that, if removed, would help solve an important societal problem" (p. 1881).

Historical CSR research is urged to account for and incorporate historical dynamics and constraints influencing the relationship between business and society. Scholars may embrace historiographically relevant issues, as the organising of business during apartheid, the labour question during the Industrial Revolution, or, going back even further, to examine how business coped with devastating plagues and warfare during the late Middle Ages (see, e.g., chapters on “management and ethics” in Wilson, Toms, de Jong, & Buchnea, 2017, for inspiration). By studying historiographically significant subjects, and also contributing to its understandings from an organisation theory perspective, historical CSR research may grapple with fundamental issues of the business and society research agenda. According to Waddock (2016, p. 17), this involves “questioning the proper roles and legitimacy of business (and other enterprises) in society [...], and what system best supports both successful businesses and, increasingly, sustainable societies and human civilisation.”

To be blunt, what I am proposing is not about discovering parallels between the present and the past or “extract[ing] lessons from the past through historical analogy”—at which most historians would look with the greatest reservation (Godfrey et al., 2016, p. 600). Much more relevant, I suggest that researchers should use all the recent methodological options and insights of how history can be used in theorising. For instance, scholars may inductively (or more precisely: abductively) explore their *unusual* empirical research settings, embedded in historical time and place, to develop novel theoretical ideas (Stutz & Sachs, 2018), much in the same way as qualitative research seeks to come up with alternative theoretical frames rather than preconfigured hypotheses to account for unfamiliar phenomenon (Eisenhardt, Graebner, & Sonenshein, 2016).

### *Rethinking the historiography of CSR ideas*

The final pressing issue for which collaborations between historians and CSR scholars may be useful is to push the CSR community to become more historically conscientious. “The [business and society] field has largely suffered from an ahistorical perspective that reinvents the wheel with every new article,” as Crane, Henriques, Husted and Matten (2015, p. 431) observe. Essentially, they propose that “business and society scholars need to recapture both the intellectual history of business and society thought as well as the history of its practice before the emergence of this particular field of academic inquiry.”

Crane and his colleagues understand that writing and reinterpreting the intellectual history of a field do not fulfil antiquarian purposes. More generally, in an attempt to revive management history, Cummings and colleagues (2017) have recently elaborated how a decline of substantially new ideas in organisational research might have roots in the past, “or more specifically, in management research’s narrow view of what in its past is relevant” (p. 3). Cummings and his colleagues show, by uncovering a more diverse past than conventional textbook histories of the management field account for, how rewriting intellectual histories enables us to think differently in the present.

Looking at the history chapters of textbooks and handbooks relevant for students and future scholars of CSR (e.g., Carroll, 2008; Frederick, 2008; Moon, Murphy & Gond, 2017), I doubt that the field engages reflexively enough with its past. For instance, Moon and colleagues’ (2017, p. 45) textbook contribution presents the history of CSR in three phases—from industrialisation over the rise of managerial capitalism to internationalisation—“as reflecting interactions between social expectations of business, business actions to meet these through CSR and governmental regulation of social responsibility.” This narrative weaves in assumptions of the politico-ethical perspective

and is arguably overly glossy, with limited historical substance. For instance, though citing Kaplan's (2015) critical account on the business-led emergence of CSR, Moon and colleagues withhold the central implications of the evidence presented, i.e., that CSR, as a form of corporate manipulation, has, at some time and places, uphold unsustainable business practices. Indeed, one wonders how CSR scholars reconcile, if not ignore, the critical historical accounts about CSR's past with the field's ambitions aimed at facilitating positive and impeding negative business contributions to society.

