

Keep the Balance. Report on the Third “Transatlantic Doctoral Academy on Corporate Responsibility”

THEA RENNER UND MAIKE WIEHMEIER

Tagungsbericht

From February 8th to February 13th, 2010, the third Transatlantic Doctoral Academy on Corporate Responsibility (TADA) took place in Montreal and Toronto, Canada. Twice a year, the conference organized by Prof. Thomas Beschorner (Universities of Oldenburg and Montréal) and supported by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) offers a forum for academic exchange to 18 PhD-Students from Germany and Canada, who are preparing their doctoral thesis on issues related to Business Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility.

The students come from diverse academic fields such as management, law, sociology, culture studies, history and psychology. Most of them had already presented their work at the previous TADA sessions and gave updates on its state of art. The projects revealed different perspectives on CSR. From an institutional point of view, private standards as ISO 26000, SA 8000 and industry-related norms were discussed. Presentations about respectful leadership, self-organization and internal promoters of normative issues highlighted the company perspective. Sabine Mirkovic (European University Viadrina, Frankfurt/ Oder), for instance, focused on the changing role of business, co-providing public goods. From a third perspective, Imke Schmidt (Essen University) reflected the responsibility of consumers for sustainable development, exemplifying the Carbon Footprint initiative.

Important CSR issues in Canada are mining companies' impacts on society and environment. Claire Woodside (Carleton University Ottawa), for example, analyzed the evolution of conflicts between local communities and mining companies. Gerardo J. Munarriz (University of British Columbia) stated the necessity of internationally binding norms and mechanisms to hold multinational companies accountable for human rights violations. This was illustrated by the clashes between mining companies and indigenous communities in the Peruvian Amazon region.

On the second day, the TADA-participants worked on a Case Study on a German company with Christian background facing problems due to internal power struggles and a lack of consistent values. Five groups identified the causes of the crisis and presented solutions, based on their theoretical backgrounds. The recommendations included the adoption of a Code of Conduct offering orientation for decision-making, a clear positioning regarding the Christian values and changes to the corporate and leadership structure in order to make them more transparent.

Luc Bres (HEC Montreal) organized a lunch discussion with members of the “Groupe de recherche interdisciplinaire en développement durable” (GRIDD-HEC) for the third day. Several statements from TADAists opened a debate on the relation-

ship between sustainability and CSR and on how these concepts can be communicated to students in management studies. Further, the voluntary nature of CSR was questioned, and the participants discussed if CSR activities necessarily lead to win-win situations or if trade-offs have to be made. Brazilian participants enriched the debate, arguing that the promotion of sustainability should not be reduced to governments and companies, but also relies on civil society mobilization.

The stay in Montreal concluded with an excursion to the Mont Royal, where participants exchanged their ideas during a “Walk and Talk” and went figure skating on the Lac des Castors – keeping the balance. The TADA continued with the joint three-day workshop “TADA meets CBERN” at York University, Toronto.

Further information about TADA are available in the internet:

<http://doctoral-academy.net>

TADA meets CBERN. International PhD Workshop on Politics and Human Rights at York University, Toronto

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On February 12th and 13th, 2010, a joint workshop on “Politics and Human Rights: Theoretical Perspectives in Business Ethics” took place at York University, Toronto. For the first time, members of the German-Canadian “Transatlantic Doctoral Academy on Corporate Responsibility” (TADA), chaired by Prof. Thomas Beschorner, met researchers from the “Canadian Business Ethics Research Network” (CBERN), headed by Prof. Wesley Cragg. CBERN was created in 2004 to promote knowledge sharing and partnerships between universities, and private as well as public institutions across Canada.

The workshop started with a “World Café” during which the 30 PhD-students and professors had the possibility to get to know each other and to link their personal and scientific interests, creating a topographical map. Four renowned experts in the field of Business Ethics had also been invited to present part of their research.

Prof. Andreas Scherer (University of Zurich, Switzerland) explained his theory of legitimacy. He called legitimacy a key concept in the CSR debate because it constitutes the main motivation for companies to engage in CSR. In his theory, Prof. Scherer distinguishes three legitimization strategies used by corporations in order to gain societal acceptance: strategic manipulation, isomorphic adaptation and moral reasoning. Given the fact that the instrumental nature of the first two strategies contrasts with the normativity of moral discourse, Prof. Scherer himself raised the question of how companies can apply these strategies simultaneously without acting contradictory.

Prof. Bryan Husted (Schulich School of Business, York University) held a conference on “Social Equity and the Firm: Conceptualization and Measurement”. Claiming for an externality approach of CSR, he stated that firms have to internalize their externalities (e. g. social costs) to avoid societal harm. Corporations influence within-group as well as between-groups equity by distributing wealth and income inside and outside the firm. Besides, CSR can help to enhance social equity as it increases transparency and trust.

Human Rights were in the center of Prof. Florian Wettstein (University of St. Thomas, USA) and Prof. Wesley Cragg’s presentations. Analyzing the public responsibilities of private actors, Prof. Wettstein demanded a shift from indirect to direct human rights obligations of companies. According to him, an ascription of responsibility beyond causality and individual involvement is needed. This can be reached through a capability approach, in which companies address human rights issues according to their core competences. Prof. Cragg concluded the workshop with a talk on the compatibility of sustainability and human rights frameworks.

Outside the workshop, the participants had the occasion to go out for dinner and discover the city and nightlife of Toronto together. Both CBERN and TADA members expressed their willingness to establish a closer collaboration in the future to continue exchanging their ideas on Business Ethics.

Further information about TADA and CBERN are available here: <http://doctoral-academy.net> and <http://www.cbern.ca>