

Varieties of Capitalism and Small Business CSR: A Comparative Overview

S. Looser, W. Wehrmeyer

Abstract—Given the limited research on Small and Medium-sized Enterprises' (SMEs) contribution to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and even scarcer research on Swiss SMEs, this paper helps to fill these gaps by enabling the identification of supra-national SME parameters. Thus, the paper investigates the current state of SME practices in Switzerland and across 15 other countries. Combining the degree to which SMEs demonstrate an explicit (or business case) approach or see CSR as an implicit moral activity with the assessment of their attributes for “variety of capitalism” defines the framework of this comparative analysis. To outline Swiss small business CSR patterns in particular, 40 SME owner-managers were interviewed. A secondary data analysis of studies from different countries laid groundwork for this comparative overview of small business CSR. The paper identifies Swiss small business CSR as driven by norms, values, and by the aspiration to contribute to society, thus, as an implicit part of the day-to-day business. Similar to most Central European, Mediterranean, Nordic, and Asian countries, explicit CSR is still very rare in Swiss SMEs. Astonishingly, also British and American SMEs follow this pattern in spite of their strong and distinctly liberal market economies. Though other findings show that nationality matters this research concludes that SME culture and an informal CSR agenda are strongly formative and superseding even forces of market economies, nationally cultural patterns, and language. Hence, classifications of countries by their market system, as found in the comparative capitalism literature, do not match the CSR practices in SMEs as they do not mirror the peculiarities of their business. This raises questions on the universality and generalisability of unmediated, explicit management concepts, especially in the context of small firms.

Keywords—CSR, comparative study, cultures of capitalism, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE process of globalisation and international trade reflects increased business complexity and demands for corporate citizenship with the aim of greater transparency [1]. Traditionally, governments were responsible for improvement of living conditions, but today, society's needs have stretched the capabilities of states [1]. Thus, it is concluded that the private sector as key creator of value and managerial resources is the principle growth engine and has a duty to contribute to equitable and sustainable economies [1]. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) recognises this role of business as an active partner in a world of shrinking resources and, thus, scarcity [1]. At the same time this raises a discussion on what role business in society plays.

Stéphanie Looser and Walter Wehrmeyer are with the University of Surrey, Centre for Environmental Strategy, (corresponding author phone: +44 44 492 35 86, +44 1483 68 9075; e-mail: s.looser@surrey.ac.uk, w.wehrmeyer@surrey.ac.uk).

Many studies [2], [3] point to Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) as a crucial actor within CSR with high engagement due to personal, trust based values [4] and a regional anchor [5]. Notably, the latter seems to effectively punish irresponsible practices [6].

Because such idiosyncrasies are reported from ample countries it should be assessed whether or not there is a CSR approach distinct for SMEs far beyond explicit and formal CSR systems, which supersedes national patterns. In particular, this research asks: Is there a global approach to CSR that can be found in SMEs from different cultural backgrounds and independent from their market economies, language regions, religion, and legal/political systems? To what extent do the identified CSR agendas allow categorisation according to explicit/implicit CSR?

Other cross-national studies mainly looked at Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) [7] or focus on differences in governmental policies fostering CSR [8] but seldom on the convergence of CSR in SMEs and their economic and cultural set-up. This research seeks to close this gap by enabling an understanding of how parameters, such as supra-national SME values and tradition rather than market economy or institutional frameworks influence small business CSR.

To investigate the SME-CSR nexus the paper is structured as follows: Section II sets out the theoretical research context and clarifies the concepts applied. The methodology is enlightened in Section III, followed by the presentation of the results in Section IV. A discussion and further research suggestions are presented in Section V.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. CSR: Concepts and Principles

The notion of CSR is not new in our society: The French philosopher Rousseau (2003) once defined the “social contract” between business and society as a “symbiosis” enabling social members to act independently in a civil society that shares the same will [9]. This resembles the “soul” of CSR. Over centuries the concept of CSR attracted a lot of attention – from those who found that CSR was irrelevant to business [10], to those who indeed see the relevance of CSR but think of it as a detrimental idea for business [11], to the large amount of authors who regard CSR an important business strategy [12], [2].

This study adopts the European Commission's (2011) definition of CSR as “the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society” [13]. Although CSR has been criticised for such multifaceted definitions [14] and the inherent ambiguity, culminating in the concept seen as “a jungle” [15],

this broad term suits the qualitative approach here.

Today, CSR is developing a “business case” closely linked to the neoclassical approaches of Milton Friedman (1962) often built on principal-agent relations [11], in which stakeholders seek validation through formalised management systems, contracts, certificates (e.g., ISO 14001), or in the legal system [16]. Extrinsic CSR is driven by the assumed correlation between corporate social activities and financial performance so as to maximise profit [17]. By contrast, CSR as “moral activity” is driven by norms and values, where moral legitimacy can only be gained through “moral reasoning” [18] and the “forceless force of the better argument” [19]. Here, neither the expectations of society nor of corporations are dominant [20].