Writing a field's history, however, is not a self-evident exercise and is surely not done by understanding the evolution of the CSR construct in the academic discussion in progressive terms (e.g., Evans, Haden, Clayton, & Novicevic, 2013; Knouse, Hill & Hamilton, 2007). Instead, engaging with history always involves an opportunity to probe "whether alternative historical vistas might inspire thinking innovatively in our field" (Cummings et al., 2017, p. 42). Rethinking the intellectual past of CSR may follow paths already taken by critically minded scholars. Ireland and Pillay (2010), for instance, contextualise academic thoughts about the responsibilities of business within larger institutional changes and call CSR scholars to re-engage with more radical past intellectual ideas (see also Marens, 2010).<sup>iii</sup> Other paths may include engagement with more plural perspectives, including reincorporating and drawing on marginalised or other traditions than the Western philosophy of thinking about business and society. In sum, future research is invited to build new bridges from the past to the present to open up more imaginative futures.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, I have set out to provide a review of and develop an agenda for historical CSR studies, a nascent interdisciplinary research endeavour bringing together organisational historians and CSR scholars. By looking back into the histories of both

fields, my review uncovers how researchers have contributed to this emerging area of research, almost *avant la lettre*. In particular, I have synthesised three knowledge clusters from existing literature, i.e., scholarly work about the historical roots of CSR, its diffusion and globalisation, and the practising social responsibility before the formation of academic CSR scholarship. Drawing on the recent efforts to establish a new methodological paradigm within MOS, I have problematised the current integration of history into CSR and contoured the conditions that would enable a two-way dialogue to produce insights beyond either discipline.

On the one hand, I have emphasised the lack of conceptual coherence in CSR scholarship, which causes ongoing confusion and inhibited prior attempts by business historians to engage with the source literature. To offer some guidance for entering into the dialogue, I have provided a framework that distinguishes the different premises of conceptual terrains (i.e., economic, critical and politico-ethical lenses) and the objects of studies (i.e., firm-centric or integrated studies, in either the narrow or broad variant).

On the other hand, I have proposed moving on from a basic conceptualisation, in which history is mostly treated as objective truth that authors may uncover to either inform historiography or use it to test a theory. Indeed, the philosophical positions available to understand history in historical CSR research span a wide array, from reconstructionist (objective truth), over constructionist (interpretive context) to deconstructionist (discourse) orientations (Coraiola et al., 2015), as exemplified by the three research avenues I sketched above. Mostly, I hope to have demonstrated that different assumptions about history may offer unique intellectual starting points that likely lead to novel scholarly contributions.

More generally viewed, by bringing together the methodological paradigm of historical organisation studies with the business and society field, this article contributes

to our understanding of how to establish new interdisciplinary research programs. While previous literature has focused on reconciling the discrepant traditions at the disciplinary level (for an overview: Decker, 2016), this article suggests extending the relevant levels of analysis to the field level, as progress in academic conversations occurs in specific sub-communities. A shift in the level of analysis from discipline to sub-communities involves analysing both the foundations and histories of existing academic discourses and the practice of previous engagement between sub-communities. Future research, like other *Perspectives Articles* to come, might follow my example to sketch and shape a new interdisciplinary research program.

In all, I have conceived historical CSR studies as an intellectual space, where ideas and approaches of both fields are used on equal standing. The future will tell whether the offered research program garners sufficient collective interest to progress. Otherwise, it may remain what Marilyn Strathern (2004) called a “partial connection”, where scholars from different backgrounds engage in a short-term conversation without realising a single entity between them. My wish, however, is that this *Perspectives Article* encourages organisational historians and CSR scholars to become involved, as part of a long-term commitment, in interdisciplinary inquiries. Given that historical CSR research is not afraid to address significant questions of our time, this research hopefully produces insights relevant for building a socially, environmentally, and economically more sustainable future.

