

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

WILEY

# Governing at a distance to change corporate social responsibility discourse: Navigating through institutions and actors

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Email: [mko@soton.ac.uk](mailto:mko@soton.ac.uk)**Abstract**

In this paper, we demonstrate what influences the evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) debates. Using the idea of 'governing at a distance' (Rose & Miller, 1992) from the Foucauldian governmentality perspective, we identify the mechanisms behind CSR's context-based evolution. Examining 72 academic texts on CSR from the 1940s to the 2000s, we find that spatial political contexts and power interests shape CSR. We argue that CSR discourse is linked to governing systems and was part of a post-WWII restructuring to support capitalism against communism in the global order. Our study reveals that academic journals and scholars introduced American CSR concepts to Turkish academia through strong ties to institutions like Harvard Business School and the Ford Foundation, influencing the emergence and change of CSR over time. Changes in CSR discourse are contextually embedded and politically laden with its emergence having a strong governmentality dimension for which academics (through their texts, academic acumen, and affiliated institutions) play a key role as intermediaries governing at a distance. While the critical perspective emphasizes the issues of coercion and contestations, our paper suggests the importance of cooperation and concerted efforts in shaping the global construction of CSR. We have demonstrated the nuanced interplay between the local and global governance of business and academic associations, challenging the perceived rigidity of their boundaries.

**KEYWORDS**

Americanization, change in CSR discourse, CSR, Foucauldian analysis, governing at a distance, governmentality, political forces

**Key points**

- Governing at a distance: Governing socio-economic life works through adopting indirect regulatory mechanisms acting at a distance and linking the conduct of individuals and organizations to political objectives.
- Corporate social responsibility: Conceptualized as a particular form of business–society relations, which is temporal and spatial.

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- Conceptual genealogy: An epistemological tool, which helps explore historical sites of meaning and the reconstruction of institutional settings, power structures, and meaning systems.

#### JEL CLASSIFICATION

M: Business Administration and Business Economics N-Economic history

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Ongoing debates about the origins and outcomes of corporate social responsibility (CSR) have triggered scholarly work. Even though such scholarship has primarily taken a voluntary, business-centric approach, there has been a recent trend toward engaging with broader societal questions (Wickert, 2021). Yet, discussion on the politics of CSR development, with a focus on spatial–temporal context, remains limited. Djelic and Etchanchu (2017) suggest that the current theorization of CSR emerged in the late 1970s when neoliberal globalization was already a legitimate discourse informing prevailing institutional and managerial practices. For example, interwar (MacLean et al., 2022) and Cold War (Marens, 2010) discussions were largely absent in the early CSR thinkers' writings. They are still limited in contemporary accounts of CSR. Having been mainly produced by American business school academics, the literature positions the Anglo-American context as a frame of reference. It renders other contexts and actors and their various actions largely invisible or amenable to established power relations (Banerjee, 2018). This critical approach aligns with the strategic appeal of this journal, which calls for a holistic viewpoint that challenges the reductionist portrayal of management as a linear construct (Caputo, 2023). Our paper draws on this critical stance and attempts to offer an interdisciplinary view merging insights from political, sociological and management domains. This provides a rounded understanding of CSR, increasingly becoming an important component of strategy formulation advocating ecological and social sustainable change (Kallmuenzer et al., 2023; Karmani et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2012). Contemporary scholarship predominantly offers us a partial perspective of CSR by omitting the web of relations that produced certain conceptions as legitimate. Instead, contextualizing CSR as a particular form of business–society relations allows for understanding alternatives produced in different times and places (Djelic & Etchanchu, 2017). Expanding on these critical insights, we suggest that challenging CSR as an ahistorical, singular, and voluntary construct would be helpful in at least two ways. First, it would help to unpack contested (Marens, 2013), diverse (Risi et al., 2023), theoretical and practical conceptions of CSR. Second, it reveals the identity and power of diverse CSR actors, institutions, and their boundaries as part of concerted collaborations and contestations (Banarjee, 2018), forming a diverse body of stakeholder engagement (Moon & Parc, 2019; Zhang et al., 2021).

Drawing on a Foucauldian perspective we acknowledge knowledge's perspectival qualities and anchor historicity within a context-sensitive framework. We focus on the conceptual genealogy of CSR in Turkey by highlighting the intimate connection between socio-economic & political developments and knowledge production

processes. Conceptual genealogy as an epistemological tool helps explore historical sites of meaning and the reconstruction of institutional settings, power structures, and meaning systems in which concepts and practices of CSR originate and lead to change over time (Djelic & Bothello, 2013).