However, CSR agendas are not only determined by company motives, more importantly, they are shaped by their country’s history, culture [21], and relative institutional effects. The next section enlightens this interaction.

B. CSR: Institutional Effects

References [21]-[23] especially looked at differences bound by cultural contexts. Accordingly, differences in CSR can be explained by “national business systems” determined by historically grown institutional frameworks [24]. Four key components of historically grown nationally institutional frameworks were identified: the political system, the financial system, the education and labour system, and the cultural system [24]. How these sub-systems are weighted and combined to a national framework evolves from “societal effects” [24]-[27] and “varieties of capitalism” [28]. The latter distinguishes “liberal market economies” and “coordinated market economies” [28].

The broad lens on market economies enables the understanding of institutional similarities and differences among industrialised economies since national, political economies can be compared by reference to the way by which firms adapt or, to be precise, develop relationships with several attributes (cp. Table I) [28]. The United States (US), United Kingdom (UK), Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland are liberal market economies. By contrast, Germany, Japan, Sweden, Austria are more coordinated based on partnerships of representative social and economic actors under the leadership of governments [28]. As a consequence, the two types have different distributions of capital, differing capacities for innovation, and tend to employ differently [21].

Liberal market economies coordinate their activities by markets, hierarchies, and competition on the basis of low costs and major product and technological innovations [29]. Coordinated market economies operate with non-market mechanisms, e.g., informal networks or corporatist bargaining [29]. Their competition is driven by state-of-the-art quality products and innovation in production processes aimed at maximising efficiency [28]. These two models are opponent poles of a spectrum, hence, nations are located alongside this continuum and even within the two discrete types there are significant variations. Above all, the theory of “varieties of capitalism” predicts that socioeconomic performance is in

general better if countries distinctly fit to one or the other type [29]. Countries like the Mediterranean ring or small countries that fall somewhere between these poles are seen as “hybrids” and, thus, should not perform very well [28]. This conclusion was challenged and adjusted especially for the case of small countries, like Denmark [29] or Switzerland [30], which represent a paradox for much of the capitalism literature.

TABLE I
VARIETIES OF CAPITALISM [28]

Attribute	Liberal market economy	Coordinated market economy
<i>Mechanism</i>	Competitive market arrangements	Non-market relations
<i>Equilibrium</i>	Demand/supply, hierarchical	Strategic interactions
<i>Inter-firm relations</i>	Competitive	Collaborative
<i>Mode of production</i>	Direct product competition	Niche products
<i>Legal system</i>	Complete and formal	Incomplete and informal
<i>Institutions' function</i>	Competitiveness, free movement of inputs	Monitoring, sanctioning of defectors
<i>Employment</i>	Full-time, general skill, short-term, fluid	Shorter hours, specific skills, long-term, immobile
<i>Wage bargain</i>	Firm level	Industry level
<i>Training and education</i>	Formal education	Apprenticeship system
<i>Unionisation rate</i>	Low	High
<i>Income distribution</i>	Unequal (high Gini index)	Equal (low Gini index)
<i>Innovation</i>	Radical	Incremental
<i>Comparative advantage</i>	High-tech and services	Manufacturing
<i>Policies</i>	Deregulation, anti-trust, tax-break	Encouraging information sharing and collaboration of firms

While Mediterranean countries have strongly embedded domestic markets, small countries tend to be economically more open than large countries [29]. Thus, relative to the size of their economies some small countries are highly engaged in international trade and commerce [29], [30]. Whereas large countries can set the rules of economy to best fit their needs small ones must be capable of flexible adjustment in order to respond to global challenges, e.g., shorter product life-cycles, rapidly changing production and information technologies, volatile financial markets, and increased international competition [29]. Other explanations may be found in the structure of their economies: 1) primarily determined by highly competitive small businesses, 2) well-coordinated in their informal, trust-based networks, saving therefore transactions costs, 3) often market leaders with specialised niche products and 4) at the same time competing on a global scale with liberal market rules [29].

According to institutional theories, nations with a particular type of organisation then also develop complementary institutions in other spheres (e.g., countries with liberal stock markets have less labour protection and vice versa) [23]. The activities or existence of trade unions and industry associations are defining while the levels of corporate taxes are crucial as well, as they foster or hinder fraud and corruption [29]. Differences in market economies lead to

different reactions on shocks. Companies are becoming socially balancing actors [22] by continuously adapting to such changing circumstances [32]-[34].

Notably, there are other theories on market economies [8]: some of them distinguish five types (market-based, Mediterranean, social-democratic, continental European, and Asian) [7]. Others concentrate only on Europe (i.e., Anglo-Saxon, Continental, Nordic, and Mediterranean) [29]. Though this paper adopts the “varieties of capitalism” theory distinguishing welfare systems, degree of state interventions, and market regulations, and most importantly the degree of inter-firm relations, it considers also studies that rest on rival approaches (primarily in Section III, B).

