

Economic Development and Cultural Change: The Role of Multinational Enterprises in Mexico's Emerging Dual Economy (1970s to 2000s)

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1. Introduction

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 calls for the promotion of “sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”. In the context of this Special Issue, which emphasises the private sector’s role in achieving SDG 8, this article focuses on multinational enterprises (MNEs) in Mexico. MNEs can be defined as enterprises that engage in foreign direct investment and own or control value-added activities in more than one country (Dunning and Lundan 2008, p. 3). Historians, economic, political, and social scientists consider Mexico an important example of a country that radically shifted the main responsibility of economic development from government to private business. During the 1980s, in the midst of an economic and financial crisis, state intervention was drastically reduced by liberalising markets, privatising state-owned companies, and cutting industrial policies. MNEs were given a crucial role, as they were supposed to bring capital and know-how to Mexico, boosting competitiveness and employment in the context of world market integration (Dussel Peters 2000; Moreno-Brid and Ros 2009; O’Toole 2010; Urquidi 2005; Schneider 2009).

From an SDG 8 perspective, the overall results of this “business-led”¹ economic development are rather disappointing (Carrillo et al. 2012b; Dussel Peters 2003; Moreno-Brid and Ros 2009; Viñuales and Langer 2012). Despite a soaring number of manufactured exports, the average GDP growth per capita was only 1.5% between 1990 and 2005, and has not considerably accelerated since then (see Figures 1 and 2).

¹ Schneider 2009 argues that since the 1980s, due to the dominance of a small number of domestic and foreign corporations, development in Mexico and other Latin American countries has been neither state- nor market-led.

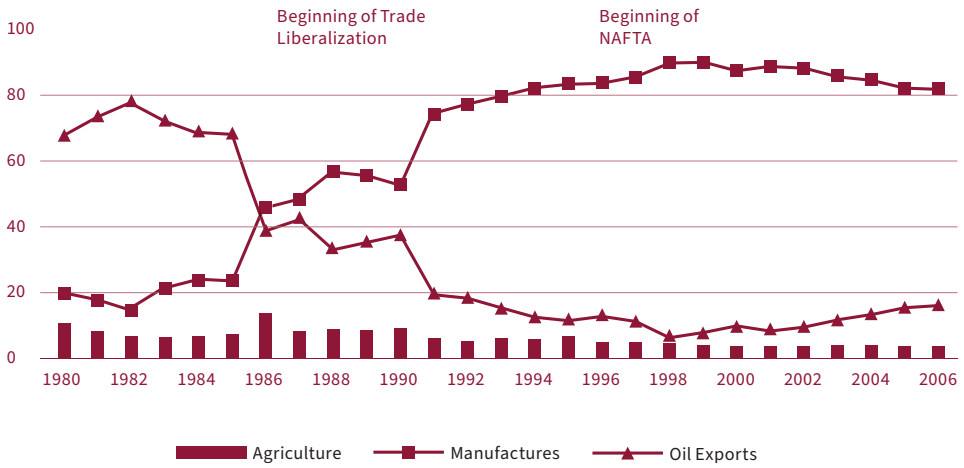


Figure 1. Composition of total exports, Mexico 1980–2006 (%). Source: (Moreno-Brid et al. 2009, p. 160).

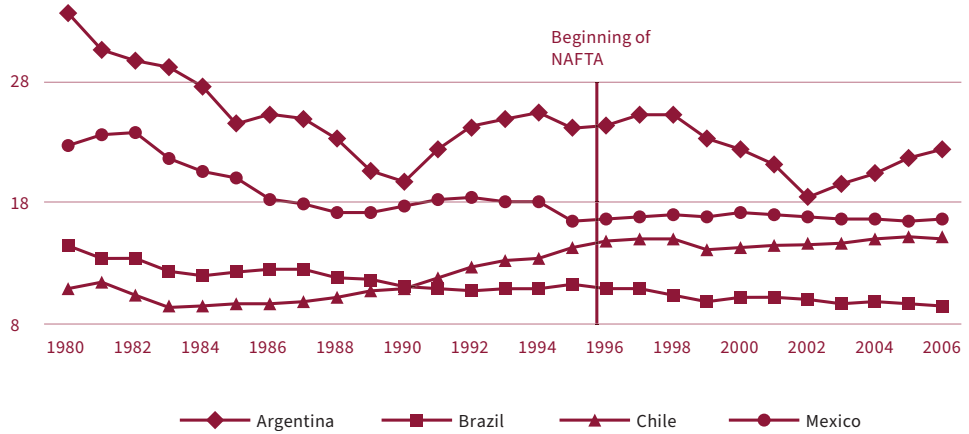


Figure 2. Mexico and other countries: real GDP per capita (relative to the USA) 1980–2006 (USA GDP per capita = 100, measured in constant 2000 US\$) Source: (Moreno-Brid et al. 2009, p. 162).