Borrowing from Rose and Miller (1992), we apply “governing at a distance” derived from the Foucauldian analytics of governmentality. Governing economic life works through adopting indirect regulatory mechanisms acting at a distance and linking the conduct of individuals and organizations to political objectives (ibid). “Governing at a distance” draws attention to complex intellectual labor. This brings about the development of new forms of thoughts and novel structures, constructing networks through which individuals, organizations and political objectives come into alignment. Following this, we adopt the empirical insights by Djelic and Bothello (2013) on “Americanization” as an illustrative process highlighting the intellectual work of the actors and institutions involved in bringing contextualized regulatory mechanisms into effect. Examining the historical academic texts and institutions, we ask the following research question: What have been the contextual driving forces for the positioning of, and change in, CSR discourse in Turkey?

Drawing on Foucauldian inquiry, we analyzed 72 Turkish academic texts on social responsibility published from the 1940s to the millennium. Our key findings indicate that CSR discourse has a strong governmentality dimension as part of restructuring programs to support and propagate capitalism against communist systems in the emerging global order following WWII. We reveal that academic journals and academics have introduced the American CSR concept into Turkish academia. Those actors have strong links to American academic and civil society institutions, such as Harvard Business School and the Ford Foundation. Building on the notion of “governing at a distance” (Rose & Miller, 1992), we demonstrate the nature and power of intellectual labor in aligning the discursive and material practices to political objectives between the periphery and the center. By drawing on one exemplary context, we illuminate the global flows of knowledge and practice, pointing out the development of, and change in, CSR construct as a historically conditioned and multifaceted conceptual journey.

## 2 | THEORETICAL LENS: FOUCAULDIAN PERSPECTIVE

Foucault's emphasis on the relationship between knowledge and power offers us an analytical space for interpreting CSR knowledge production, diffusion and change in a particular context. Foucault's

(2003) notion of governmentality elevates the idea that government is intrinsically contingent upon ways of knowing and knowledge. A careful exploration of the specificities of context (as defined by time and space) leads to certain CSR discourses and practices. Foucault's governmentality offers insights into the emergence of new relationships between governments, corporations, and other organizations (such as universities), and therefore understanding the instrumentality of the change in CSR.

Through governmentality, CSR scholars can attend to the language that authorities use in its broadest sense to imagine, frame, control, and perpetuate the objects and processes they aspire to govern (Barratt, 2008). The Foucauldian genealogical analysis offers an in-depth and discursive analysis of forces' connections, encounters, and interplays (Foucault, 1991). In that context, it defines exclusion and inclusion processes that bring about knowledge and practices generated through institutions and dominant actors forming a particular understanding of CSR. Thus, we use governmentality as embodied in various deliberate efforts to help facilitate and adopt specific mechanisms and rules that will shape the decisions of CSR actors with programmatic aspirations (Miller & Rose, 1990). In this paper, the role of governmentality is to address how CSR texts were positioned historically and used instrumentally to affect change. The empirical context of the study, Turkey, lends itself nicely to applying the governmentality framework. Connecting this conceptualization to the mechanisms responsible for the contextual change and positioning of CSR is powerful, particularly given the dynamics of the Turkish context: a spatial and temporal landscape, which is geopolitically situated between two systems of thought: capitalism and communism as well as between East and West.

The notion of "governing at a distance" has a lot to do with alliances formed. How people, organizations, and other entities typically scattered through time and space with non-overlapping official boundaries come together to form a loose, mobile but approximate alignment is its focus. Language plays a leading role in forming these loose networks and enables this process through adopting shared language vocabularies and theories by distinctively independent actors e.g., academics, non-governmental organizations, employees, and managers. The language of expertise is important in this process (Miller & Rose, 1990). First, expertise represents a set of norms and values of disinterested truth for each party. Second, it also promises ways to achieve the desired results by appealing to the ambitions and objectives of most actors and those who seek expert guidance in their daily conduct. Thus, CSR scholarship also offers the *language of expertise* to help align and self-regulate the conduct and actions of economic and social actors at a distance. Choosing academia as a locus of investigation demonstrates the importance of intellectual labor in preparing the CSR that is amenable to the notion of government.