## **Appendix**

### *A brief history of the business history field*

From the vantage point of the presumptive “historic turn” in CSR (Godfrey et al., 2016, p. 601), one is inclined to compress the history of business history into a storyline that deterministically leads to the convergence of business history and organisation theory (see Kipping, Kurosawa, & Wadhvani, 2017, critically, for the following). In such a coherent but incomplete narrative, business history is likely to be seen as originating in the United States at the Harvard Business School in the 1920s, where enthusiasts for highly-detailed historical studies of individual firms advocated the case method in business education. Then, the arrival of Alfred Chandler (1918-2007) would mark the maturing period of the field. Indeed, he worked out a recognised methodological approach, with somewhat narrow empirical foci (e.g., the internal development of big business), and became an influential source for different schools of thoughts in the ever-diversifying fields of MOS. Business historians have, until now, taken pride and self-image in his ancestry. In the “post-Chandlerian” era, one could then argue that the field entered an interregnum denoted by the discovery of new topics with much broader foci (e.g., Hansen, 2012; Rosen, 2013), examined through a variety of methods (e.g., Decker et al., 2015; Friedman & Jones, 2017). Finally, this story would climax in the definite “organisational turn in business history” (Rowlinson, 2015, p. 71; see also, notably, Maclean et al., 2017).

While this narrative might resonate well with many business historians who moved from history and economics departments to business schools, it will not ring true for all. By contrast, Kipping and colleagues’ (2017) revisionist history of business history takes a longer-term view and considers “alternative paths—both from disciplinary and geographical perspectives and including the roads not travelled.”

Moreover, Kipping and colleagues (2017, p. 22) suggest that business history possesses not even the characteristics of a discipline and see it as a kind of “borderlands”, where scholars of different backgrounds—economics, sociology, history, or organisation theory—find a temporary or permanent home. In the course of changing frontiers of business history, some enduring institutions nonetheless enabled scholars to converge on topics of common interests. Specialised journal outlets, with long-lasting traditions, launched and kept discussions going (e.g., *Business History Review*, established 1926; *Business History*, 1958; *Business and Economic History*, 1972-1999; *Enterprise & Society*, 2000; *Journal of Management History*, 1994-2000, 2006; *Management & Organizational History*, 2006). The topics of interest covered in these scholarly discourses were broader as the above account suggests, which overemphasises the path that Chandler’s work pursued (Friedman & Jones, 2017; Kipping et al., 2017). For instance, threads of business history took from early on an interest in the cultural, political and moral status of corporations *in societies* (e.g., Cole, 1959; Heald, 1970). However, in whatever ways the past is told, it is important to notice that business history is right now in an “inventive mood, bursting with multiple futures and paths forward” (Kipping et al., 2017, p. 2). In one of these trajectories, business historians are led to closer cooperation with organisation theorists to benefit from a broader audience of authors and readers (Maclean et al., 2017). Ultimately, they may become members of the community of practice of organisational history (Godfrey et al., 2016).

### ***A brief history of the CSR field***

Conventionally, historical accounts of CSR acknowledge that the business and society field, as it is more broadly known, began to consolidate during the 1960s and 1970s within American business schools (Carroll, 2008; Frederick, 2008; see, critically, Marens, 2010). Its early subject matters, as Cheit (1991, p. 72) notes in a keynote

address at an annual gathering, were found “among the leftovers, subjects no one else [at the business school] had laid claim to.” To put it the other way round, Waddock (2016), a doyen of the community, suggests that the field’s “mission has always seemed to involve staying at the cutting and somewhat critical edge of management practice, and thinking and reflecting seriously about the (proper) roles and impacts of business in society”. The critical edge may have impeded the field’s acceptance and credibility in business schools, as it was often regarded “with some suspicion as either closet social-democracy [sic!] or an excuse for executives to neglect their duty to shareholders” (Marens, 2013, p. 471). Nevertheless, the field was successful in institutionalising vital associations with annual meetings (*Social Issues in Management* division at the *Academy of Management*, 1971; *Society for Business Ethics*, 1980; *International Association for Business and Society*, 1990) and established highly-regarded journals devoted to its domains (*Business & Society*, 1960; *Journal of Business Ethics*, 1982; *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 1991).

