Corporate social responsibility in *Economia Aziendale* scholars’ theories
A taxonomic perspective

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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to provide an analytical overview of the academic output of eminent Italian scholars in the period from the end of the Second World War to the 1970s on the subject of corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Design/methodology/approach – Through the use of content analysis, possible logical and conceptual similarities between the theories of the scholars and present-day definition of CSR have been identified.

Findings – Concepts as ethical values and stakeholders included in definition of CSR come from the thinking of the Italian Economia Aziendale scholars, so that it is possible to get pioneering aspects in the light of the international debate on CSR today.

Originality/value – The originality of this paper derives from the fact that the theme of CSR has rarely been examined from a historical point of view and that the development of the theme in Italy has rarely been examined through analysis of the ideas of the leading Italian Economia Aziendale Scholars.

Keywords Stakeholders, Corporate social responsibility, Added value, Ethical value, *Economia Aziendale*, Italian scholars

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction
Our paper, which is to be collocated with international studies into the historical origins of corporate social responsibility (CSR) ([Argandona et al., 2009; Dahlsrud, 2008; Manetti, 2011; Moscarini, 2009; Vilanova et al., 2009](#)), examines CSR and connected themes through an analysis of the key ideas of a number of farsighted Italian *Economia Aziendale* scholars in the period from the end of the Second World War to the 1970s or, in other words, at a time before the current international debate on the subject began. Indeed, it was in the 1970s that the CSR debate began to proliferate. Following are the four main academic approaches to the theme developed:

1. The first ([Carroll, 1979; Davis, 1973; Manne and Wallich, 1972](#)) is an attempt to identify exactly what a company must do to be considered socially responsible. Carroll’s contribution is particularly relevant in this respect; he states: “the social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary
expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time” (Carroll, 1979, 500).

(2) The second approach (Johnson, 1971) is based on the interpretation of social responsibility as a response to the relevant socio-economic milieu.

(3) The third approach (Preston and Post, 1975) is concerned with the analysis of the reasons for which a company decides to act in a socially responsible way.

(4) The fourth approach (Ackerman and Bauer, 1976; Frederick, 1978) involves the interpretation of social responsibility from a strategic viewpoint, with an emphasis on how the company develops its internal procedures so as to be able to respond to external social demands.

These ideas relate to topics such as the social function of a business, the role of profit, the importance of added value, and reconciling various interests within a company.

The originality of this paper derives from the fact that CSR has seldom been examined from a historical point of view (Husted, 2014; Aguinis and Glavas, 2012; Vogel, 1991; Schrempf-Stirling et al., 2016) and that the development of the theme in Italy has rarely been examined through an analysis of the leading Italian Economia Aziendale scholars’ ideas.

One of the first of these studies (Signori and Rusconi, 2009) examined possible connections between these ideas and stakeholder theory. Caldarelli et al. (2011) analysed similarities between the Catholic Church’s theory regarding the Common Good and Economia Aziendale theory and pointed to lessons that could be learned by the international community concerning CSR practices. Costa and Ramus (2012) investigated some Italian Economia Aziendale scholars’ thinking by focussing on the concept of azienda to reinterpret, in a more humanistic way, the role of business organisations in society.

A more frequent approach by Italian researchers, however, has involved analysing the development of the international literature on CSR (Chirieleison, 2002; Massei, 1992; Moscarini, 2009; Rusconi, 1997).

The aim of this work is to illustrate the contribution made by the first Italian Economia Aziendale scholars dealing with these themes; their contributions impacted the international community with regard to the development and implementation of CSR.

This paper is organised as follows: Section 2 describes the historical background; Section 3 describes the methodology used and the reasons for focussing on the historical period in question; Section 4 analyses the numerous definitions of CSR found in literature today. Many of these definitions echo key concepts of Economia Aziendale theory, so these concepts have been analysed in the subsequent sections. Section 5 deals with the ideas of a number of leading Italian Economia Aziendale scholars; Section 6 highlights the connections found between the scholars’ ideas and the concept of CSR in contemporary literature; it also presents the main conclusions.