### 3 | METHODOLOGY

Foucault's work is interdisciplinary. His legacy is to be attentive to reflexive applications of methodologies. We conducted a series of

analyses of texts, which were published by national and international authors, drawing on these insights that research texts actively produce social reality. Studying discourses as study objects in academic texts is more significant given that academics stand as ultimate knowers in society and serve as public intellectuals (Elaeson & Kalleberg, 2008), as is the case with Turkish academics (Çelebi, 2008). The empirical material comprises research articles published in Turkish academic journals on the social responsibility of business between 1941 and 2000. We used two data sources for this study. *First*, we researched the database of the National Library in Turkey for any publication on CSR. We identified the keywords such as social responsibility, ethics, purpose of the firm, responsibility of the businessperson, impact, and extensions of the term "social." We identified related articles in a variety of journals including also the practitioner journals. *Second*, assuming that there may be some deficiencies in the database of the National Library, 11 major management journals were screened for CSR articles since their establishment up to 2000. Finally, our empirical material included 72 articles published in nine journals (see Table 1). Two criteria were considered in selecting the journals. First, we selected the oldest and major academic journals on business and economics to be able to detect early work on CSR in Turkey. Second, we also paid attention to having an inclusive sample of the significant publications on management covering the entire period. These journals are covered during the whole period of their existence. Each journal was reviewed by two researchers, who identified the articles regarding CSR by reading the abstracts of all the publications in those journals. Finally, we collected information about each author and the founder editors through

**TABLE 1** Overview of selected publications.

Journal	Number of publications	%
Amme İdaresi Dergisi (Public Administration Review)	9	13
AÜ Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi (AU Political Science Faculty Journal)	1	1
EAÜ İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi (EAU Economics and Administrative Sciences Faculty Journal)	5	7
İÜ İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası (I.U. Economics Faculty Review)	12	17
İÜ İşletme Fakültesi Dergisi (I.U. Business Administration Faculty Journal)	3	4
İstanbul Üniversitesi İşletme Fakültesi İşletme İktisadi Enstitüsü Yönetim Dergisi (IU Business Administration Faculty, Institute of Business Economics Journal)	33	46
Sevk ve İdare Dergisi (Management Journal)	6	8
Türkiye İktisat Mecmuası (Economics Journal of Turkey)	2	3
IU İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi (I.U. Faculty of Theology Journal)	1	1
Total	72	100

archival, web sources and sometimes through their resumes and professional life histories.

In alignment with the Foucauldian (Foucault, 1972) analysis, we read the texts with particular attention to the context(s) in their production, use and interpretation, avoiding reification of the contexts (Fairclough, 2005). We constantly remained mindful of shifting the focus between macro-level notions like power and domination with a micro-level analysis of texts (Van Dijk, 2001). The notion of context manifests itself as space, time, practice, and change (Leitch & Palmer, 2010). The layers of context as space and time are important in this paper. “Context as space” refers to the location or physical setup in which the text comes about, namely *institutional, organizational, and national*.

Adopting a multi-spatial lens, we used different spatial dimensions. First, we analyzed the introductions of the academic articles to identify the patterns of theoretical and practical motivations. Then, we identified the authors, editors, funders, and organizers of academic articles, journals, and events, tracing their movements in space and time, and paying attention to the “discourse community,” which refers to who sets the rules and navigates the conversations toward public goals (Swales, 1990). In so doing, we highlighted the institutional support provided to establish foundations of CSR discourse and agenda in Turkey. For context as time, the authors in the reviewed literature refer to historical contexts and intertextuality linkages between texts. We used the temporal context primarily to structure our analysis.

#### 4 | CONTEXT AS SPACE AND TIME: AMERICANIZATION AS PROGRAMMATIC FOUNDATIONS OF CSR

An in-depth understanding of context blending space and time, processes, and shortcomings of the unique form of American capitalism and how this manifested itself in such a trend of Americanization has been brought to the fore of debates in several disciplines such as economic sociology, history, management studies (Djelic, 1998). Among the critical institutional actors and agentic forces was the technical assistance program that emerged alongside the Marshall Plan as part of an overall aid program, which aimed to restructure European economies and different countries subject to communist threat from the 1950s to the 1970s (Üsdiken, 2010). In that sense, the influence of American capitalism was not confined to the economy; it also shaped business education in many countries (Djelic & Amdam, 2007), including Turkey. Turkey like the rest of Europe was one of the countries that was highly influenced by Americanization. *As an extension of the post-war politics of the United States, which aimed to strengthen the “capitalist” frontline against “communist” Russia, the curricula of universities and the domain of management have been restructured.* This makes Turkey one of the illustrative contexts for governmentality.