A longer-term perspective even suggests that business ethics played a vital role in the business school’s quest for legitimacy and higher-education status at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As ethics was “bound up with the project of turning business into a profession, like law or medicine, which had codes of ethics,” it was initially positioned at the centre of the business education project (Abend, 2013, p. 191). However, business ethics had limited success in establishing itself nationwide in the curricula. Instead, law, economics and other professors initiated important conversations early on about the responsibilities of business (e.g., Berle & Means, 1934; Bowen, 1953), whose traces are readily incorporated into the historiographical accounts of the field (Acquier, Gond, & Pasquero, 2011; Marens, 2008). Further, a geographically more diverse historical perspective shows that the field took longer to

take off outside the US. In the case of Germany, for instance, it was not until the late 1990s and after the turn of the century that larger numbers of scholars entered the field who “mistakenly saw the country as a blank spot on the CSR landscape” (Antal, Oppen, & Sobczak, 2009, p. 291).

Regarding the intellectual structure of the broader business and society field, CSR is just one discourse cluster amongst other major themes, including morality and social contract theory, ethical decision making and stakeholder theory (Calabretta, Durisin & Oglienge, 2011). However, while some fundamental contributions to CSR date back to the early stages of the field (e.g., Carroll, 1979), the attention to CSR exploded at the beginning of this century. As an empirical analysis of the knowledge base of the *Journal of Business Ethics* (1982-2008) illustrates (Calabretta et al., 2011, p. 514), CSR has become by far the single most covered topic in recent years. Looking at this recent history of the literature, it is fair to say that mainstream scholars in the field regard it as progressing in the sense of what Kuhn called “normal science” (Gond, Mena, et al., 2017). In accord with Kuhn’s analysis of the evolution of scientific disciplines, CSR scholars increasingly specialise and address more precise and narrow constructs to examine the empirical implications of the primary paradigm. For instance, a recent stream has begun to look at the psychological micro-foundations of CSR at the individual level of analysis (Gond, El Akremi, Swaen, & Babu, 2017). After all, it has been argued that studying CSR as a steadily progressing and coherent body of knowledge was instrumental for finally obtaining acceptance as a legitimate field of management research (Gond, Mena, et al., 2017).

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- <sup>i</sup> An attentive reviewer pointed out the irony that I call to bring history to the centre stage, but exile the histories of both fields to the appendix, and thus to the margins. However, while I felt caught in the act, I decided to not interweave the historical narratives with my main body of text. For reasons of readability, this move would have forced me to cut out information, which I expect to be very informative to many readers.
- <sup>ii</sup> However, I agree with Suddaby (2016) who argues that institutional theory has much promise for further rapprochement between history and organisation theory (see also Decker, Üsdiken, Engwall, & Rowlinson, 2018).
- <sup>iii</sup> As for sources, see for example the “oral histories of the business and society field” project by Wokutch, Steiner, Waddock, and Mallot (2018).

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NOTE: The references used in the analysis are marked with an asterisk (\*).

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## Figures and Tables

Figure 1. The intellectual space at the intersection between business history and CSR studies