Overall, these systems predict homogenous CSR agendas within a market economy or, to be precise, within one country [35], [36]. Whether this applies for all organisations and companies is matter of analysis herein. The next section sheds light on defining factors (i.e., language and codification) and key drivers (i.e., motives and intent) of the predicted dichotomous system of implicit and explicit CSR while it relates them at the same time to market economies.

C. Implicit and Explicit CSR: A Dichotomy

Explicit CSR is determined by individualism, discretionary agency, incentivising responsive actors, liberalism, network governance, policies providing discretions, and isolated actors [23]. Such components are rooted in liberal market economies, where deregulation, privatisation, and highly competitive markets based on low cost/mass production create the need for explicitly formalise and communicate CSR (cp. Table II). This develops explicit approaches, which assume and articulate responsibility for some interests of society in response to stakeholder pressure (e.g., by consumers, civil societies) [21], [22]. This normally consists of voluntary programmes and strategies by corporations, which combine social with business value. Comparably to CSR as “business case” it assumes a win-win relationship between CSR and financial success [40]. It often involves partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organisations (e.g., the Marine Stewardship Council, or the ISO 14000/26000 series) so as to increase legitimacy by improving image, market share, or profit. Explicit CSR rests on corporate discretion rather than reflecting governmental authority, broader formal or informal institutions, or societal needs [23]. In a system of explicit CSR, CSR is formalised (i.e., codification), aimed at external recognition (language), has a strategic purpose and goal (i.e., intent), and a commercial pursuit (motive).

Implicit CSR, on the contrary, is determined by values, norms, and rules (i.e., codification) as result of formal and informal institutions filling wider interests and concerns of society (motives and intent) [22]. Such institutions evolve from non-market relations and collaborative networks fostered by policies and systems in coordinated market economies (cp. Table II). Often autochthonous institutions (i.e., firm ties with the political base, universal trust in state and authorities, or traditionally related to the Catholic Church) account for such market systems. Implicit CSR is seldom explicitly described

as CSR (i.e., language), rather it manifests in the form of codified norms, rules, and (unwritten) laws [23]. Set in the context of normative vs. strategic CSR, by having an implicit approach CSR is normative and seen as “moral activity”. In other words, here implications for the social responsibilities of business are implicit, whereas the societal norms, networks, organisations and rules might be explicit [21].

TABLE II
IMPLICIT VS. EXPLICIT CSR [21], [37]

Dimensions	Implicit CSR	Explicit CSR
<i>Intent</i>	Company has a role within wider formal and informal institutions for society's interests and concerns	Corporate activities to assume responsibility for the interest of society
<i>Codification</i>	Driven by values, norms, and rules, which results in embedded, internal and codified rules and CSR seen as a “moral activity”	Consists of corporate policies, programmes, strategies, and formalised instruments (certificates, standards, code of conducts), results in CSR as “business case”
<i>Motives</i>	Motivated by societal consensus and expectations on company contributions to society	Motivated by incentives and opportunities perceived from stakeholder expectations
<i>Language</i>	Do not communicate their policies, activities using CSR language	Advertising of CSR by an extensive use of CSR language

The primary differentiation criterion concerning CSR is communication (i.e., language): companies having an explicit CSR agenda issue CSR reports and use CSR in communicating their policies and practices to their stakeholders while those practicing implicit CSR would be more discreet and less demonstrative [21]. The latter normally find it difficult to formulate “the way we do our business” [30]. There might also be a discrepancy between what is communicated: explicit companies report formally about CSR and respective activities, while implicit companies discuss rather their values. A further differentiation criterion is “intent”: although implicit CSR can result in similar practices as an explicit agenda, the former is not conceived as a voluntary and deliberate corporate decision but rather as reaction to or reflection of society's demands. Explicit CSR, on the contrary, is the result of a strategic decision of companies [23]. The latter describes the organisation and is “espoused” whereas the former defines it and is “enacted”.

With increasing privatisation and liberalisation comes an increase in demand for more explicit CSR as the economic power is shifted to actors with global orientation and the need to legitimate their business by explicitly espoused CSR and away from traditional, autochthonous institutions [23]. This research concerns whether this concept also applies for SMEs deeply embedded within their communities and with a habitual, local orientation on their customers and communities.

Notably, as research here is inherently qualitative it is difficult to offer quantitative measures for such distinctions. As said, in regard to market economies this is rather a difference of emphasis and not a dichotomous distinction

between “liberal” and “coordinated” [21], [22]. For instance, companies from the US, which primarily evolve explicit CSR based on their liberal market economy, also show implicit elements, i.e., workers’ rights [22]. Comparably, European companies are not implicit in regard to absolutely every business operations since there is evidence of a rise in the number of issued sustainability/CSR reports [21]. Another aspect to take into account is that research on CSR is mainly done within, together with, and in relation to large companies and MNEs. Therefore, it cannot be concluded that the same effects play for small businesses. Some studies support, for instance, that explicit CSR in Europe is mainly a topic for large companies and SMEs rely on their longstanding informal networks rather than on explicit and formal policies [21], [30], [32], [35], [38]. The local church, the “Stammtisch”, membership in Chambers of Industry and Commerce [35], [36], and the traditions of the dual education system (i.e., apprenticeship system in Switzerland) are among others the driving forces within SMEs [21], [31].

