

Framing the 'hardening' of multinational corporations' responsibility: the case of the Swiss responsible business initiative

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Abstract:

This study advances research on how institutions are constructed and changed as actors compete over social meanings. While prior research has focused on the processes of meaning construction and on actors' contestations over alternative meanings of a given issue, one important shortcoming is the lack of sufficient attention to social interaction processes as the key mechanism and source of meaning creation and change. Through a longitudinal and inductive case study of the Swiss Responsible Business Initiative (SRBI), this article intends to illuminate the processes and mechanisms through which stakeholders socially construct a new meaning of business' responsibility regarding human rights. Specifically, we ask the following question: How and why does actors' framing of business' 'responsibility' change over time? The findings point to three critical contributions. First, the expansion of the understanding of the contextual, political, and on-going social and symbolic interactions involved in the creation of meaning. Second, the uncovering of the dynamics of framing contests and their settlement, as well as the impact of framing contests on institutions. Finally, the introduction of 'hard' regulation as an overlooked governance mechanism and theorize the role of cultural-cognitive factors as determinants.

Presenter:

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Thesis topic: " *The 'hardening' of Multinational Companies' responsibility* "