2. Economia Aziendale birth and historical background

Gino Zappa is considered the founder of Economia Aziendale. Indeed, the content of the famous inaugural lecture of 1927 (Zappa, 1927) is considered the foundation of the new science, so called Economia Aziendale. Even if that period was characterised in Italy by the crisis (1929) and the rise to power of Fascism regime, the Zappian revolution was established before the consolidation of the fascist ideology (Cinquini, 2007, 217).
Thanks to the Zappian contribution, a new academic movement arose: the Economia Aziendale, a discipline wider than Accounting that studies the conditions of existence and manifestations of life of the aziende (Zappa, 1927, 30).

In particular, Economia Aziendale led to a holistic view of the azienda. As a consequence, the separate areas of management, accounting and organisation were considered all part of the unique concept of Economia Aziendale.

Nevertheless, even if Economia Aziendale was born in 1927, our paper focuses on the period from 1950s to 1970s, because up to 1950s no research appears concerning the issues analysed in the paper.

Furthermore, the 1950s-1970s period was chosen for two reasons: first, it was only from the 1950s onwards, after the Second World War, that Italian Economia Aziendale scholars turned their attention to the role a company played in the wider community; second, this was a unique period in Italy, which was undergoing a transformation from being an agricultural nation into an industrial one. It was, in fact, a time of intensive development and of the so-called economic boom, during which, thanks to the process of change, Italy became one of the leading European countries in terms of growth and GDP. Industrialisation was taking place at a previously unimaginable pace. Employment in the industrial sector rose significantly and the rate of capital savings grew at an unprecedented rate. This level of growth was because of both the international situation (for example, positive economic trends, various forms of aid from the USA, the disparity between domestic and international prices) and to internal factors such as the availability of an enormous low-cost workforce.

Intensive expansion in the sector in question led to continuous increases in investment and, as a consequence, an unprecedentedly significant rise in productivity. In the same period, the redistribution of income towards those supplying the capital and at the expense of workers contributed to a large increase in the investment capability of private individuals (Zanetti and Filippi, 1967). Ultimately, the impressive surge in productivity worked mainly to the advantage of those providing the capital; the effects on salary levels were minimal while profit margins were further increased (Castronovo, 2013).

Economic growth was accompanied by a rise in social conflict, which meant that topics such as the social function of the company and the role of profit became increasingly important. It was, in fact, a historical period in which companies were predominantly concerned with making profits and showed little or no interest in working conditions or, more generally, in the social impact of their business activities. It goes without saying that in such circumstances, any foreshadowing of the principles of CSR could only be described as farsighted and revolutionary.

In such background, the thoughts and contributions on the Economia Aziendale scholars appear of great importance.

3. Methodology
This paper analyses the work published by five of the most eminent Economia Aziendale scholars in the period from the end of the Second World War to the 1970s to identify shared characteristics in their ideas concerning the social responsibility of businesses. The approach adopted is therefore “horizontal” (Amaduzzi, 2004, 13), or in other words consists of a cross-sectional analysis of the theme, namely, the development over a 20-year period of the concept of CSR.

At the same time, the paper is synchronic (Amaduzzi, 2004, 14; Gaffikin, 2006, 14): it involves examining history in the light of contemporary thinking to understand more clearly the developments that have brought us to the present (the historian is an observer of the past). This is different from the diachronic approach, in which history is viewed in the
light of the situations and thinking of the period under analysis, and no account is taken of subsequent events (the historian is an observer in the past).

The main aim of the paper is to identify possible logical and conceptual similarities between the theories put forward in the past by the authors in question and present-day definitions of CSR through highlighting the pioneering aspects of their thinking. This work thus contributes to furthering international research into the historical origins of CSR.

In other words, we try to identify possible interactions, recalls and/or similarities between the theory of CSR and the basic principles of Economia Aziendale. To find these links, we analyse and compare definitions of CSR (as described in Section 4) with Economia Aziendale concepts (as described in Section 5).

To analyse the CSR definitions, content analysis through T-lab software was used, as better described in Section 4; to analyse the Economia Aziendale thoughts, a manual and interpretative content analysis was made, as explained in Section 5.

We started our analysis with the founder of Economia Aziendale, Gino Zappa (1879-1960). Then we analysed his most eminent pupils, all founders of single and specific schools.

A preliminary study of Zappa’s publications provided useful insights into the content of academic works written during the period in question by the leading pupils in the Zappa and post-Zappa schools, namely, Pietro Onida (1902-1982), Aldo Amaduzzi (1904-1991) caposcuola, Carlo Masini (1914-1995) and Paolo Emilio Cassandro (1910-2004).