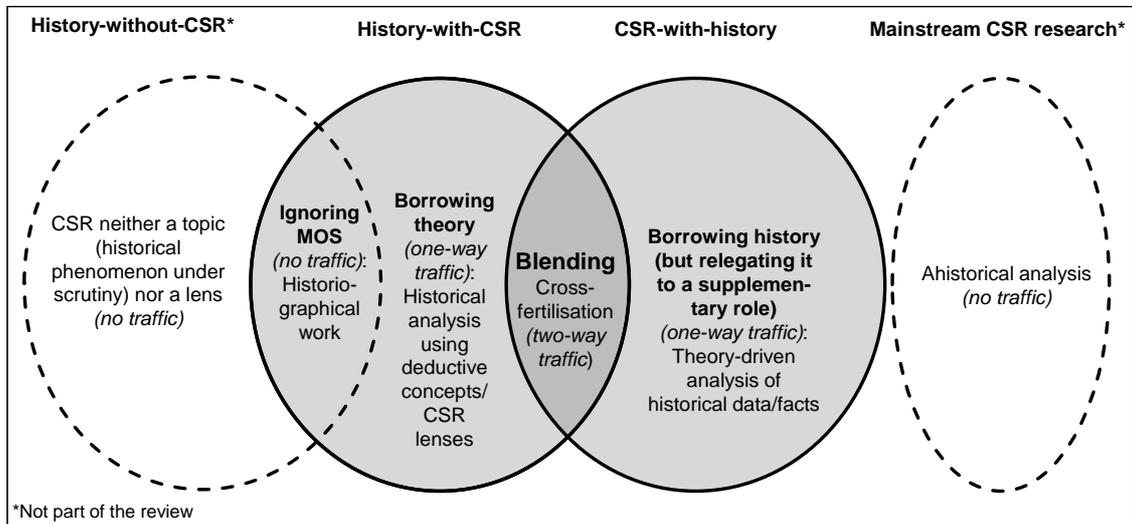


Table 1. Description of the procedures: Defining the goal and scope, building the corpus of relevant studies and its analytical reading

Step	Description	Search and limitation parameters	Outcome
Step 1: Goal and scope of review	Goal: Providing a synthesis of prior literature through the perspective of historical CSR studies to develop recommendations for a further rapprochement	Scope conditions: 1) Selection of the primary journals to be included, based on opinions of researchers within both fields (Albrecht et al., 2010; Ojala et al., 2016; Godfrey et al., 2016). 2) Time-period covered: 1995 until today 3) Applying a relaxed variant of the dual integrity principle for selecting the type of studies 4) Explicit usage of the term CSR (or a closely related term) as a requirement	Selected business and organisational history journals: <i>Business History</i> , <i>Business History Review</i> , <i>Enterprise and Society</i> , <i>Journal of Management History</i> , <i>Management &amp; Organizational History</i> Selected CSR journals: <i>Business &amp; Society</i> , <i>Business Ethics Quarterly</i> , <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i> , <i>Business Ethics: An European Review</i>
<b>Step 2: Building the corpus of relevant studies</b>			
Step 2a: Keyword search	An initial search of articles in the leading journals of both the business history discipline and the CSR field to build an initial corpus of articles.	Parameters used to search the electronic databases of business history journals (title, abstract, keywords): CSR, social responsibility, shared value, corporate citizenship, stakeholder management (record date: 08/2017). Parameters used to search the electronic databases of CSR field journals: CSR AND history, CSR AND historical, CSR AND longitudinal (record date: 02/2017)	Total publications: 135 Business history journals: 28 articles CSR field journals: 107 articles
Step 2b: Screening of publications	Screening of title, abstract and full-text of the articles to decide whether to omit or keep them in the corpus.	Business history journals: Omission of articles that are a) not using CSR (or a related term), b) not of an empirical nature CSR field journals: Omission of articles that did not employ a historical research strategy (in the widest sense, following standards by Maclean et al.).	Total publications: 27 Business history journals: 13 articles CSR field journals: 14 articles
Step 2c: "Mining" the reference lists of the articles in the corpus	Enlarging the corpus by systematically screening the reference lists of relevant studies already identified to find other potentially relevant studies. Also, I considered suggestions by the journal editors and various commentators at seminars and conferences to be included in the corpus.	Studies from different outlets were included in the corpus, using the same parameters as in step 2b. With regard to books, I included only publications written by authors who self-identify as business historians or CSR scholars.	Total publications: 75 Business history journals: 34 CSR field journals: 19 Other management journals: 5 Journals of other disciplines: 8 Books/chapters: 9
Step 3: Analytical reading and coding of the corpus	Analysing the corpus by a set of categories to find patterns and relationships between the categories to identify the knowledge clusters, the main meta-theoretical rationales, and the strengths and weaknesses of the corpus.	Used categories include the assumptions of history, perspective to CSR, research setting, the definition of CSR, used theories, level of analysis, methods, etc.	See step 2