The GDP growth per capita has proved insufficient to provide for enough employment, let alone decent work. The informal sector, with its precarious working conditions, keeps growing.² However, these figures conceal important differences within Mexico's economy. For instance, the automotive, electronics, and aerospace industries have flourished and largely realised what liberal reforms had promised: dominated by mainly foreign MNEs,³ they have grown in output and productivity, created jobs with relatively good working conditions for middle- and high-skilled personnel, and have integrated Mexico into global value chains (GVCs).⁴ Thanks to its manufacturing exports, Mexico has reduced its vulnerability to commodity prices, which makes it a positive exception in Latin America (OECD 2009, pp. 68–73, and Cadestin et al. 2016, p. 192). This “globalised Mexico” contrasts starkly with the one described above, which is further characterised by domestic market orientation and the prevalence of micro, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSME) (see Table 1 for a statistical comparison). Therefore, many authors speak of a “dual economy” (Moreno-Brid and Ros 2009, p. 187; Pozas 2006, p. 78; Villavicencio 2012, p. 37).⁵

This article provides an analysis of the emergence of this dual economy in the context of globalisation from the 1970s to the 2000s. From a business and economic history perspective, it depicts MNEs' transformation from sceptically viewed outsiders to the economic engines and normative role models of globalising Mexico. The concept of embeddedness helps analytically grasp this transformation. In line with a business and economic history after the cultural turn, (Berghoff and Vogel 2004), it emphasises the manifold contingencies of economic activity—cognitive, normative, institutional, and therefore cultural in the widest sense (Dequech 2003, pp. 461–70). Like in any other realm of the social world, in the economy, actors' interests and the ways in which they pursue them can be better understood and explained if connected to the underlying cognitive and normative ideas, and the formal and informal rules that characterise a cultural collective.⁶

² For historical figures, see (Moreno-Brid and Ros 2009, pp. 261–78; Ros 2008, p. 538). For more recent development see (OECD 2019).

³ On the emergence of Mexico-based MNEs, see: (Andonova and Mauricio 2018; Hoshino 2013; Lessard and Lucea 2009; Pozas 2002; Santiso 2013).

⁴ For working conditions in MNEs, see: (Bensusán et al. 2018; Bensusán and Carrillo 2017; Carrillo et al. 2012b). For an analysis of MNEs' structural importance in Mexico, see (Schneider 2009).

⁵ For the description of the same phenomenon, Schneider (2009) coined the term hierarchical market economy.

⁶ For a critical analysis of this approach, see (Schmid 2008, pp. 73–103). For my own understanding of the cultural contingency of economic activity, see (Gertschen 2013, pp. 37–43).

Table 1. Measuring employment in Mexico’s “dual economy”.

	Foreign MNE Subsidiaries		Mexican MNEs		Non-MNEs	
	2009	2014	2009	2014	2009	2014
People employed						
	889,044	921,878	45,057	31,433	3,726,961	4,120,121
Comment by the authors	Informal hiring is, in MNEs, three times lower than in non-MNEs, and there is a greater tendency towards the formalisation of employment with MNEs.					
Union Membership of employees (in %; no distinction between Foreign and Mexican MNEs)						
Yes	25	25	25	25	11	10
No	73	73	73	73	87	89
Do not know	2	2	2	2	2	2
Working hours per week (in %)						
0–14	0	0	0	0	0.6	0.7
15–24	0.3	0.8	0	0	1.7	2.4
25–34	2.2	3.9	0.4	2.3	3	4.9
35–39	4.9	8.3	3.3	1.5	4.1	5.4
40–48	58.6	61.6	84.1	53.6	62.7	52.5
49–56	28.1	17	11	21.2	16.5	17.1
More	5.9	8.4	1.2	21.4	11.4	17
	100	100	100	100	100	100
Incomes (per month, in Mexican Pesos)						
Average of salaried workers directly linked to production, sales, or providing services	7109	7847	7803	9649	5179	6559
Average of administrative, accounting and management employees	19,418	22,091	21,752	20,433	13,971	15,803
Average of company’s contribution to social security	1360	1704	1454	2475	929	1149
Average of other social benefits	1015	1327	1306	1085	646	1040
Average of profits distributed to workers (annual)	5229	7814	3500	12,114	3270	4899
Comment by the authors	Wage tendency is decreasing in MNEs and non-MNEs; particularly backward in the administrative staff that work in Mexican MNEs.					