The decision to focus on Paolo Emilio Cassandro as well as on the other three scholars, who were all actual pupils of Zappa, was taken for very specific reasons. Cassandro developed interesting ideas about the social role of businesses, the importance of appropriate distribution of added value and the ethics of profit and this at a time when all the emphasis was on production and consumption and the market for mass-produced goods and services was thriving. With impressive farsightedness, Cassandro devoted a considerable part of his time to the analysis and development of ideas relating to the concepts and themes that are the focus of this paper (Cassandro, 1956, 1958, 1967a, 1967b, 1969, 1972, 1978, 1980). It is significant that he was the first Economia Aziendale scholar to deal with the subject of the social report (Cassandro, 1989).

The academic works in which analysis revealed concepts in line with themes relating to CSR are listed in Table I.

The analysis was carried out primarily on first-hand sources.

Our analysis begins in the 1950s, as no research appears to have been undertaken on the subject before that date, and extends to the 1970s, which is when studies on the topic began to appear internationally (Carroll, 1979; Davis, 1973; Manne and Wallich, 1972; Johnson, 1971; Preston and Post 197; Ackerman and Bauer, 1976; Frederick, 1978).

### 4. Taxonomic aspects of corporate social responsibility

We decided not to examine all the numerous definitions of CSR that have emerged in 50 years of studies on the subject (Sheehy, 2015) but to simplify the analysis by taking as a point of reference – for comparison with the theories explored by the five authors (Zappa, Onida, Amaduzzi, Masini and Cassandro) – a 2008 work on the main definitions of CSR found on the internet (Dahlsrud).

Dahlsrud (2008) seeks to identify distinctive taxonomic characteristics in procedures and in the literature on the subject of CSR; we selected five of his definitions. The two criteria for selection were the number of quotations and multi-dimensionality (i.e. the inclusion of environmental, social, economic, stakeholder and voluntary aspects).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Works</th>
<th>Translation of works’ titles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Aldo Amaduzzi</td>
<td>L’azienda nel suo sistema e nell’ordine delle sue rilevazioni</td>
<td>The <em>azienda</em> in its system and in its accounts records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Pietro Onida</td>
<td>L’azienda. Primi principi di gestione e di organizzazione</td>
<td>The <em>azienda</em>. First principles of management and organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Pietro Onida</td>
<td>L’azienda. Fondamentali problemi della sua efficienza</td>
<td>The <em>azienda</em>. Fundamental problems of its efficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Gino Zappa</td>
<td>Le produzioni nell’economia delle imprese</td>
<td>Production in companies’ economies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Aldo Amaduzzi</td>
<td>Conflitto ed equilibrio di interessi nel bilancio dell’impresa</td>
<td>Conflict and balance of interest in financial reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Gino Zappa</td>
<td>La dinamica dei processi economici e delle altre coordinazioni di gestione nelle aziende</td>
<td>The dynamic of economic processes and of other aspects of business management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Gino Zappa</td>
<td>L’ipotesi del costante nella dottrina e nella gestione d’azienda</td>
<td>The hypotheses of constant in doctrine and business management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Paolo Emilio Cassandro</td>
<td>Le aziende. Principi di Ragioneria</td>
<td>The <em>aziende</em>. Principles of Accounting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Gino Zappa</td>
<td>La perdurante instabilità dei mercati e delle gestioni di azienda</td>
<td>The continuing instability of markets and of business management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Gino Zappa</td>
<td>Le condizioni e le circostanze di instabilità delle gestioni di azienda</td>
<td>The conditions and circumstances of instability in business management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Gino Zappa</td>
<td>Nuove condizioni e circostanze dell’instabile gestione di azienda</td>
<td>New conditions and circumstances of the unstable business management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Gino Zappa</td>
<td>La ricercata stabilità dell’economia delle aziende e dei mercati</td>
<td>The researched stability of business and market economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Gino Zappa</td>
<td>La nozione di sistema; le sue vaste applicazioni; i diversi sistemi dei valori nell’economia di ogni azienda</td>
<td>The notion of system; its extended applications; the different value systems in business economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Gino Zappa</td>
<td>Il divenire sociale</td>
<td>The becoming social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Carlo Masini</td>
<td>L’organizzazione del lavoro nell’impresa</td>
<td>The Organisation of work in the company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Gino Zappa</td>
<td>La popolazione, i suoi movimenti e la sua economia</td>
<td>The population, its movements and its economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Gino Zappa</td>
<td>Le classi delle società umane: la famiglia</td>
<td>The classes of human society: the family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Pietro Onida</td>
<td>Economia d’azienda</td>
<td>Economy of the <em>azienda</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Pietro Onida</td>
<td>Economicità socialità ed efficienza nell’amministrazione dell’impresa</td>
<td><em>Economicità</em>, sociality and efficiency in business administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Gino Zappa</td>
<td>L’economia delle aziende di consumo</td>
<td>The economy of no profit <em>aziende</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Carlo Masini</td>
<td>La struttura dell’impresa</td>
<td>The structure of company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Paolo Emilio Cassandro</td>
<td>Il profitto dell’impresa e la sua determinazione</td>
<td>Profit and its determination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Paolo Emilio Cassandro</td>
<td>L’equilibrio di impresa e la politica dei redditi</td>
<td>The balance of a company and the politics of profits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>Paolo Emilio Cassandro</td>
<td>Il profitto dell’impresa mezzo non fine</td>
<td>Profit as a means and not as an end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Carlo Masini</td>
<td>Lavoro e risparmio (also in its II ed. edited in 1979)</td>
<td>Work and Savings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Paolo Emilio Cassandro</td>
<td>Il bilancio oggettivo dell’impresa</td>
<td>The objective report of a company</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I. Works analysed
Although this choice precluded the possibility of providing a single, definitive, definition of CSR, it stems from the idea of better identifying specific features common to the various definitions of CSR extant today (Argandona et al., 2009).