Even what CSR means for SMEs is not clearly assessed and deserves further scrutiny in the next section.

D. The CSR-SME Relationship

A common assumption made about SMEs is that this sector is homogeneous and that the defining characteristic is size [39]. Actually, SMEs vary a lot by sector, technology, or size [41]. And although size only delineates and not fully characterises companies this study adopts a quantitative definition of SMEs issued by the Federal Statistical Office [43]: SMEs have less than 250 employees and their turnover does not exceed Euro 50 Mio (balance sheet total is less than Euro 43 Mio). Within this category, small firms have less than 50 employees and a turnover/balance sheet total that does not exceed Euro 10 Mio. Micro-firms have less than 10 employees and a turnover/balance sheet total of less than Euro 2 Mio.

The most common SME form – so as in the case of Switzerland [43] – is the owner- or family-managed company, where ownership and the centre of control are congruent [44]. Hence, this person (or circle of persons) has the legitimacy to decide upon company resources, for e.g., CSR related programmes and this allows some freedom and autonomy in decision making [45]. Often SMEs have strong interrelations with the communities in their village or small town and their leaders are more seen as “*Unternehmer*” than as managers, personally involved due to the family business or personal interest in the success of the traditional company [44]. They are paying lot of attention to interpersonal relationships [45].

Notably, such idiosyncratic business patterns of non-market relations, strategically collaborative interactions, informal information gathering and sharing, even the monitoring and sanctioning of defectors, resemble a coordinated market economy (as described in Table I).

Surely, the greater degree of autonomy enjoyed within SME management, enhanced flexibility and capacity to react due to limited size and the multi-functionality of SMEs’ employees is noteworthy [45]. SMEs are closer related to the community, which, coupled with negligible impacts on markets, has

created terms like “silent CSR” [65], “sunken CSR” [42], or “unconventional CSR” [49]. In other words, small firms’ CSR agendas are often described as non-formalised, non-systematic, and unstructured. By contrast, contributions of MNEs are seen as calculated, planned, systematic, quantifiable, and measurable [50] and, above all, explicit.

To summarise, there are a lot of peculiarities in SMEs’ business, on the one hand regarding opportunities and threats due to CSR regulations or resource-related issues, on the other hand in regard to values, family background, and the huge disparity among SMEs suggesting that there is no “typical SME” [68] while “a consolidated and generally accepted model for the CSR-SME relationship” [45] is still missing.

As outlined, research on this interplay is still rare, elsewhere and in Switzerland, thus, the next section looks at the impact SMEs may have, especially in Swiss CSR.

E. CSR in Switzerland

Switzerland, officially known as the Swiss Confederation, has a stable, prosperous economy based on high-tech products and services. Its wealth is mainly borne by the economic backbone of SMEs [51]. Indeed, the majority (99.8%) of all companies are SMEs, which employ about 70% of Swiss labour, contribute 20% of export value, and 60% of Swiss GDP [43]. Although Switzerland is home to several large multinational corporations (e.g., Nestlé, Novartis, ABB), its predominant economic sector is manufacturing largely of health and pharmaceutical products, specialist chemicals, and scientific and precision instruments [52]. These goods are mainly produced by Swiss SMEs often highly specialised niche actors and, although not widely known, in many cases world or at least Swiss market leaders [51].

Hence, Switzerland is regarded as a hybrid economy and, notably, as the land of the “hidden champions”, on the one hand in an economic sense related to its highly specialized and quality-oriented SMEs, however also with respect to CSR, as for instance shown in the Swiss Corporate Sustainability Report [53] or other studies, e.g., [75], [49]. Switzerland has a long tradition of people and stakeholders sharing the viewpoint of CSR as “moral activity” [49], [53], and as “implicit part of the day-to-day business” [23]. Responsible values are widespread, anchored in traditional businesses with an uninterrupted mode of family capitalism and “Mittelstand”/small business culture [79] while CSR activities are in most cases not openly communicated [53]. This might be related to the cultural context of decency, direct democracy, and federalism, where the community counts and not the individual. Notably, such insights cannot be achieved without looking at the values, beliefs, and ethics of Swiss small firm owner-managers. Consequently, this paper also focuses on these peculiarities of Swiss CSR in order to verify the various findings mentioned above.

As derived, CSR cannot be detached from the cultural context and system of capitalism. At the same time, there is strong emphasis on the existence of a distinct SME CSR approach. To explore this small business culture, the next section sheds light on the methodology.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research analyses whether there is a global SME CSR approach or rather regional approaches (shaped by local culture, political systems, or markets). It further looks at the origins or determinants of such peculiarities. It is guided by grounded theory, which enables to seek out and conceptualise the latent social patterns by using an inductive approach to generate substantive codes from collected data [54]. Later it is possible to develop theories leading to a next sequence of data collection increasingly focussed on the deduction of further questions [54], [56].