MNEs: multinational enterprises. Source: Author; data from (Bensusán and Carrillo 2017; Bensusán et al. 2018).

In this vein, Mexico's dual economy and globalisation are considered economic and cultural phenomena. There is empirical evidence for a positive correlation between economic development and MNE subsidiaries' integration. Local supplier or provider relationships, collaborations with education and research institutions, or initiatives to foment local competitiveness have allowed for an industrial upgrading of both the subsidiaries' activities and the socio-economic environment in Mexico (Carrillo et al. 2012a, 2012b). The concept of embeddedness suggests that such economic processes occur in an interplay with cultural change, which in turn refers to a notion of sustainable development that goes beyond the improvement of efficiency and consistency in natural resources management and encapsulates a cultural transformation (Schneidewind 2018). Therefore, this article follows two lines of argument: MNEs' enhanced economic and normative relevance was bound to cooperation with local actors; and this cooperation required a cognitive and normative understanding, as well as rules that made actors' behaviour reliable and legitimate. The study does not aim to generate insights on SDG 8 per se, but on historical changes that brought the globalised and MNE-led part of Mexico's economy closer to achieving this goal than the majority of the country's businesses.

2. Materials and Methods

In order to depict and analyse the interplay of economic and cultural change, which led to the globalised part of Mexico's dual economy, we reconstruct business people's discourses on enterprises' social responsibility (CSR) and total quality management (TQM). CSR discourse, which emerged in Mexico in the 1960s (Gertschen 2017), helps us to understand business people's perceptions of the social context, of their legitimacy vis-à-vis society, as well as their interest and efforts to establish trustful relationships with employees and other local stakeholders. Legitimacy and trust surge from shared cognitive and normative ideas, and institutions. They are considered indispensable for a company's licence to operate in a specific society (Gertschen 2017, pp. 528–30).⁷ TQM spread rapidly and globally during the 1980s and particularly the 1990s. According to it, human beings are the main source of errors, and eliminating these errors is possible if companies enhance control of processes and products by statistical means on the one side and workers' involvement on the other. By emphasising the "human factor", TQM advanced the idea that

⁷ For sociological contributions to these terms and their interrelatedness, see Maurer and Schimank 2008. For an important contribution by business history, see (Berghoff 2004).

culture has a decisive impact on cooperation within and outside the company, and on competitiveness (Laboucheix 1992; Wilkinson and Willmott 1995).⁸ Neither CSR nor TQM discourses signify actual change towards decent work and other aspects of SDG 8. Used heuristically, they serve to reconstruct the (cultural) change of business people's cognitive and normative ideas, and concomitant rules of cooperation, which enabled MNEs' increasing embeddedness in Mexico.

For the reconstruction of the two discourses, written and oral statements of both domestic business people and MNE representatives were considered.⁹ This allowed for distinguishing between the local context and MNEs, even though domestic business people represent only an (important) fraction of this context. The statements were gathered with a qualitative mixed-methods approach (Diekmann 2014). The main sources are documents of the Mexican Centre for Philanthropy (Centro Mexicano para la Filantropía, CEMEFI), the Social Union of Mexican Businessmen (Unión Social de Empresarios de México, USEM), and the Mexican Total Quality Foundation (Fundación Mexicana para la Calidad Total, FMCT).¹⁰ They played crucial roles in CSR and TQM discourses, produced a considerable amount of publications, and connected domestic business and MNEs in terms of ideas and people. The latter holds particularly true for the CEMEFI and FMCT, which collaborated closely with foreign MNE subsidiaries. In order to better reconstruct the MNE perspective, documents from the U.S. American Chamber of Commerce in Mexico (Amcham), the Switzerland-based MNEs Nestlé and Ciba-Geigy (as of 1996, Novartis), and their respective subsidiaries Compañía de Nestlé S.A. (CONESA) and Ciba-Geigy Mexicana (CIGEMEX) were considered.¹¹ Because written statements regarding the two subsidiaries and the 1990s (due to archival restrictions)