In his work, Dahlsrud examines 37 definitions of CSR. As stated previously, the five definitions selected for analysis in this paper were chosen for their completeness and because of the number of times which they are quoted.

The leading definition of CSR in terms of the number of quotations is the one provided by the European Commission in 2001 (CEE, 2001) which defines CSR as “A concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis”.

The other definitions selected for this study are as follows:

- “Business decision making linked to ethical values, compliance with legal requirements and respect for people, communities and the environment” (Business for social responsibility, 2000).
- “Open and transparent business practices based on ethical values and respect for employees, communities and the environment, which will contribute to sustainable business success” (IBLF, 2003).
- “Corporate social responsibility is achieving commercial success in ways that honour ethical values and respect people, communities and the natural environment” (Business for social responsibility, 2003a, 2003b).
- “Global corporate social responsibility can be defined as business practices based on ethical values and respect for workers, communities and the environment” (Global corporate social responsibility policies project, 2003).

Analysis of the five definitions led to an examination of certain concepts that are conspicuously present in the works of Zappa, Onida, Amaduzzi, Masini and Cassandro.

Indeed, from a first reading of these definitions, we can observe that CSR is clearly linked to two aspects: stakeholders and ethical values. All five definitions refer to “stakeholders” or specific categories of stakeholder as people, communities, workers or the environment. In this perspective, CSR seems to be a way of doing business that respects the stakeholders’ expectations and maintains ethical values (Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Words in common in CSR definitions](image-url)
To verify this result, we conducted content analysis on all 37 definitions using T-lab software. Through this analysis, we found 46 keywords indicated in Table II. Table II also highlights the frequency of the 46 keywords.

Among these 46 words, “stakeholders” and “ethical, values” are present. In fact, these are the two most frequently used words (18 for “stakeholders”, 7 for “value” and 6 for “ethical”). It is worth noting that the other words with the same or higher frequency compose the acronym CSR (corporate, social and responsibility) or specific kinds of stakeholders (such as “community”, “environment”, “employee” and “society”) or generic words (not about CSR) (such as “business”, “define”, “operations” and “impact”). Therefore, the results confirm our observation that “stakeholder” and “ethical, values” together feature in the most common definitions of CSR.

This is not as obvious a statement as it might seem and will be key to the subsequent analysis of a number of concepts that have been widely discussed in the international literature and that, moreover, provide the basis for some of the teachings of the masters of Economia Aziendale.

These concepts are the starting point for this study that aims to identify analogies with Zappa, Onida, Amaduzzi, Masini and Cassandro’s work, particularly with reference to the following themes: the social role of the company, the role of profit, the concept of added value and balancing different interests within a company.