The United States acted as a supplier of models in business education (Locke, 1989). Business education was revised to support free-market capitalism in its competition with Soviet Communism. Young expert teams worldwide were trained in American institutions with a

specific focus on business education or management consulting. On their return, they became professors in the newly founded business schools and departments in universities in their home countries (Üsdiken & Cetin, 2001; Yamak, 2007). With the increasing importance of private actors in the late 1950s and 1960s, private American foundations such as the Ford Foundation promoted and sponsored business education in Europe. In collaboration with the European Productivity Agency (EPA), they played an instrumental role in setting up business education and research institutions, such as INSEAD, which offered the first MBA programs in Europe (Üsdiken & Cetin, 2001).

The idea of Americanization as a process enables us to assert that the United States has been a critical disseminator of institutional, normative, and organizational models since WWII (Djelic & Amdam, 2007; Kipping & Üsdiken, 2009). In parallel with the developments in Europe, American professors served different positions in Turkish universities within the framework of the aid programs. Turkish faculty members (or those aiming to become such) were offered graduate training opportunities abroad (Kipping et al., 2004). A proliferation of institutions learning the American way of management occurred during the same period. The establishment of the Turkish and Middle Eastern Institute of Public Administration (Amme İdaresi—affiliated to Ankara University) in 1952 was followed by the foundation of the Inter-ministerial Productivity Centre (later National Productivity Centre-Sevk ve İdare) and the Institute of Business Economics (İsletme İktisadi Enstitüsü—affiliated to Istanbul University) in 1954. While the latter benefited from the Ford Foundation's financial support and Harvard Business School consultancy, the Turkish and Middle Eastern Institute of Public Administration received technical aid from the United Nations (Üsdiken & Cetin, 2001). Two higher education institutions were established in the second half of the 1950s—the Middle East Technical University (1957) and the School of Business Administration and Economics within Robert College (1958). The collaboration between American institutions and Turkish higher education increased in the following years. Furthermore, the Turkish Management Association, which received USD 350,000 in funding from the Ford Foundation and the Agency for International Development (AID), was established in 1962 to provide a range of extension programs and consulting services to small- and medium-sized enterprises (Ford Foundation, 1965). In this paper, we are investigating the transfer of CSR discourse as an extension of political discourse and initiatives.

CSR discourse seems to be developed to enhance the capitalist system. Dean David of Harvard Business School was among the first promoters of extended notions of CSR. He launched a call to businesspeople in 1946 to use CSR to align business interests with the protection of capitalism against communism (Spector, 2008). As a member of the post-war new elite, David held significant positions in federal commissions, corporate boards, and the board of trustees of the Ford Foundation, which impacted the business school curriculum through its grants. The above-mentioned institutions, organizations, and journals were instrumental in reinforcing the American way of business and management including CSR in Turkey as demonstrated through our findings.

## 5 | FINDINGS: FOUCAULDIAN ANALYSIS OF THE PROGRAMMATIC FOUNDATIONS OF CSR IN TURKISH ACADEMIA

Drawing on Foucault's methodological principles, the findings presented here demonstrate the preliminary analysis derived from the content and form of the texts. We present our analytical dimensions in historical periods, including specific movements within these temporal and contextual frames. The authors of the analyzed articles spent efforts in establishing CSR territory by highlighting the relevance of the field for economic and societal development and increasing attention in academic and management fields. However, they spent little effort to critically frame their study against existing problematizing research. We found a patterned scholarly interest among specific topics and analyzed the type of papers and their theoretical orientation, as depicted in Tables 2 and 3.

Empirical studies were minimal (10%) throughout the development of the field. Instead, the majority (90%) provided conceptual discussions to construct a broad overview of the chosen topic, often not basing their studies on a specific theoretical field or discipline, as shown below.

Around 46% of the articles were not related to any theory. Management and organization theory was used in 23% and only 14% of the studies had an interdisciplinary theoretical scope including combinations of Management, Economics, Sociology, Political Science, Psychology, Social Policy, and Public Administration theories.

## 6 | CSR IN TURKISH ACADEMIA BEFORE THE 1970S

In Turkey, the first publications on the administration and operation of business firms appeared in 1935 with solid German influence

(Üsdiken & Cetin, 2001). Within 26 years of the first focused article, the authors have expanded efforts to explain business and society relations by contextualizing emerging capitalist economic context within the local economic order. The editor and author of the *Istanbul Faculty of Economics Journal*, and later the Dean of the Faculty of Economics, Ülgener, worked with German refugee economists in his early career (Ertüzün, 1987) and was a visiting scholar at Harvard University and the University of Munich (Sayar, 2008). Economic sociology has been the disciplinary field in which discussions around the historical evolution of the capitalist system and its institutional, religious, and cultural roots were discussed beyond the economic laws and regulations. According to Ülgener (1950), the *homo economicus*—which entails the rational and individual connotations around individual creativity, innovation, and free-enterprise ideology—is incompatible with the local economic dispositions in the Ottoman economic life, underpinned by the values of tradition, obedience, and the principles of Islamic Sufism.