As initial step, an extensive literature review was conducted, i.e., documents from academics and companies were searched, downloaded, and analysed to capture definitions, interpretations, and understandings of CSR in general and in SMEs in particular. This laid groundwork for the interview questions. Further, merging these insights with the findings from the interviews established some generalisability from individual statements to a national Swiss level.

A. Interviews: Selection and Analysis

The small businesses were initially contacted by phone to seek their participation and to secure their expertise in this topic. SMEs are in most cases led by an owner-manager able to enact values other than profit and to directly shape business practices/strategies according to these personal values, which vice versa affects his/her perception and beliefs towards CSR [2]. Hence, it was decided to lead the interviews with owner-managers. While following grounded theory to add data until a certain theoretical saturation is reached [56] and trying to pay respect to the statistically sectorial distribution of SMEs in Switzerland [43], this research culminated in 40 interviews. Table III outlines the sample details.

The interviews were based on pre-tested questions derived from theory and from documents corresponding to the themes of implicit or explicit CSR attributes (in Table II). In addition, the questions targeted at answering whether the small business approach is a result of its political/historical background, or whether a country's political constitution or history is built on values, tradition, and cultural peculiarities of its SMEs. The face-to-face interviews allowed contextualised discussions and an open-ended, in-depth exploration of Swiss small business CSR, wherein "speech is considered data" [55] that constitute organisational realities. The interviews took on average one hour and were conducted between February and October 2014.

They were subsequently transcribed and coded using MAXQDA. The code tree created at the beginning of the coding process is based on "in-vivo" coding. This initial code tree was wide, and then condensed to constructs. The coded constructs were sorted so as to set up categories of similar constructs. New categories were formed, combined if useful and heuristic or broken down when required. For statements found to be important but not classifiable, a category "others" was created. This enabled the identification of specific answers in regard to the research questions. The codes given in the interviews were quantitatively analysed for

implicit/explicit of CSR.

Thus, the majority of codes (following Table II) enabled a fine gradation of Swiss small business CSR activities and a distinct attribution to one category. Finally the different statements were weighted (default mean = 50, maximum = 100, minimum = 0) in order to analyse the "softer" conversation components.

TABLE III
DETAILED SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

Attribute	Characteristic	Absolut	%
Gender	Male	38	95
	Female	2	5
	Less than 3	0	0
Number of years in business	3-5	9	22
	6-10	15	38
	More than 10	16	40
Position or title in company	Owner	1	2.5
	Owner and manager	39	97.5
	Employed manager	-	0
Level of education	National level certificate	34	85
	Bachelor's degree	3	7.5
	Master's degree or higher	3	7.5
	Limited company	5	12.5
Legal form	Incorporated company	33	82.5
	Society	1	2.5
	Cooperative	1	2.5
	Finance	2	5
Sector	Manufacturing	11	27.5
	Service	5	12.5
	Trade	3	7.5
	Agriculture	9	22.5
	Construction	8	2
	Food	2	5
Language region	German	25	62.5
	French	9	22.5
	Italian	6	15
	Romansh	-	0
Number of employees (full-time equivalents)	Less than 10	1	2.5
	11-50	11	27.5
	51-100	21	52.5
	101-200	2	5
	More than 200	5	12.5
Annual turnover in CHF Mio.	Less than 10	3	7.5
	11-20	4	10
	21-50	4	10
	51-100	19	47.5
	More than 100	2	5
	Missing system	8	20

So as to further heighten the quality of this study the results and conclusions gained from the interviews were challenged in two Delphi processes: one discussion was led together with seven of the interviewed SMEs. The other verification step was together with the governmental department responsible for SME policy and with Switzerland Global Enterprise, the Trade Chamber for Swiss Business. These vivid exchanges brought about interesting complements especially in regard to exporting SMEs or the particularly parallel value world in SMEs (cp. Section IV A).

B. Secondary Data Analysis

To derive an understanding of the SME-CSR relationship from other cultures a secondary data analysis was conducted.

Therefore, research reports, statements, etc. by academics (cp. Table IV) were analysed and coded using the same procedure and code tree as aforementioned in order to

generate hypothesis on how similar/different the SME-CSR relation is in the context of the specific, national origin it is based in. The decision on whether implicit or explicit CSR is deployed is based on majority of coded statements in the studies under research, which supports either one model or the other (cp. Table II). The studies were selected from Scopus while their quality was controlled by their journal rank and citation index [57]. Other selection criterions were: sample size (either quantitative survey data were required or a minimum of 9 interviews with the exception of two case studies in Cameroon and Austria, which are seen as complement to other studies), ownership/management (only studies that target at SME owner-managers were selected, so as to compare them to the Swiss context where the majority of SMEs are totally self-owned – see Table III), organisational structure (only studies on businesses that employ staff from at least three functional areas were chosen, again to limit variety in comparison to the situation in Switzerland), and nationality (the studies have to report about registered companies in the respective sample country).