⁸ For an assessment of TQM in a historical perspective of management thought, see (Bonazzi 2014, ch. 7; Witzel 2012, ch. 10).

⁹ Methodologically, we focused on people with executive responsibility on the company or sectorial level (such as members of an executive committee, board of directors, or representatives of business associations), and on two different kinds of statements: public statements to foster corporate legitimacy and trustworthiness with society, and internal statements referring to this business discourse.

¹⁰ The CEMEFI operates in Mexico City; a library with archival material (henceforth indicated as CEMEFI). The national Confederación USEM, also headquartered in Mexico City, has neither an archive nor a library. However, on eight occasions between 2014 and 2017, the author was allowed to access then General Director Germán Araujo's personal library (henceforth Conf. USEM). The FMCT does not exist anymore. Its publications were retrieved from public libraries in Mexico City or provided by José Giral, former FMCT president, whom the author interviewed in Mexico City on 11 April 2016.

¹¹ Amcham documents are all publications and therefore publicly accessible. Some documents on Nestlé, CONESA, Ciba-Geigy, and CIGEMEX stem from the respective company archive Archives historiques Nestlé (henceforth AHN) and Firmenarchiv der Novartis AG (henceforth FAN).

are scarce, on an Oral History basis (Obertreis 2012), semi-structured interviews with two former chief executives of CONESA and CIGEMEX were conducted.¹² Amcham represents the historically most important foreign MNE subsidiaries. CONESA (food) and CIGEMEX (chemicals, pharmaceuticals) are highly relevant for our topic due to their size, the sensitivity of their sectors, and their uninterrupted presence in Mexico during the period of investigation. Even though this sample is not representative of MNEs in Mexico, it allows one to illustrate, question, and qualify conclusions based on statements from the CEMEFI, FMCT and USEM, which were representative carriers of CSR and TQM discourses, respectively.

3. Results

3.1. *Enhanced Legitimacy through Denationalised CSR Discourse and a Changing Economic and Political Context (1970s and 1980s)*

MNEs have been engines of globalising capitalism for centuries (Chandler and Mazlish 2005; Dunning and Lundan 2008; Jones 2005). However, in the context of the 1960s, marked by decolonisation, popular conscience about the gap between “developed” and “underdeveloped” countries, as well as U.S. hegemony in many parts of the world, they started attracting considerable political and academic attention at an international level. Most MNEs were headquartered in the U.S., for which they were considered an expression of U.S. dominance and a challenge to national interests (Bair 2009; Hajduk 2013; Maurel 2011; Oliveiro 2010).¹³ Such scepticism was usually mixed with positive considerations on MNEs’ impact in terms of investments, technology transfer, and employment. Mexico was the case in point. Harvard economist Raymond Vernon, who had a considerable impact on the international debate with his 1971 book *Sovereignty at Bay*,¹⁴ had started working on the topic with the example of Mexico. His 1963 book *The Dilemma of Mexico’s Development*¹⁵ was about policies that enabled a developing country in need of capital and technology from abroad to overcome contradictions between foreign and particularly MNEs’ interests with

¹² Carlos Eduardo Repesas, born in Mexico City in 1945, was CONESA’s CEO (1983–1994) and chairman (1983–2004). He was interviewed in Mexico City on 27 April 2017 and 18 May 2018. Peter Reinartz, born in Puebla in 1946, was director of the agricultural division (1979–1983), CEO and chairman of CIGEMEX (1989–1996), and chairman of Novartis México (1997–2000). He was interviewed in Querétaro on 6 May 2017.

¹³ Additionally in countries like France; see (Servan-Schreiber 1967).

¹⁴ (Vernon 1971).