Similarly, German sociologist and economist Alexander Rüstow (1945) offers a contextualized analysis of the concept of the businessman, drawing on historical and religious analyses of emergent capital accumulation processes in Europe. The text positions business conduct as a duty and suggests that countries that do not come from the same Christian history can transform these spaces in their way with references to the Turkish context. The publication of Rüstow's article is no coincidence. The German influence is evident in the economic climate of the era. This effect continued with the influence of academics, who escaped from Germany during Hitler's administration in the 1930s and settled in Turkey, starting with the German university professors invited from Germany to alleviate tutor shortage in Istanbul University and different universities in the early phases of Ottoman's modernization project (Üsdiken et al., 2004).

In the 1950s, two articles were published in the *Journal of Turkish Economy*, the publication organ of the Istanbul Merchant Association. In these papers, the author strives to elevate the slanted image of a businessman by giving examples from abroad, particularly from America, and combining them with the discourse of national economic development, referring to the Turkish Republic's founder, Atatürk. The emerging Turkish capitalists were chosen as role models and as evidence of the need for change in the discursive and historical construction of the businesspeople.

The first article focusing on CSR titled *Is the only aim of the manager profit?* by Atilla Gönenli was published in 1967 in the *Management Journal*. The *Management Journal* was a publication of the Turkish Management Association (Sevk ve İdare Derneği) founded in 1962 through joint efforts of Mobil Oil's top executive Robert Kerwin and Turkish businesspeople (Örnek, 2013). Kerwin also became the American Cultural Attaché and assumed a consultant position at the Ford Foundation (Sevk ve İdare Dergisi, 1971). The author, Gönenli, also benefited from the Ford Foundation's contributions to training teaching staff for the Institute in the United States. Gönenli calls for the newly emerging capitalist class to be socially responsible and actively help develop the nation. The author refers to foreign capital as lacking patriotic ideals and to the petty bourgeoisie as in need of capital. The new subject position—Turkish businessmen—emerges

**TABLE 2** Major topics.

Major topics	Number of papers	Percentage
Social responsibility of business—management/managers	29	40
Social auditing/accounting/reporting/unit	6	8
Ethics	11	17
Environmental issues	15	21
Workforce and organization issues	17	24
Workers' participation in management and decision making	12	17
Organizational groups/forms	5	7
Total	72	100

**TABLE 3** Type of study.

Type of study	Number of publications	Percentage
Conceptual	65	90
Empirical descriptive/exploratory	7	10
Total	72	100

around paternalistic, gendered, and nationalistic discourses portraying the businessman as a provider and a leader of the nation, just as a man is (traditionally) the breadwinner of the family. The notion of a businessman well-founded in the discursive field of the 1940s and 1950s led to newly emerging subject positions of Turkish businessmen as industrialists. This came out in the only article concerned with the social responsibility of business published in the late 1960s.

## 7 | CSR IN ACADEMIA IN THE 1970S

The 1970s are remarkable since the society–business relationship attracted the most outstanding scholarly attention. Out of all 72 CSR articles, 56% (40) appeared in the 1970s in the following outlets: a majority (82%) in the journal entitled *Istanbul University Business Administration Faculty Institute of Business Economics Journal (IUBAFI-BEJ)*, 13% in the *Management and Administration Journal (MAJ)*, and the rest in the journals of the Istanbul University Faculty of Business (IUFB) and Istanbul University Faculty of Economics (IUFÉ). The *IUBAFI-BEJ*, which was promoting the topic more than any other journal, was the publication of the Institute of Business Economics (İsletme İktisadi Enstitüsü, 2023). It was founded with the initiatives of two prominent Turkish businessmen supported by Harvard University academically and by the Ford Foundation financially. Out of 40 studies published in this outlet, 12 were translations from English and were primarily produced by U.S.-based authors. The diffusion of the ideas was slow since only 30% of the studies appeared in different outlets more than a decade after introducing the American CSR concept. These studies focused primarily on the responsibilities of businessmen in the developing country context. Moreover, the publications covered topics like the democratization of workforce participation, environmental issues, social costs, and social responsibilities which drew on the debates in the United States (Yamak, 2007).