The decision on whether an economy is seen as liberal, coordinated, or as hybrid is based on the attributes of market economies outlined in Table I. As said, there exist other systems to distinguish different market economies [7], [8]. In spite of this paper's adoption of the system of "varieties of capitalism" the selection of the studies for the secondary data analysis was also influenced by its aspiration to include the clusters determined by these rival theories. For market-based economies studies from UK and US were selected. Spain, Italy, and Catalonia consider the Mediterranean ring, a study from Finland the socio-democratic system. The continental-European background is covered by Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. Lastly, Asian capitalism is represented by studies from China, Taiwan, and Singapore. In regard to the division of European styles into Anglo-Saxon (UK), Nordic (Finland), Mediterranean (Italy, Spain, Catalonia), and Continental (Austria, Germany, Switzerland) all clusters are covered as well. As the countries examined represent different types of market economies, language regions, cultural contexts, and religious setting, the data collected allowed a unique, transnational analysis of CSR attributes. The studies are listed in chronological order. Although the approach here might be to some extent interpretative, the data analysis is characterised by a hermeneutic, iterative, and integrating process following grounded theory. The aim is to reflect and question the gained data critically, search for key concepts, then redefine, or buttress with evidence the patterns identified [54].

In sum, the procedures applied (e.g., data collection in easily traceable order, the integration of multiple sources, coding (using MAXQDA), and the Delphi process) foster internal validity and construct validity but also reliability [54].

IV. FINDINGS

The integration of statements from document analysis and from the 40 interviews permits the following identification of a CSR approach distinct for Swiss SMEs.

A. Swiss Small Business CSR

Because of the strong overlap between societal cultures in Switzerland (e.g., democracy, liberalisms, subsidiarity, and federalism) and the ethical values held by SMEs' owner-managers, this study, indeed, points at an idiosyncratic, implicit Swiss model of CSR that is examined in the next paragraphs alongside the dimensions of *intent*, *codification*, *motives*, and *language* for implicit vs. explicit CSR (Table II):

In regard to *intent* it can be concluded that the companies under research have all a role within wider formal and informal institutions for society's interests and concerns. For instance, they usually integrate disabled people into their staff and they bear the Swiss apprenticeship system. Therefrom their expressions of personal ethics at work are deeply embedded during the process of work socialisation and responsible business practices are established from the start of employer-employee relations.

Their highly sophisticated CSR agendas are a result of evolution and not of a strategic decision to "jump on the CSR bandwagon". They are assumed to have high social capital, which leads to regionally strong networks to customers, who mutually rely on the SMEs' traditional image. They experience social support from their communities based on their philanthropic profile, their function as societal pillars, and their long-term continuity passing the business down to their children. Such corporate cultures built on trust and ethics result in staff turnover rates of only 3% [43]. More importantly, no differences were found between German, French, and Italian (currently neglecting Romansh) speaking regions, although other studies [26], [31] reported of language as considerable impact on CSR practices.

In regard to *codification* it was found that Swiss SMEs have no corporate policies, programmes, strategies, and formalised instruments (certificates, standards, code of conducts) with some exception e.g., in the chemistry sector. On the contrary, it was stated that responsibility and altruism are often important elements of their upbringing and running a SME is a lifestyle decision to chase innovation and visions. Thus, their CSR agendas are driven by traditional values and economic opportunities are not their business imperative. This is strongly supported by findings on how SMEs do global business within their small business network. Precisely, they rather sacrifice a deal if business partners asked for formalisation by a contract and did not rely on the handshake between them.

Concerning Swiss SMEs' *motives* it is clear from the interviews that they are driven by the pursuit for societal consensus and the expectations on their company's contribution to society. In other words, they have idealistic motives based on an individual "locus of responsibility" [58], under the influence of vision and inspiration with corporate self-restraints aimed at general welfare. Interestingly, they are influenced in significant aspects by the role of the women related to the company (e.g., mothers and wives). They are often the "hidden leaders", caring for staff with deeply rooted ethical values and high expectations towards their husbands/sons on how to lead the company in a proper way.

For some companies Christian values are the basis of their CSR, whereas for the others it is rather pragmatism, philanthropy, and their responsibility as “*Unternehmer*”.

Apart from that they do not espouse their CSR activities using CSR *language*, which puts emphasis on the argument of them having an implicit agenda. This is strongly supported by the fact that companies forced to do certification in the supply chain of a MNE found it to be an “easy task” because they did the required activities since decades and, hence, had the related documents (in an implicit form) ready. Today, some of them see an advantage in the communication of “the way we do our business”, and therefore they issue CSR/sustainability reports. The reason for this development towards more external communication seems to be in their insight that responsibility must be a part of education and cannot be implemented in a later stage as adults. Consequently, these reports are often built, written, designed for schools to introduce the SME’s business to pupils and to show that they are operating regionally, deeply rooted as (future and responsible) employer in the region and, even if they are in the “dirty” business, they try to do this in a “proper way”. Above all, this communication is about values and has not the aim to espouse CSR activities.

