

A CITIZEN-DRIVEN ALTERNATIVE TO CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract. *Despite the existence of a small number of companies genuinely committed to investing in sustainable products, the shallowness of the green claims of many others, which has often been revealed in recent years, is a considerable flaw of a classic CSR model that emphasizes the development of a corporate responsibility towards environment and society. This is the main reason why I argue for a shift in business ethics from a corporate- to a citizen-driven moral responsibility to build a sustainable future. Likewise, although governments are major players in any global shift towards a cleaner production, they cannot be taken as primary moral agents, due to electoral considerations that may discourage them from promoting a climate legislation which promises mostly long-term benefits, and makes “sacrifices” in the short- and middle-run. As an alternative, I advance a triadic model, which considers the environmentally minded citizens as the driving force of a green shift. According to this model, citizens would pressure governments to enforce climate regulations and to monitor the green claims of companies and business groups, by sanctioning them electorally if they fail to do so. Governments, in turn, would be mandated to promote new enforceable climate regulations and to provide mandatory guidelines to companies as to how to implement new cleaner technologies. Yet, the technological innovations themselves, and the investment in renewable energy should belong to the private sector, which has both the expertise and the capability to create and implement new designs and technologies for their own products.*

Keywords: *green citizenship; sustainability; enforcement of climate regulations; responsibility towards the environment; interaction between civil society, the public, and the private sector.*

Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has often been used by many companies as a rationalization for building a “green image” which was instrumental in boosting their sales and obtaining tax rewards. Basically, many companies have deliberately used the “green” issue for maximizing their profits, according to a traditional neoliberal logic of avoiding as much genuine societal responsibility as possible, while jumping on the bandwagon by appearing to be environmentally friendly. The most egregious corporate duplicity of the kind has led to the *greenwashing* practices of many companies. Only last year, we learned about the large-scale strategy of emission cheating of the notorious “environmentally friendly” German carmaker Volkswagen, which, as I have argued elsewhere (Palade, 2016), should trigger a new approach in business ethics and a revision of the ideal of corporate responsibility towards “people and planet”, beside the creation of shareholder value. The hope shared by business