Table 2. Main publication sources of historical CSR research across time

Category	Journal	1995-1999	2000-2004	2005-2009	2010-2014	2015-2018	# of articles	% of Total
<i>1. Business and management history</i>								
	Business History	1	0	0	4	7	12	16%
	Journal of Management History	0	0	4	2	2	8	11%
	Business History Review	1	0	1	0	3	5	7%
	Enterprise and Society	0	1	1	3	0	5	7%
	Misc	0	0	2	2	0	4	5%
<i>2. CSR field journals</i>								
	Journal of Business Ethics	0	0	4	3	2	9	12%
	Business & Society	0	0	1	0	3	4	5%
	Business Ethics Quarterly	0	0	1	2	0	3	4%
	Misc	0	0	1	2	0	3	4%
<i>3. Top tier and other management journals</i>								
		0	0	0	4	1	5	7%
<i>4. Other disciplines</i>								
	Socio-Economic Review	0	0	0	3	1	4	5%
	Misc	0	0	2	2	0	4	5%
<i>5. Books and book chapters</i>								
		1	0	1	2	5	9	12%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 3. A basic framework for approaching CSR from a historical perspective, based on definitions of the surveyed literature

	<b>Firm-centric definitions, focusing on the practices of business</b>	<b>More integrated definitions, focusing on business-society relationships</b>
<b>Economic orientation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>„Porter and Kramer argued, in broad terms, that businesses which create economic value by addressing the needs and challenges in society might enhance a competitive advantage. Ansvar provides a historical example of how shared value was created between the company and one of the largest popular movements in Sweden – the temperance movement.“ (Bergquist &amp; Eriksson, 2017, p. 16)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Broad view: „... companies and entrepreneurs defined their responsibilities depended to a large extent on the criticisms launched by the outside world. Entrepreneurs and company managers responded to concerns in the society of which they formed part, and the progressive ones among them, the true leaders, searched for ways of reconciling the requirements of their business with the demands of the society.“ (Sluyterman, 2012, p. 313)</li> </ul>
<b>Critical orientation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>„Between 1945 and the early 1960s, the concept of ‘social responsibility’ became popular among business leaders because it provided a language and loose set of ideas to help them improve their image and strengthen their ability to negotiate their relationship with the government.“ (Chapin, 2016, p. 1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Narrow, historical cognisant view: „CSR, we propose, is one form of business-society interactions reflecting a unique ideological framing.“ (Djelic &amp; Etchanchu, 2017, p. 641)</li> </ul>
<b>Politico-ethical orientation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>„CSR implies pursuit of social good by businesses (Bowen, 1953; Fredrick, 1960; Walton, 1967) and given that Bombay’s mills accommodated needs and roles of employees as human beings, parents, family members and citizens, this would have made them responsible.“ (Jammulamadaka, 2016, p. 451)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Broad view: „As a concept, it is the idea that the corporation exists in society and has rights and responsibilities as a member (or citizen) of that society.“ (Carroll, Lipartito, Post, &amp; Werhane, 2012, p. 7)</li> </ul>