In particular, following the steps of the qualitative analysis (Creswell, 2013), we identified, from the integral reading of the works, as listed in Table I, the above four themes. In fact, among the many issues dealt with in the works analysed, we identified and chose the four themes considered related to the topic of CSR. To do this, a thematic content analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), as explained in Section 5, was used.

All topics highlight possible logical and conceptual similarities with the three elements of CSR presented in Figure 1.

5. Themes and concepts in academic works
After having performed an integral reading of the works of the Italian Scholars, with subsequent interpretation of the information present, we selected, from the documents analysed, 36 significant sentences (or re-elaborated versions of the same ones),

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Treat</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Corporation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Socially</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Value</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Outside</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Manner</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Obligation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Concern</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Customer</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Operate</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Improve</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Responsible</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Wide</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Ethical</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Life</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Define</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Practise</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>People</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Firm</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Contribute</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Voluntary</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Need</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Behave</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II. Results of content analysis
representative of the topics considered related to CSR (14 for the social role of the company, 8 for the role of profit, 8 for the concept of added value and 6 the balancing of the different interests within the company) (Figure 2).

Instead of the traditional content analysis that, though used across qualitative data, often provides counts and frequency (Wilkinson, 2000), a thematic content analysis was used, because of the need to interpret certain aspects. Indeed, the analysis was essentially of a qualitative nature, based on the interpretation of the entire works of the author analysed, and the information to be evaluated is highly heterogeneous and, as such, is not always present in standard sections of the analysed works.

The following sentences, chosen for the topic “social role of the company”, are 14 (specifically 4 from Zappa, 2 from Onida, 5 from Masini, 2 from Amaduzzi and 1 from Cassandro). From the analysis of them, some interesting considerations can be made: the azienda is seen as an economic and social institute characterised by durability and long-term. Its activity (process of production and/or consumption) is oriented to common good and to increasing human wellbeing. In this respect, the social relevance of the azienda is evident.

They are the following:

1. Azienda [company] as an economic institute “geared to survival, which, in order to meet human needs, organises and effects – in a continuously coordinated manner – the production or pursuit and the consumption of wealth” (Zappa, 1956, p. 37).

2. He emphasized the importance of durability and the long-term view “in transcending the current interests of the individuals or groups of people who contribute to the functioning of the company” (Zappa, 1956, p. 38).

3. He returned to the definition of the azienda observing that “the idea of the company as an institute helps to make clear its social relevance” (Zappa, 1962, p. 547).

4. Referring to the azienda he wrote, “As they have a social function, businesses become productive complexes at the service of the community” (Zappa, 1962, p. 681).

5. He affirmed that the goal of companies’ economic activities was the common good, given that “companies do business […] in the economic sphere, but the economic aspect is not an end in itself; rather, it is a rational means of
achieving human wellbeing, which is why a company is created in the first place. Thus, what is economic or useful [...] enters the domain of human wellbeing and is anything but extraneous to or opposed to this wellbeing” (Onida, 1968, p. 3).

(6) Drawing a distinction between the ultimate goals of a company and its objective, he wrote, “As a social institute, the azienda serves to increase human wellbeing, to promote the development of the human personality and to facilitate the achievement of the aims of human beings collectively, which are essentially ethical in nature. The way in which companies actually behave is fundamentally subordinate to these goals and therefore to ethics. The choices made are important as means to an end and as such must be adapted to the aims they are intended to achieve” (Onida, 1968, pp. 43-44).

(7) Placing the family at the hearth of his theory and insisting on the need to strive for the common good, he wrote, “a company must strive for the common good of its own community in harmonious compatibility with the pursuit of the common good of other communities in its economic and social milieu” (Masini, 1960, p. 194).

(8) He maintained that “in order to realise their aims, businesses must integrate in a socially appropriate way with the circumstances created by political communities of every level in order to achieve the common good of all of them” (Masini, 1964, p. 52).

(9) He reinforced the social concept in definition of what a company is, namely an “economic and social institute that produces profit and capital for the remuneration of those who work for it and invest capital in it” (Masini, 1979, p. 5).

(10) He defined the company as “a system of economic forces that develops, within the milieu of which it is a complementary part, a process of production, or of consumption, or of production and consumption combined, for the benefit of the so-called - soggetto economico (controlling interest) - and also of the individuals who cooperate with the - soggetto economico” (Amaduzzi, 1953, p. 16).