¹⁵ (Vernon 1963). See also (Vernon 1964).

those of the host country. In 1980, another U.S. American scholar wrote that Mexico had found a middle-way between restricting and attracting MNEs, and inspired many other developing countries (Sigmund 1980, p. 48).¹⁶ This positive conclusion did not represent a consensus.¹⁷ However, a common opinion in both the academic and political debate was that MNEs were a powerful and growing phenomenon, which had to be investigated and regulated. This sceptical stance reflected a crisis of legitimacy of global capitalism in Mexico and around the world. During the 1970s, which saw the end of the post-war economic “miracle”, this crisis reached its turning point, from which one can reconstruct MNEs’ changing economic and cultural role in Mexico.

Mexico’s leftist president Luís Echeverría (1970–1976) was one of the most important champions of the New International Economic Order, which was promoted by Third World countries and aimed at strengthening governments’ role in the world economy, for instance through major control of MNEs by their host countries (Bair 2009, p. 350; Burke 2012, p. 440).¹⁸ Echeverría’s government introduced or changed several laws with the same purpose, provoking confrontations with Amcham. For some time, the president had the support or sympathy of an important part of Mexican business. MNEs’ resources exceeded by far those of the mostly small- and medium-sized domestic enterprises. This induced concerns even with those businesses that did not compete directly with them. Moreover, since World War II, U.S. corporations had greatly expanded in the manufacturing and consumer goods sectors. Their products and marketing methods influenced consumer behaviour, for which they had a broader impact on Mexican society than the previously arrived corporations from extraction sectors.¹⁹ Domestic businessmen criticised this as undermining Mexican culture. They felt under increasing social and political pressure themselves. Since the 1960s, USEM, an association of businessmen inspired by Catholic social teaching (CST), had developed a discourse on business’s role in society. It organised public events directed at the business community and society at large, invited labour and government representatives, and participated in an

¹⁶ The country’s importance in academic research is shown by further international contemporary contributions such as (Baumer and Gleich 1982; Fajnzylber and Tarrago 1976; Iffland and Galland 1978; Krook 1976; Matthies 1977; Montavon 1979; Newfarmer and Mueller 1975).

¹⁷ Moreover, domestic scholars deemed MNEs too influential, and claimed they gained more from Mexico than they provided. See for instance (Aguilera 1975; Bernal 1976; Chapoy Bonifaz 1975; Sepúlveda et al. 1974).

¹⁸ For an overview of Echeverría’s presidency, see (Schmidt 1991).

¹⁹ For the expansion of U.S. corporations in Mexico, see (Moreno 2003; O’Brien 1999; Rosenberg 1982).

international circulation of CSR ideas, notably the one run by the International Christian Union of Business Executives (UNIAPAC). This CSR discourse was critical of global capitalism and promoted the idea of companies as humanist, family-like, patriarchal communities. For both economic interests and cultural motives, Mexican businessmen viewed MNEs with suspicion.²⁰

However, the impression that the government became ever more hostile to private business made a growing number of them change their view of MNEs. Concerns about socialism increasingly outweighed such about national values and interests. Big Mexican corporations cooperated with foreign MNEs to both fight Echeverría's policies and denationalise CSR discourse. In 1975, they set up the powerful umbrella association Consejo Coordinador Empresarial (Luna and Tirado 1992), which adopted CST-inspired CSR discourse, but swiftly excluded the question of a company's national origin from it. Social legitimacy should no longer be nationally connoted (Gertschen 2017, pp. 546–53).²¹ For its part, Amcham criticised an “unprecedented attack” on “free enterprise” in Mexico and around the world.²² It launched a so-called communication program to convey the benefits that U.S. MNEs brought to Mexico. It conducted opinion surveys, published articles, awarded prizes to socially beneficial business practices among its members, invested in a program for young entrepreneurs, and consulted corporations on new issues such as “public services” and “public relations” (Amcham 1974a, 1974b, 1977). In 1977, five years after launching the program, Amcham conceded that up to that time, most members had “lived by the maxim ‘The business of business is business.’ Low profile and non-involvement were the passwords” (Amcham 1977, p. 35). It is hard to gauge the impact of the program, aimed at establishing or improving relationships with a variety of stakeholders. The experiences of Nestlé's subsidiary (CONESA)²³ and of

²⁰ For business' CSR discourse in Mexico during the 1960s and 1970s, see (Gertschen 2017).