In sum, Swiss small business CSR is seen as value-and virtue ethics-driven, determined by norms and their aspiration to contribute to society. It is definitely attributed to *implicit* CSR. This justifies the subsequent research step, which gives an international overview over the CSR-SME relationship.

B. Cross-National Comparative Overview

According to the comparative analysis the majority of SMEs have *motives, intent, codification, and language* that emerge from an *implicit* approach to CSR detached from their system of capitalism, language, region, religion, etc. Table IV carves out the details: Only SMEs from Hong Kong show an explicit approach and even this conclusion is somewhat debatable since it is not based on statements from SMEs but from NGO representatives. Notably, NGOs are in most cases asking for more explicit and formal CSR since, in their eyes, this should provide evidence of a responsible business. Other studies conducted among SMEs and especially on this country’s second sector (production and manufacture) may also point to a more implicit approach. However, this needs further analysis.

Arguably, there are some movements towards more liberalisation in Europe in certain areas and towards more coordination in the US and UK in other fields. But from the studies under research it can be concluded that SMEs are in general driven by assumed societal demands and their willingness to fill them. These findings are astonishingly congruent with the patterns identified in Section II, C and Switzerland. Concentrated ownership, age of companies, less dependence on capital markets, and the embeddedness of owner-managers to the social-economic/socio-political “centre of gravity” are frequently reported reasons towards less explicit and more implicit CSR [48]. These are findings confirmed within this study, for Switzerland and 15 other

countries.

TABLE IV
COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW

Country / reference	Subject: methodology	Market economy	Implicit / explicit
Italy [40] [59]	19 SMEs: interviews 105 SMEs: survey	Hybrid	<i>Implicit CSR</i>
Cameroon [60] [61]	18 SMEs: interviews 1 SME: case study	Coordinated	<i>Implicit CSR</i>
Netherlands [62] [63] [64] [65]	111 SMEs: survey 1662 SMEs: survey 689 SMEs: survey 20 SMEs: interviews	Coordinated	<i>Implicit CSR</i>
UK [65] [46] [47] [46]	20 SMEs: interviews 65 SMEs: survey 9 SMEs: interviews 32 SMEs: interviews	Liberal	<i>Implicit CSR</i>
Australia [66] [67] [68]	12 SMEs: interviews Contextual paper 171 SMEs: survey	Liberal	<i>Implicit CSR</i>
Finland [69]	25 SMEs: interviews	Hybrid	<i>Implicit CSR</i>
Germany [38]	15 SMEs: interviews	Coordinated	<i>Implicit CSR</i>
Hong Kong [70]	59 NGOs: interviews	Liberal	<i>Explicit CSR</i>
China [71]	1500 SMEs: survey	Coordinated	<i>Implicit CSR</i>
Taiwan [72]	1000 SMEs: survey	Coordinated	<i>Implicit CSR</i>
Singapore [73]	15 SMEs: interviews	Coordinated	<i>Implicit CSR</i>
Austria [74] [75] [48]	1 SME: case study 1 SME: case study 259 annual reports	Coordinated	<i>Implicit CSR</i>
US [76] [77] [78] [79], [80]	168 SMEs: survey 180 SMEs: survey 217 SMEs: survey 700 articles	Liberal	<i>Implicit CSR</i>
Spain [81]	112 SMEs: survey	Hybrid	<i>Implicit CSR</i>
Chile & Catalonia [82]	465 SMEs (Chile) 394 SME (Catalonia)	Coordinated Hybrid	<i>Implicit CSR</i>

The next section discusses the results and outlines explanations for and implications of this global, and well, monolithic SME CSR approach. Some limitations of the study and further research steps are delineated as well.

V. DISCUSSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Considering that profit maximisation is not an imperative for many SMEs, from Switzerland and elsewhere, it is concluded that small firms do not necessarily change their responsible attitude if they had the opportunity to expand into the global market. Other researchers [49], [75], [83] support this evidence. Furthermore, SMEs as backbone of Swiss economy support the existence of a distinct small business CSR approach. This generates some testable hypothesis, e.g., on how the Swiss SME model will be received in particular settings to which it is “exported”.

A very simple explanation for the herein identified monolithic SME CSR model lies in the small markets and local value and supply chains SMEs are embedded in. Comparable to coordinated market economies (Table II) SMEs were found to be mainly driven by non-market relations, collaborative and strategic interactions with other SMEs, local customers and their communities. They are encouraging information sharing and collaboration between them, while at the same time the monitoring and, if necessary, sanctioning of violators. SMEs are more constrained by scarce resources, depending on exchanges with their direct, local, political, economic, and social environment, and this embeddedness has a distinct impact on SME owner-managers' perception regarding CSR compared to managers of MNEs. This is supported by the fact that in most cases SMEs are in the second sector, producing specialised niche products on a small scale with high entry barriers.