(11) He maintained that “[...] the opposing forces of labour and capital are united on the common ground constituted by the company” and goes on to say that the ultimate goal of all those who work for and in the company is to “use the part of the profits that are due to each individual [...] for the fulfilment of the needs of that individual and his family” (Amaduzzi, 1953, p. 16).

(12) He saw the company as having an inescapable social role on account of its being an “organism in which the various revenues –salaries, interest, profit – are formed and from which those same revenues depart” (Cassandro, 1967b, p. 661).

(13) He arrived at a social view of the company and affirms that “The goals of the company must be consistent with the higher goals of the human individual according to that individual’s ethics or religion [...]” (Masini, 1970, p. 49).

(14) He maintained that a company’s goals should be “active participation in the economic and social development of the country” (Masini, 1979, p. 17).

The following eight sentences have been chosen for the topic “the role of profit”. From these sentences the role of profit as an indispensable means of ensuring the existence and development of the azienda, more than an aim of it, is evident:
A company should aim to achieve its objectives not by maximising a single element but by ensuring “simultaneous maximums, in terms of salaries, dividends and self-financing, which are all dynamically combined” (Onida, 1968, p. 91).

As early as 1954 he wrote, “As long as it remains within the moral and legal limits, the quest for profits in a company is a healthy, socially useful phenomenon which it is damaging to condemn. While it is true that water flowing down from a mountain may be ruinous, this does not mean one should pray for drought; a more appropriate solution would be to channel the water and exploit its strength and light” (Onida, 1954a, 1954b, p. 716).

When revenue generation is not balanced by sociality, it is “of short duration, the result of blinkered vision or disconnected from the long-term future of the business and compromised by predatory – if resourceful – speculation” (Onida, 1961, p. 15).

He writes: “An observant reader […] cannot fail to notice how mistaken it is to assert that the company’s goal is “revenue”. Revenue is a complex element of the economic dynamic of the non-profit azienda, of the business, and of the state-owned company, but it is not the ultimate goal; it is a part of the system of economic values (the azienda) of the institutes mentioned” (Masini, 1970, p. 52).

Economicità as an objective that the company must pursue; he points out that it is not the only or ultimate aim; the institutional goals may in fact be of a non-economic nature (our rielaboration) (Masini, 1970, p. 49).

He saw profit as a means of development that enables a company not merely to maintain a static economic equilibrium (which would be achievable simply with revenue) but to become forward-looking and dynamic (our elaboration) (Amaduzzi, 1953, 178, ff.).

He wrote: “Seeing profit as it really is, as an indispensable means of ensuring the existence and development of the company, is also a way of disarming those critics who, in the name of outdated ideologies, seek to attack it from a moral standpoint, portraying it as something reprehensible” (Cassandro, 1969, p. 828).

“The best sociality lies in fact in economicità, and there is no economicità without profit” (Cassandro, 1969, p. 828).

The following eight sentences have been chosen about the value added. All these sentences highlight the importance for the azienda not only to obtain value added (considered as the result from the company viewpoint) but also and above all to allocate it to all stakeholders:

1. He pointed out, however, that although the sharing out of profits and self-financing might seem to be in conflict, since keeping back part of those profits means there is less wealth available for distribution, in actual fact this retention makes it possible to consolidate the company’s ability to generate revenue and to increase profits in the future (our elaboration) (Onida, 1968, p. 82ff.).

2. He emphasised the importance of the ethical and social aspects of policies regarding workers’ salaries in view of the fact that, in pursuit of their own development, companies cannot ignore the development of the workers as individuals (our elaboration) (Onida, 1968, p. 88).

3. “Economics actually teaches us that for businesses – as for individuals, families and countries – prosperity becomes lasting and grows when it is spread amongst others, not when it is kept from others” (Onida, 1968, p. 93).
He observed that “the company is an economic organism which, using various contractual means, takes different kinds of goods and services from the milieu in which it operates and then returns to that same milieu goods and services of greater value than the goods and services it has utilized” (Cassandro, 1972, p. 920).

This greater value, which is equivalent to the so-called added value is the so-called “economic result from the company viewpoint” (Cassandro, 1958, p. 154).