²¹ On the cooperation between domestic big business and foreign MNEs, see also (Arriola 1976; Basáñez 1991, pp. 196, 219).

²² See the Amcham president's statement in (Loretta 1973, p. 13).

²³ The Nestlé executive board was well aware of the “quite exceptional” fact that CONESA remained completely foreign-owned (Swiss) when many MNE subsidiaries were forced to open up to Mexican capital, and that this was due to the close relationship between CONESA's president José Represas (father of Carlos Eduardo, see footnote 12) and the presidents Echeverría and López Portillo. See the letter by executive board member Carl L. Angst to his board colleague Camillo Pagano of 17 October 1980, in: AHN, NES C1.5/1700-93. For an appreciation of Represas' extraordinary political skilfulness by his superior in Vevey, see the “Lettre-circulaire” addressed to all general directors in Latin America by Pagano of 20 October 1976, in: AHN, NES C1.5/1700-8. Meetings with López Portillo, which demonstrate Represas' political standing beyond Echeverría's administration, are mentioned in

Ciba-Geigy Mexicana (CIGEMEX)²⁴ suggest that in the de facto one-party regime of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), relations with the administration and particularly the president remained paramount. Therefore, MNEs' quest for legitimacy was decisively facilitated by the change of presidency. Echeverría's successor José López Portillo (1976–1982) saw a political benefit in improved rather than strained relations with domestic and foreign business.

Moreover, in Switzerland, Nestlé and Ciba-Geigy were confronted with stakeholders—and the public at large—that viewed them with increasing scepticism.²⁵ With Nestlé, this concerned mainly the corporation's role in Third World countries; with Ciba-Geigy the ecological effects of chemical production and social implications of rising medicine prices in developed countries must also be noted.²⁶ Therefore, their subsidiaries' quest for legitimacy in Mexico was part of an effort of the whole group to cope with changing societal conditions and expectations (Gertschen 2019). However, in the case of Mexico, it is plausible that political and economic conditions again were more important factors for the further improvement of MNEs' status. In autumn 1982, the government had to declare default and thus triggered a debt crisis which would soon have global repercussions. In 1985, after failed attempts to stabilise the country within the traditional state-interventionist scheme, president Miguel de la Madrid (1982–1988) started liberalising the economy. However, only his successor Carlos Salinas (1988–1994) abandoned the regime's revolutionary discourse, which equated government with the state, and the state with society. He postulated

the minutes of CONESA's executive board meeting of 20 May 1977, 15 March 1978, and 11 September 1978, in: AHN, NES C1.5/1700-4.

²⁴ Furthermore, in the mid-1980s, when the government was in a much weaker position due to economic and financial problems, and its rhetoric on MNEs was no longer antagonistic, CIGEMEX considered itself "extremely vulnerable [...] due to the political nature" of its agrochemical and pharmaceutical business. Quote from general director J. P. Scott in Issue Management Committee, Minutes of the Meeting of the IMC 3-1985, 8 May 1985, in: FAN, Ciba-Geigy Mexicana, Korrespondenz Divisionen und Dritte, 1986, Akten Dr. S. Schmid, RD 06.07.01. Accordingly, even at a time when the regime's grip on society was beginning to ease, the only addressees of PR activities were authorities; see the document "Major problems and opportunities 1987/1988—Key projects", in: FAN, Ciba-Geigy Mexicana, "Korrespondenz Divisionen und Dritte", 1987, Akten Dr. S. Schmid, RD 06.07.01.

²⁵ According to Kuhn, the emergence of a Third World discourse in Switzerland during the late 1960s and early 1970s was inextricably linked with the rising criticism of MNEs based in the country. See (Kuhn 2012, pp. 278–81; Kuhn 2009, pp. 115–20). An important contribution from a business history perspective is (Pitteloud 2019, esp. ch. 7 and 8).

