

Preface

I first became interested in the role of business in society when I studied for a Masters in law at the University of Sheffield in 2004–5. Coming from a German legal background, I was particularly intrigued by the differences in the regulation of companies in English law and German law, compounded by discussions I had with Andrew Johnston during that year. Following the LLM, I qualified as a German lawyer and looked at companies from a rather practical legal perspective, until 2008, when I was given the opportunity to run the LLB Law with German degree course at Sheffield.

In the meantime, the new Companies Act 2006 had been enacted. Its underlying enlightened shareholder value theory caught my interest; moreover, the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) had gained prominence in the public debate. When I returned to the issue of the regulation of companies and the relationship of the company with its various stakeholders, I noticed that there was a substantive body of literature on CSR in international law and in socio-legal studies. Upon reflection, I wondered what the contribution of private law could be to the promotion of CSR. I felt that the literature on CSR and the law had, so far, largely neglected the role of private law in relation to CSR and as a consequence became particularly interested in the role of law for the promotion of CSR in global supply chains. Recent disasters such as the collapse of the Rana Plaza Building demonstrate the significance of responsible corporate conduct in global supply chains. This book reflects this interest as it moves the perspective from CSR more generally to its particular application in the context of global supply chains.

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