The Corporate Code of Ethics at Home, Far Away and in Between
Sociomaterial Translations of a Traveling Code

Maira Babri

Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för
avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt förvar i
Hörsal B, Samhällsvetarhuset,
Fredagen den 27 januari 2017, kl. 13:00.
Avhandlingen kommer att förvaras på engelska.

Fakultetsopponent: Docent, Niklas Egels-Zandén,
Handelshögskolan vid Göteborgs universitet, Göteborg, Sverige.
Corporate codes of ethics (CCEs) have become increasingly prevalent as overarching ethical guidelines for multinational corporations doing business around the globe. As formal documents, governing corporations’ work, policies, and ways of doing business, CCEs are meant to guide all business activities and apply to all of the corporation’s employees, suppliers, and business partners. In multinational corporations, this means that diverse countries, cultures, and a myriad of heterogeneous actors are expected to abide by the same standards and guidelines, as stipulated in the CCE. Despite this empirical reality, CCEs have previously been approached by academics mainly as passive company documents or as marketing or management tools, in the contexts of their country of origin. Building on Actor-Network Theory this thesis applies an interactionist ontology, and relational epistemology, seeing the code as a sociomaterial object with both material and immaterial characteristics, and moving in a global arena. Furthermore, the CCEs are assumed to be susceptible to change, i.e. translations. With these assumptions, the CCE of a multinational corporation is followed as it travels between its country of origin (Sweden) and another country (China) and goes to work in different contexts. Heterogeneous empirical materials such as interviews, company documents, observations, shadowing, and emails are used to present stories from different contexts where the CCE is at work. The overall purpose of the thesis is to contribute to the theorizing of CCEs, thereby providing further understanding of the possible consequences of CCEs in contextually diverse settings. By following traces of a CCE, this study posits the need for a simultaneous understanding of three dimensions of CCEs for CCEs to be understood in contextually dispersed settings. The three dimensions are a) material translations of the code, b) enactments of these translations, and c) ideas associated with the material and enacted code. The study contributes to the understanding of CCEs by highlighting a specific country-context (China), by putting together knowledge from codes in various contexts, and the overarching contribution lies in highlighting codes as different kinds of objects and adding to the existing literature – specifically, contextualizing the CCE as a vaporous object.