²⁶ The most famous and best researched case is the campaign against Nestlé's infant formula business, see (Kalt 2009, 2010; Sasson 2016; Sethi 1994). A general account of Ciba-Geigy and Novartis, which tackles the shrinking social legitimacy of Ciba-Geigy and the chemical industry in general, is provided in (König 2016). An insightful journalistic contribution is (Bürgi and Imfeld 2004).

that national sovereignty and development could and should no longer be only the government's responsibility. Civil society and business mattered, too, especially in the context of globalisation in which competitiveness was as vital for sovereignty as territorial control.²⁷ In this vein, Salinas' (neo-)liberal discourse justified an important—and lasting—shift in power relations. Before the crisis, MNEs had to demonstrate their social responsibility and trustworthiness to be allowed to operate in Mexico. Afterwards, the burden of proof was reversed. It was the country and particularly its government that needed to be endorsed. An MNE like Nestlé actually did so, affirming in newspaper ads that it was “a good moment to invest in Mexico”.²⁸ With president de la Madrid, Mexico's sheer necessity improved MNEs' status; with president Salinas, it was their depiction as symbols of development and competitiveness.

3.2. *Enhanced Competitiveness by Adapting to and Shaping Society (1980s and 1990s)*

MNEs were not ready to live up to these high expectations from the start. Their subsidiaries had grown used to protectionism. Most of them had been established to circumvent trade barriers and serve the Mexican market, not to compete internationally. The depressed domestic market and increased import competition put both Mexican and foreign businesses under enormous pressure.²⁹ Being part of an MNE provided foreign subsidiaries with more resources than domestic companies, but also exposed them to increasing competition within the group. Like other MNEs, Nestlé and Ciba-Geigy wanted to benefit from trade liberalisation by serving different national markets from centralised production units, thus realising economies of scale.³⁰ The North American Free Trade Agreement,

²⁷ On Salinas' neoliberal “reinvention” of Mexico, see (O'Toole 2010, chp. 2 and 4).

²⁸ “Si en 1930 Nestlé tuvo confianza en México, ahora con más razón”, *“Informador”*, 24 September 1986, p. 9A.

²⁹ For accounts of CONESA's struggle, see the minutes of the board of directors meeting of 28 July 1981, and the letter of then-General Director C.E. Represas to José Daniel, member of Nestlé group's executive board, of 28 February 1984, both in: AHN, NES C1.5/1700-4. For difficulties of chemical and pharmaceutical companies, including Ciba-Geigy, see the interview with P. Reinartz on 6 May 2017. de la Garza (1999) provides a more general account of the radical restructuring of Mexico's manufacturing industry during the 1980s and 1990s.

³⁰ This meant for instance that former CIGEMEX products could be supplied by Ciba-Geigy U.S.A. See Agricultural Division, Major problems and opportunities 1987/1988, in: FAN, Ciba-Geigy Mexicana, Korrespondenz Divisionen und Dritte, 1987, Akten Dr. S. Schmid, RD 06.07.01. For respective efforts by Nestlé in Europe and North America, see the annual reports of 1990, p. 7, and of 1991, pp. 6–7. According to (Bielschowsky and Stumpo 1995), Mexico's foreign trade was decisively boosted by intrafirm trade of MNEs.

which entered into force on 1 January, 1994, decisively added to this context. During the second half of the 1980s and the 1990s, CIGEMEX made great efforts to improve productivity and quality. It introduced TQM, flexibilised labour relations, and reduced the workforce.³¹ With CONESA, a similar process occurred.³² It seems plausible that the integration into the global market boosted awareness that MNE subsidiaries relied on a competitive and cooperative environment, if they were to prosper. In their internal and external communication, CIGEMEX and CONESA depicted their efforts to become more competitive as part of a national effort.³³ During the 1990s, CIGEMEX launched several collaborative projects aimed to fight lepra (partnering with government), to promote the responsible disposal of toxic waste and help improve laboratory safety at universities, or to promote ecological technology innovation (partnering with various academic institutions).³⁴ According to then-CEO Peter Reinartz, they improved relations with stakeholders, because they were based on a real and shared interest. Only one was a mere “marketing gimmick”.³⁵

³¹ See 3rd Quarter Review 1986, section 1 “Major Aspects and Outstanding Issues for Parent Company’s Attention”, in: FAN, NoAr, Regionsdienste, CIGEMEX, Protokoll MC 23 June 1986, RD 06.07.01; the confidential report by R. H. Muhr on his Mexico trip, dated 25 November 1986, in: FAN, Ciba-Geigy Mexicana, Korrespondenz Divisionen und Dritte, 1987, Akten Dr. S. Schmid, RD 06.07.01; and the comments on TQM by the responsible for Latin America at group level in El Dr. Rolf A Meyer acompaña a la representación suiza . . . , in: Imagen, ed. by Ciba-Geigy Mexicana, August 1995, pp. 6–7. General Director P. Reinartz wrote of “painful decisions” that had to be taken, see Editorial, in: Imagen, ed. by Ciba-Geigy Mexicana, November 1993, p. 3.