SMEs often independently educate their employees in specialised production processes (aligned with coordinated markets). In all countries examined SMEs have a long-standing tradition to contribute to welfare, resulting in owner-managers who want to personally add to the social good. Thus, CSR might be perceived as threatening to this traditional design of the business-society nexus and as undermining the widespread understanding of the broad societal responsibility of SMEs. Globally theorised organisational concepts and management practices, and thus explicit CSR, seem not to disseminate well into local, cultural contexts that are already organised by autochthonous institutions and their inherent social solidarity [48]. Non-adoption and the reinforcement of the reliance on family structures, local networks, implicit values and respective routines are responses more likely for SMEs as organisational sub-population [48]. This might be another explanation for similarities in small business CSR.

In general, implicit CSR and the lower likelihood of explicit CSR in SMEs can be traced to: 1) concentrated ownership and low/no dependence on capital markets [48], 2) reluctance to adopt the ideas and terminology of explicit CSR, 3) the low visibility of SMEs in the sense that they are rarely a target of comprehensive media campaigns and thus less interested in advertising their CSR, 4) close association with their socio-economic/social-political environments and therefore less interest and need for explicit CSR [48], and finally, 5) the widespread presence of SMEs in every country regardless of political system, market economy, or culture. Obviously, CSR processes are established neglecting policies, borders, language, financial systems, or nationality. Hence, classifications of countries by their market system or capitalism, as found in the comparative capitalism literature, do not match the CSR practices in SMEs as they do not mirror their business. This raises questions on the universality and generalisability of unmediated, explicit management concepts.

The global SME CSR model needs a closer look to verify the abovementioned key patterns and enrich, develop, and deepen its content, answering profound questions on potential sub-models. If the monolithic approach was further verified, it

could be concluded a small business CSR agenda that is not the result of its economic, political/historical context. However, whether SMEs really determine their country's constitution, social, economic, political, or legal systems is matter of further discussion. The results from Switzerland support the latter. More importantly, it appears that certain patterns (trust-based networks, ownership, tight relations to employees and the community, and CSR (in its original meaning as "moral activity")) are over spanning as an implicitly followed path of doing business shaping local as well as global business strategies of SMEs [66]. This contrasts MNEs, which have differing CSR strategies for their local and global business [83].

Historically there seems to be more explicit CSR in the US than in Europe and a recent shift from implicit to more explicit CSR among European corporations is reported [23]. This does not seem to apply for SMEs: neither was there explicit CSR in US SMEs under research nor is there a shift to more formalisation in e.g., Swiss SMEs or in SMEs from Germany/Austria. Further studies should consider the very interesting situation, which occurs at the intersection between different implicit CSR systems (e.g., when it comes to international corporations of SMEs) and the power struggle between explicit and implicit CSR (in the case of mergers and acquisitions or when a SME grows into a MNE). As said, there are many other concepts for distinguishing countries. Other definitions may have led to different results and the dichotomy of "liberal" and "coordinated" market economies might be scrutinised by follow-up studies and, as a result, revised. Notably, there are still adjustments in terms of legal frameworks and it would be very risky to take a static decision on CSR and as well on market economies.

Further, the secondary data analysis suffers from a lack of information about the primary research quality, lack of control over sampling, data collection, interview quality, interview analysis, data categorising etc. Although the studies were chosen upon journal rank and citation report, which are quite objective criteria, the selection of the studies might be biased by the choice of the authors. Moreover, this paper is primarily based on a quantitative definition of SMEs violating qualitative aspects though data, such as property situation, personal management by the owner etc., were collected during the first part of the interviews (see Table III). Consequently, there are a number of anchors for future scrutiny here.

It is beyond the scope of this comparative research to elaborate a detailed predictive framework for national systems of CSR. However, a few general conclusions may be in order: 1) The degree to which explicit CSR will become more common for SMEs will largely depend on the strengths and success of traditional, autochthonous institutions (e.g. family, religious or tribal institutions). 2) Despite that many studies are predicting the rise of explicit CSR in Europe there is good reason to reject this shift for SMEs. 3) By contrast, small business responsibility is in most cases weakened by regulation and thus, SMEs remain more likely to maintain their implicit CSR. 4) These forces are informal, overarching, and influential within the SME sector and network. 5) In other

words, this study concludes a monolithic, supra-national SME approach that resembles implicit CSR.

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Stéphanie Looser obtained an MSc degree in Business Administration with a specialisation in Public and Non-profit Management in 2013.

After gaining work experience in the accounting/consulting, auditing, public, and non-profit sectors, she is currently working towards a PhD in the field of Environmental Strategy at the University of Surrey.

Dr. Walter Wehrmeyer joined CES in 1998 as the BG Surrey Scholar, focusing on contaminated land and ways in which current processes towards recycling land can be improved, in terms of both the speed of recycling as well as the quality of the site remediation.

Before that he was at the University of Kent, jointly appointed between the School of Biological Sciences and the (now) Kent Business School, working on environmental performance measures and management systems.