The 1970s were busy times for extending institutional ties and alliances with governing bodies at the global level around a particular agenda of socially responsible business. Following the establishment of the Business and Economics Institute at Istanbul University in the mid-1950s as the primary carrier of modern management education and practice, Turkey further strengthened its links with the United States following the programmatic reforms operated by the U.S. government. Important academic outlets and activities were established in collaboration with the Turkish academics and representatives of the American management non-government organizations (NGOs). This shows strong intertextuality in Foucauldian analysis so that historical context is reflected in the development of CSR discourse through alliances with diverse institutions such as corporations, NGOs, and universities, thereby reinforcing a certain degree of power hierarchies.

For instance, at the first of these conferences hosted by the Turkish Management and Administration Association in Istanbul on *The Social Responsibilities of Managers and Administrators in Developing Countries*, business consultant, Saul Silverstein, was represented as an

apostle of modern business knowledge and a true friend of Turkey (Sevk ve İdare Dergisi, 1971). He made frequent visits to Turkey in his capacity of being responsible for a foreign operations administration and served several terms as a Council Secretary of the Council for International Progress in Management spending weeks in Turkey transferring knowledge on management principles, production, marketing, and human relations. He gave seminars to businesspeople emphasizing morality and responsibility in modern management philosophy and the role of industrialists and managers, rather than politicians, as the prominent actors in determining the country's future.

As part of the historical context, these seminars and management knowledge diffusion activities were part and parcel of the programmatic agenda proposed by American capitalist Mr Rockefeller—a business counterpart of the Peace Corp to be established and privately financed to help companies in developing countries. After introducing the program to the management and administration audience at the 13th Management Congress in New York, the American Senate approved the program when foreign aid was under pressure in Congress. Besides, the diffusion of programmatic efforts also runs through management consultants such as former members of the International Management Institute, Urwick Orr and Partners (Brech et al., 2010). They are involved in large-scale restructuring tasks of modernizing the Turkish public companies run by the state (Yalçınkaya, 2020).

The article entitled *Modern trends and social responsibilities of business life*, published in 1972, was written by Kemal Tosun. We see a transition to a new discursive period where the responsibilities involve diverse stakeholders without jeopardizing the leadership role attributed to Turkish businessmen.

The social responsibility of business life is a concept that goes beyond the classical and narrow purpose of profit. It expresses the elevation of the business to the level of an institution (institution) that serves all concerned in a balanced way ... “Great society is the society in which businessmen understand the enormity of their role (Tosun, 1972, p. 35).

The article by Tosun (1972) mentioned above was published in the first issue of the *Istanbul University Business Administration Faculty Journal (IUBAFJ)*. Tosun was a professor at the Business Administration Faculty of Istanbul University, and the Director of the Institute of Business Economics, which was closely associated with the Ford Foundation and Harvard Business School. He undertook postgraduate studies in business and public administration at the London School of Economics (LSE) (1952–1953) in England and the University of Minnesota (1953–1954) in the United States. After carrying out scientific studies at Harvard University in the United States (1961–1962), he was promoted to professor in the same chair he returned to in 1964 (Vehbi Koc Vakfı Ansiklopedisi, 2022). He had an anchoring role in the diffusion of American-type CSR in Turkey, setting the tone and boundaries of acceptable scholarly conversation around the content,

form, and ideas of origin in the 1970s and onwards, from the Foucauldian lens.

Contrary to the highly contextualized analysis of prior decades, in the 1970s, the studies report on an international perspective on environmental issues and the democratization of workforce and management with a particular emphasis on workers' participation. The labor question has been at the heart of CSR discussions in Turkey. Early and lingering German influence may partly help explain the authors' consistent focus on industrial democracy as tackled within a capitalist system, reflecting also the national spaces characterized by labor movements in Turkey during the 1970s.

A few authors call for companies to implement CSR philosophy and measures, such as appointing experts to represent society or the environment on the board. They also started to call for academic research to guide companies in prescribing (1) the sensible limits of social responsibility according to their area/sector of operation and (2) balance economic and social goals. In articles published in this era, authors touched upon the national context directly or indirectly and justified and positioned CSR adoption within the ideological pillars of the current economic system as a guarantor of democracy.

The academic discourse reflects the broader discourse framing the Turkish business field as a significant factor in reproducing the national development discourse of the Modern Turkish republic. The discourse is twofold: economic development and attaining the levels of modern civilization (Heper, 1985). Embracing the nationalistic agenda, the Turkish entrepreneurs have positioned themselves as patriotic industrialists receiving resources from the state and turning those investments to productive ends by pronouncing state support at any opportunity.