The added-value is the “social revenue” a measurement of the contribution that the company makes to the community in terms of revenue (our elaboration) (Cassandro, 1972, p. 920).

“A result concerning all the company’s workforce” (Cassandro, 1958, p. 154).

“Social revenue or objective revenue”, as opposed to business revenue or subjective revenue, which is the result that concerns the company, not the wider community (our elaboration) (Cassandro, 1972, p. 920).

All in all, the following six sentences have been chosen about the different interest around the azienda to be balanced. From these sentences, a long-term reconciliation of all interests around the azienda to achieve the long-term equilibrium and development is evident:

1. He distinguished between objective and subjective interests; the former are dictated by the need to maintain the company in a state of equilibrium and in general to be well managed; the latter, on the other hand, are those belonging to individuals or groups of individuals who work for the company or who, although external, have an interest in the position of the company in the relevant social system (Amaduzzi, 1957, pp. 13-14).

2. The subjective interests, whether internal or external to the company, can be divided into those which operate in the same direction as the objective interests (Amaduzzi, 1957, p. 57).

3. He defined the soggetto economico as including all those who have institutional interests in the company and who thus share in the common good deriving from the company’s continuing to operate. In his opinion, the interests converging in the company must create a list of priorities headed by the human being together with respect for ethical and moral values (our elaboration) (Masini, 1979, p. 8 ff.).

4. He wrote “the interests of the soggetto economico are not usually satisfied adequately in the long term when they are not moderate and adjusted in line with the interests of those collaborating in the business, including the savers who provide the equity and, in part, the debt capital” (Zappa, 1956, p. 309).

5. Within companies, particularly in the long term, he maintained that “individual interests are reconciled and, for the sake of the common good, specific self-interests are moderated” (Zappa, 1956, p. 38).

6. He broadens the concept of stakeholder to one who should “at least represent the interests both of those who provide the equity capital and of those people who, through organised activity, bring the company into being and for whom the company becomes the object of their work, in the economic sense (expectation of remuneration) and in the moral sense (the performance and enhancement of the human personality)” (Onida, 1968, p. 30).
Therefore, in addition to the social role of the company and balancing the different interests of stakeholders, the findings highlight the importance of the role of profit and the significance of added value.

As far as Economia Aziendale is concerned, profit is an indispensable precondition for the development and survival of a company; a company is based on the drive to achieve the best return on the resources available, thus preventing the destruction of wealth. Profit is the wealth that exceeds the adequate remuneration of all the resources, notional as well as real, used by the company to produce, and it is a necessary (though not the only) precondition for achieving and maintaining the long-term equilibrium of a business.

The concept and importance of “added value”, a key element in any analysis of a company’s social contribution, was also a subject on which Economia Aziendale scholars of the past had a number of observations to make.

The sharing out of wealth is subject to a series of restrictions and to potential or real conflict between the various interested parties, a problem of which the leading Italian Economia Aziendale scholars were well aware.

The key to this issue is the balance/imbalance between the dividend policy and the self-financing policy: the former is necessary to provide an adequate return on the equity capital and the latter to boost the long-term strengthening and development of the business.

In this perspective, profit and added value should represent the means to recognising the social role of the company in ways that respect the stakeholders.

6. Conclusions
The analysis carried out thus far on 20 years of works published by Italian Economia Aziendale scholars emphasised the following themes: the social role of the company, the role of profit, the concept of added value and the balancing of different interests within the company.

At the same time, the content analysis of the definitions of CSR drew attention to the relevance of doing business by following ethical values and listening to stakeholders’ instances.

In our opinion, identifying logical and conceptual similarities between the factors provided in Section 3 and these themes is possible.