Table 4. Meta-theoretical perspectives to CSR

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Economic perspective</b>	<b>Critical perspective</b>	<b>Politico-ethical perspective</b>
<b>Description of CSR</b>	CSR as an instrument for advancing the long-term financial value of the firm	CSR as embedded in the neoliberal discourse	CSR as both a means to acquire legitimacy and an end in itself
<b>Broader underlying assumptions</b>	Classical-liberal conception of business-society relationship: Strict separation between business and public spheres	E.g., Postcolonial theory Criticising the extension of business influence at the expense of civil society	E.g., Pragmatism or Habermasian philosophy Attempting to re-embed business activity into society
<b>Practices, behaviours and mechanisms</b>	CSR practices have both a voluntary and discretionary nature (but likely to be justified in fiscal terms via business case) External pressure to comply with demands: Seen as violating the principle of voluntarism	CSR practices related to practices of manipulation and exploitation CSR as a means to acquire power by corporations	CSR practices are directly concerned with the public welfare Business internalise the “right” behaviour or societies “softly” regulate corporate conduct through CSR expectations
<b>Representative examples in the CSR literature</b>	Carroll (1979) Jones (1995) Wood (1991) Porter & Kramer (2011) Aguinis & Glavas (2012)	Banerjee (2008) Hanlon & Fleming (2009) Shamir (2004)	Freeman et al. (2010) Scherer & Palazzo (2007)

Sources: Heikkurinen and Mäkinen, 2018; Palazzo and Scherer, 2007.

Table 5. A research program for historical CSR studies

	<b>Historic CSR and uses of history</b>	<b>Tackling larger issues</b>	<b>Rethinking the historiography of CSR thought</b>
<b>Description of research avenue</b>	Understanding how organisations take responsibility for the past	Understanding larger big-picture issues	Understanding the past of the discipline more broadly and deeply to create a larger repertoire of innovative thinking in the present and future
<b>Assumptions about history</b>	“History as interpretive context” is deciding, while assumptions of history as representational truth are useful	A wide range of combinations between “history as interpretive context” and “history as objective truth” may be useful	A rather poststructuralist variant of “history as interpretive context” is deciding: History is seen to be discursively produced
<b>Assumptions about CSR</b>	Contemporary (instrumental, critical, and politico-ethical) CSR understandings are deciding. Mostly following a firm-centric approach	Contemporary CSR in a more integrated variant is useful as an umbrella term to connect ideas and research findings	Theoretical work of CSR scholars is itself a form of literature
<b>Methodological options for empirical research</b>	<p><i>Variants with more interpretive assumptions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reflexive historical case study (Stutz &amp; Sachs, 2018)</li> <li>- Microhistory (Vaara &amp; Lamberg, 2016)</li> <li>- Ethnographic history (Rowlinson et al., 2014)</li> <li>- Narrative type of history (Maclean et al., 2016)</li> <li>- Explicating type of history (Maclean et al., 2016)</li> <li>- Constructionist history (Coraiola et al., 2015)</li> </ul> <p><i>Variants with more positivist assumptions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conceptualising type of history (Maclean et al., 2016)</li> <li>- Reconstructionist history (Coraiola et al., 2015)</li> <li>- Analytically structured history (Rowlinson et al., 2014)</li> <li>- Evaluating type of history (Maclean et al., 2016)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Foucauldian genealogy (Vaara &amp; Lamberg, 2016)</li> <li>- ANTi-History (Durepos &amp; Mills, 2012)</li> <li>- Deconstructionist history (Coraiola et al., 2015)</li> <li>- Narrative type of history (Maclean et al., 2016)</li> </ul>
<b>Representative research question</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do narratives of past wrongdoings reflect the various layers of specific contexts in time and space?</li> <li>- How is the legitimacy of a claim about the past constructed and enacted in specific contexts?</li> <li>- What are the ethical implications of “using history” strategically by managers?</li> <li>- What effects has a legacy of an (ir)responsible past for the relations to different stakeholders?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How can and should business firms relate to grand challenges (e.g., growing inequalities)?</li> <li>- What can or should be done about the grand challenges?</li> <li>- Which historico-institutional arrangements have spawned the most desirable, efficient and stable ways of organizing business conduct?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What are the taken-for-granted assumptions in conventional histories of CSR thoughts? How can they be problematised?</li> <li>- How does change in CSR discourse occur in conditions of larger transformations of epistemic systems?</li> <li>- What marginalised or forgotten discourses may help to think differently in contemporary CSR thinking?</li> </ul>