Most authors drew on a bleak portrait of communist regimes without denouncing the state's power. They saw such systems as threatening the foundations of democracy and freedom in contrast to benevolent capitalism secured through the notion of social responsibility of businesses and managers toward societal actors and pressing socio-economic problems. In texts where Turkey as a national context is a focus, the prevailing tone of the authors was to call for orchestrated action centered around social responsibility from the state and business corporations, as reflected in the historical context dimension related to the Cold War era, as emphasized by Spector (2008).

In socialist systems where the political institutions assume the primary responsibility for protecting society and its resources and setting up organizational bodies, the corporations and their management are the principal actors in capitalist societies. In countries with a combined economic structure like Turkey, both state and management should assume shared responsibility. (Özcan, 1973, p. 23)

The concept of social responsibility takes on a role that will shape the future of the order and the country's progress, attributing business a leadership role. The intertextuality dimension of Foucauldian analysis is evident here in the sense that the discursive power of the

texts (articles) is strengthened by the non-discursive formations such as role of institutions, professions, and disciplines (Alfaro, 1996).

## 8 | CSR IN ACADEMIA AFTER THE 1970S

The number and diversity of studies on social responsibility significantly decreased after the 1970s. In total, 25 papers were published during this period; 10 were published in the 1980s and 15 in the 1990s. In contrast to the earlier period where 95% of papers on CSR were published in two major journals, in this period, papers were published in a diverse range of outlets. It may be misleading to explain this fall as the political transformation due to the military coup and the adoption of neoliberal economic policies in Turkey. A similar trend is also observed in the United States, where changes in tax policies and poor economic conditions led to the loosening of CSR regulations (Acquier & Aggeri, 2007; Frederick, 1983; Yamak, 2007). Therefore, we suggest that the decrease may result from internal conditions and external trends, which function as forces that constrain the circulation of certain ideas (through texts) that embody all key components of discourse—i.e., author function, commentary, and discipline.

Five of 10 papers published in the 1980s focused on CSR. The rest provide macro perspectives on the workers' participation in management, industrial democracy, social democracy, and Islamic views on society, the economy, and business relations. This is a period in which CSR is detached from societal and ideological references and grand narratives. While some studies have drawn their examples from local or national contexts, contextual focus was limited to organizational units or samples. The trend remained the same in the 1990s. The diffusion of CSR discourse was slow.

## 9 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Our overarching research question has been: What have been the driving contextual forces for positioning CSR in Turkey leading change? Our findings highlight that CSR discourse is strongly imbued with the governmentality dimension and is part of the restructuring (and rebuilding) program following WWII to act as proponents of capitalism against communism. We offer the genealogical roots of CSR in a developing country and present the use of a governmentality lens in explaining the Americanization process. We demonstrate that CSR is contextually embedded and politically laden. Academics play a role in the creation and reinforcement of politically laden concepts, thus acting as intermediaries in governance at a distance.

We make multiple contributions in terms of contextual insights and implications for practice. Our paper shows the importance of not losing sight of context, mainly temporal context, in understanding the historical positioning of CSR. Our findings indicate that the positioning of texts was more focused on the local context before WWII. The emergence of CSR as a management topic in Turkish academic circles is a product of post-WWII-era organizations, which enjoyed financial and consultancy support from American institutions like Harvard

Business School and the Ford Foundation. The CSR notion, which was imported from the United States, was detached from the Turkish business context and was based on American patterns. The long-existing local traditions of CSR were neglected during the attempts to construct Americanized CSR. Therefore, the governmentality of CSR presented a duality in capturing the spatial-temporal context, through its institutional actors such as universities, publishers, and business associations. Hence, the links between legitimized responsibilities of business and structural transformations within a national socio-political context are elevated, converging with extant works (e.g. Kandola et al., 2019; Marens, 2013). As suggested by Vallentin and Murillo (2012), government and surrounding discourses and practices serve the purposes of promoting a strategic understanding of CSR as a lever for economic growth while at the same time favoring liberal and indirect means of steering at the expense of regulatory measures. In this paper, we contribute to knowledge on CSR and strategic change by demonstrating how an extension of the political economy uses action at a distance.