The reflections on the characteristics of the company as an economic institute able to survive over time and as an open, dynamic system of forces (Zappa, 1956, 1962; Onida, 1968; Masini, 1960, 1964, 1979, 1970; Amaduzzi, 1953; Cassandro, 1967b) cannot but call to mind the concept of the company as a system of stakeholders and relationships, as well as the role that the company plays in its specific milieu and the long-term perspective. The importance of the human factor means, on the one hand, balancing different interests around business while responding to the demands of the stakeholders, and, on the other hand, acknowledging the significance of relationships with the people who come into contact with the company. It is equivalent, moreover, to having a full understanding of the role that the company plays in its specific milieu or of its contribution to the well-being of the community, while taking account of ethical principles, with a view to survival and long-term viability. Sociality, which is not an alternative to but a part of economicità, considering profit as a means to the achievement of long-term company objectives rather than as an end for company operations and planning for survival (Onida, 1968, 1954a, 1954b, 1961; Masini, 1970; Amaduzzi, 1953; Cassandro, 1969) are undoubtedly ethical principles and are consistent with the role that the company takes on within its specific milieu through the creation of value in the long term. Finally, the convergence between specific and general interests in the long term, meeting the requirements of the soggetto economico, the make-up of which varies in accordance with the number of people considered relevant (Amaduzzi, 1957; Masini, 1979; Zappa, 1956; Onida, 1968) and the
importance of added value (Onida, 1968; Cassandro, 1972, 1958) all correspond with the role of the company in its specific milieu and with its role as a creator of wealth in the long term, as well as with the equal distribution of that wealth amongst all those who, in their different ways, have contributed to producing it.

In this perspective, the possible matchings could be:

- ethical values with the social role of the company and with profit; and
- stakeholders with the balance between different interests and with added value.

In particular:

- Doing business according to ethical values is equivalent to having a full understanding of the role that the company plays in its specific milieu or of its contribution to the wellbeing of the community, while taking account of ethical principles, with a view to survival and long-term viability. It is, moreover, equivalent to considering profit as a means to the achievement of long-term company objectives and planning for survival rather than as an end for company operations. Undoubtedly, these principles are consistent with the role that the company takes on within its specific milieu through the creation of value in the long term.

- The importance of listening to the stakeholders’ demands calls to mind the convergence between specific and general interests in the long term and the importance of added value as the equal distribution of generated wealth amongst all those who, in their different ways, have contributed to producing it.

Figure 3 illustrates the links outlined above.

The analysis carried out so far, in addition to contribute to the lacking literature about the historical origins of CSR, suggests that the teachings of the Italian Economia Aziendale scholars can offer a potentially valuable contribution to the actual international debate on CSR. This contribution can be summarised as follows:

- First, the Italian Economia Aziendale teachings, particularly those concerning the role of the company, propose an ethical approach to CSR theory. Strategic considerations (Donaldson and Preston, 1995; Porter and Kramer, 2006; Husted and Allen, 2000) are
secondary. Therefore, the advantages in terms of revenue and/or reputation have to be considered a natural consequence of behaviour based on principles of a moral nature and not goals in themselves.

- Second, Italian *Economia Aziendale* ideas regarding the role of profit suggest the possibility of an important, new, alternative approach to CSR, in which ethics and the related social responsibility do not represent an added cost for a company. Complete economicità means sustainable profit, and profit of this kind can never be considered an obstacle to efficiency or profitability. The apparent conflict between social and economic issues (Spence, 2007) and performance is thus seen to be spurious.

- Finally, Italian *Economia Aziendale* teachings, especially those regarding the reconciliation of different interests, suggest that, in the long term, absolute harmony between shareholders and other stakeholders (Signori and Rusconi, 2009) is dependent on the survival and development of the company. This is the primary goal, and it has to be shared by everybody.

Ultimately, the various conclusions drawn from this study of Italian *Economia Aziendale* suggest that long-term vision and a normative approach to CSR, based on ethics rather than on strategic aspects (Donaldson and Preston, 1995; Porter and Kramer, 2006; Husted and Allen, 2000), might be the way to tackle and resolve some of the issues raised in recent international debates on CSR (Aguinis and Glavas, 2012).

**Note**

1. There is no direct English translation with the same meaning as the Italian term *Economia Aziendale*, so we decided to use the Italian term. It has been translated elsewhere as “Business Administration” “Accounting” or “Management”, *Economia aziendale* represents a different concept. It is the unitary approach to the analysis of the azienda, for which all different aspects, elements and phenomena are considered in their systemic relationships (Onida, 1951). It is based on the unitary view of the azienda, which leads to a holistic approach to articulate a unitary economic discipline. The word azienda could be translated into “entity”, but in the tradition of the Italian *Economia Aziendale*, the azienda is seen as a system. It is not identified with the owners, the capital, the assets, the people taking part in it or with the contracts or the relationships among its components, but rather it is an autonomous and real entity composed of all these elements and the relationships among them.

**References**

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Further reading


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