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Introduction

A way of thinking about corporate responsibility emphasizes the moral obligations of the corporation towards its stakeholders (Freeman and Liedtka, 1991). However, this view neglects that moral relations are reciprocal and that, if we want to understand in a more comprehensive way CSR, we must consider “the appropriate reciprocal duties that exist among corporate stakeholders” (Bowie, 1991). The literature on business ethics has only recently started to tackle this approach, stressing the necessity to make “business ethics a two-way conversation” (Goodstein and Wicks, 2007).

This edition of the Forum focuses on the corporate responsibility from the perspective of the complex interactions between business and its stakeholders within the context of the sustainability. Wheeler et al. (2003) presented a proposal to reconcile a stakeholder approach, CSR, and sustainability with the creation of value (economic, social and ecological) for the constituencies of the firm, not only economic value for the shareholders. As Wheeler et al. have stated, if sustainability is “an ideal toward which society and business can continually strive, the way we strive is creating value, i.e. creating outcomes that are consistent with the ideal of sustainability along social, environmental and economic dimensions”. Therefore, “a stakeholder approach (...) offers the best hope in effecting the pursuit of global as well as organizational sustainability”. The stakeholder view framework (Post et al., 2002) contributes to a comprehensive view on a firm’s wealth creation and dissemination process that enables a definition of a comprehensive corporate responsibility. This view “places the firm at the centre of a web of stakeholder relationships, and demonstrates that sustainable organizational wealth can be enhanced by a purposeful management of favourable relations between the corporation and its strategic stakeholders” (Sachs et al., 2005). Under this view, “the corporation is only legitimized in its existence if it creates wealth for and with all its strategic stakeholders”, that is “its potential beneficiaries and/or risk bearers” (Sachs et al., 2009). For this reason, the value creation is an interactive process that includes relevant stakeholders. Consequently, more formal processes of “shared governance” are now required to address social and environmental aims and challenges. This would involve invoking processes of stakeholder inclusion in order to construct clearer partnerships arrangements between government, business and civil society. Multi-stakeholder partnerships for sustainable development and for climate change have received particular attention from companies (Pinkse and Kolk, 2009). As Zadek (2001) has stated, corporate responsibility “will only be effective if and where it evolves to a point where business becomes active in promoting and institutionalizing new global governance frameworks that effectively secure civil market behaviour”. Thence, “civil corporations” will be those that “actively engage in promoting governance frameworks that enable, and if necessary enforce, the wider business community to address (...) the aspirations underpinnings sustainable development”, that is the corporations that “will drive markets in a more ethical directions”.

Aim of the Forum is to understand how the redefinition of the interaction between firms and stakeholders may enhance business excellence. World’s leading scholars will show results and key findings of their research, relating to different regions and countries, various topics – including climate change, poverty and child labour – and mechanism such as partnerships, codes of conduct and CSR/sustainability report.

The Forum is organized by the Research Centre Politeia in cooperation with the University of Milan and a Promoting Committee of several well-known Italian companies and organizations. Politeia is responsible for the academic organization and supervision of the Forum, while the Promoting Committee provides the sponsorship of the Forum and participate in the definition of the annual agenda.

The aim of the Politeia Forum is to organize a conference in which managers of national and international companies and experts in business ethics and corporate social responsibility from the

most prestigious international research centres will have the opportunity to discuss the emerging ethical issues in the global economic system. By this way, it aims to contribute to increasing awareness and knowledge among companies about the ethics and social responsibilities of economic organizations, and to contribute to filling the gap between ‘practitioners’ and ‘experts’.

Politeia is a non profit organization based in Milan and founded in 1983 with the purpose of promoting theoretical discussion on the relationship between ethics and public choices. Since 1985 Politeia publishes *Notizie di Politeia*, a quarterly journal (in Italian and English), where the Forum proceedings will be published. The proceedings of the previous editions of the Forum, edited by Emilio D’Orazio, are published respectively under the title “Business Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility in a Global Economy” (vol. 74, 2004), “New Perspectives on the Stakeholder View of the Firm and Global Corporate Citizenship” (vol. 82, 2006), and “Corporate Integrity, Ethical Leadership, Global Business Standards: The Scope and Limits of CSR” (vol. 85/86, 2007), “Restoring Responsibility. The Accountable Corporation” (vol. 89, 2008) and “Corporate and Stakeholder Responsibility. Theory and Practice” (vol. 93, 2009).