While the critical perspective emphasizes the issues of coercion and contestations, our analysis suggests the importance of cooperation and concerted efforts in shaping the global construction of CSR. We show the critical role of expertise in governing at a distance by forming a specific form of social authority with claims to hold specialized truths and rare powers, as championed by certain academics and institutions. While, up to the 1970s, the scholars embraced interdisciplinary framing of problems inspired by economic sociology and social policy disciplines, after the 1970s, meta-theoretical proposals were replaced with the disciplinary frames of management and organization studies.

Institutional and financial dependency has affected the rules and rituals regarding who is allowed to speak, where, and how, demonstrating the procedural screening dimension of the Foucauldian approach. The reproduction of CSR discourse within the temporal context analyzed in this study reflects the academics' deliberate use of an authoritative tone in providing recommendations to the companies on how and why they should be socially responsible. Academics have cascaded the governmentality related to CSR in enterprises using their expertise as a vehicle to act at a distance, hence transferring their specialized truths to their practitioners. The practitioners are also actively involved in discussions of CSR on the academic side. The journals published papers or commentaries written by international industry experts mainly from the United States, and national representatives speaking on behalf of the Turkish corporations. Intertextuality is signified in our study through Foucauldian governmentality, as the interaction of different institutions gives rise to certain actors being enabled but at the same time regulated to disseminate textual meanings.

We acknowledge the critical insights questioning CSR's excessive focus on nation-state-centric narratives and the need to take a transnational and political CSR lens. However, we suggest that meeting global and national forces and interests is not a new phenomenon that should be limited to a particular focus and scope of transnational businesses. In that, we agree with Djelic and Etchanchu (2017) that the

current theorization of CSR in general and political CSR is limited in its temporal and spatial reach. The temporal focus is limited to the structuration of CSR as a field since the late 1970s, following the parallel trend of incorporating a neoliberal agenda and governance structure. This shadows how CSR as a particular form of business-society relationship is constructed and administered in different alternative ideological frames but also shows that the relations between politics and business have always been intimate whereby academia plays an intermediary role. Instead, the historical context reveals the inherently political nature of CSR from its inception. In this study, we have demonstrated the relationships between the local and global states of governance of business and academic associations. We suggest that the boundaries between those entities might not be as rigid as we seem to consider. We argue for further reflections on how and why specific models come to be reproduced and travel more extensively around the globe, with a focus on governmentality through an intersectionality lens exploring the relationships between texts, authors, institutions, organizations, and national spaces across time and place.

## 10 | IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE: THE WAY FORWARD

Our analysis shows such omission of reference to the local practitioner context in texts related to CSR. Relying on their remarkably high symbolic standing in Turkish society, the actors (academics) have spoken not on behalf of the management practitioners but to management practitioners, almost using a lecturing voice. They consistently defended the social responsibility of business as a positive and unavoidable choice for Turkish firms. They omitted all counterarguments, even those that are seminal works of well-cited authors, with an overemphasis on the social dimension while neglecting the economic dimension of CSR.

Drawing on this critique, we contribute to practice by arguing against blindly adopting a U.S.-orientated CSR approach, practice, and policy. Moving forward, we consider that the role of the academic scholar is to identify the multi-level challenges faced by organizations and recognize special circumstances embedded in the international, national, and regional contexts where they operate. Adopting such a broader scope will enable scholars to address the challenges by questioning the history and ideology behind CSR. This entails weeding out overarching descriptive dimensions of CSR, assessing the contextual circumstances critically, and understanding and questioning the governmentality of institutions, and actors. Equally, CSR leaders and practitioners could empower themselves by questioning the principles, historical elements, and particularities of context. Future practice should address the needs and requirements of a particular setting by drawing on the strength and capacity of institutions and actors in redefining the CSR agenda and identifying the shortcomings of fads and fashions of CSR. One step further is to develop tools and practices to implement these accordingly. Our findings displaying the impact of governmentality highlight the need for both academic scholars and practitioners to be reflexive in adopting any management



approach. This reflexivity implies both forward and retrospective critical thinking and acting conscientiously, which requires identifying the limitations and constraints of relevant institutions and actors. We encourage CSR leaders and practitioners to evaluate the functions and governmentality of their approaches and implementations. Future research needs to focus on the relevance and relativity of CSR subject matters to address organizational and managerial needs as conveyed through the material and non-material (symbolic) and discursive (such as texts) and non-material and non-discursive (no language involved) methods and forms of engagement.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors have declared no conflict of interest.

### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared.

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**How to cite this article:** Yeröz, H., Karatas-Ozkan, M., & Yamak, S. (2024). Governing at a distance to change corporate social responsibility discourse: Navigating through institutions and actors. *Strategic Change*, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jsc.2576>