³² Interview with C.E. Represas on 18 May 2018.

³³ Illustrative of this framing is, for instance, *Los mexicanos también hacemos calidad total*, in: Imagen, ed. by Ciba-Geigy Mexicana, November/December 1989, p. 15.—CONESA was a founding member and C.E. Represas a board member of the below described *Fundación Mexicana para la Calidad Total (FMCT)*, and both CONESA and CIGEMEX participated in TQM events; see *Calidad Total, Monografías 7*, ed. by FMCT, México D.F. 1991; *El Hombre y la Calidad, V intercambio internacional (advertisement)*, “*Informador*”, 25 February 1990, p. 9A; *XIX Congreso Nacional de Control de Calidad (adv.)*, “*Informador*”, 8.9.1991, p. 3A; *Primera Cruzada Jalisco por la Calidad (adv.)*, “*Informador*”, 20 October 1999, p. 2G.

³⁴ For the lepra project, see *Sigue la colaboración del Fondo Ciba Contra la Lepra*, in: Imagen, ed. by Ciba-Geigy Mexicana, August 1996, p. 4; *Se ha registrado reducción en la incidencia de lepra*, “*Informador*”, 17 October 1996, p. 11A. Ciba-Geigy had set up a fund to fight lepra in ten countries during the 1980s; see (Bürgi and Imfeld 2004), p. 188. For the project on ecological technology innovation, see *Premio Ciba de Innovación Tecnológica en Ecología*, in: Imagen, ed. by Ciba-Geigy Mexicana, October 1993, pp. 3–4; *Se entregó el III Premio Ciba . . .*, in: Imagen, ed. by Ciba-Geigy Mexicana, May 1996, pp. 10–11. For the project on the disposal of toxic waste, improved laboratory safety, and traineeships to students, see the interview with P. Reinartz on 7 May 2017.

³⁵ P. Reinartz on an epilepsy campaign during these years to win doctors’ favour. Interview with P. Reinartz on 7 May 2017.

CONESA had established comparable collaborations already in previous decades, and continued corresponding efforts.³⁶

Business CSR and TQM discourses demonstrate that intensified relations between MNE subsidiaries and their local environment, and the concomitant interplay of economic cooperation and cultural change, were a more general phenomenon closely connected to global market integration. Already during the 1970s, carriers of CSR discourse had promoted the positive interrelatedness of social responsibility, productivity, and quality. Andrés Marcelo Sada (born in 1930) was arguably most important in voicing that the company be “humanistic for both its proper and for social interest” (Sada 1978, p. 3).³⁷ He was a founding member of USEM’s chapter in Monterrey, and headed the chemical company Celulosa y Derivados S.A. (CYDSA). CYDSA was part of the “Grupo Monterrey”—an ensemble of corporations based in Northern Mexico’s industrial centre owned by a few intermarried families with multiple relations with foreign MNEs as clients, suppliers or joint venture partners.³⁸ According to the human resources director of a Grupo Monterrey company, who held a speech about workers’ participation at USEM Monterrey in 1975, internationalisation made workers’ reality “more similar to that of the European than to the average Mexican worker” (Valdés 1976, p. 15). The automotive industry, dominated by U.S. and European corporations, was paramount for the introduction of new technical and social norms in Mexico.³⁹ As of the early 1980s, MNE subsidiaries started applying standards and processes of statistical control and continuous improvement of quality, and soon requested the same from their providers (Gutiérrez 1992, p. 61).⁴⁰

³⁶ In the interviews on 26 April 2017 and 12 May 2018, C.E. Repesas claimed that CONESA had focused on creating value for both the company and society since its establishment in the 1930s. Nestlé has sustained this claim with many publications, such as “An illustration of Nestlé’s role in developing countries: Example of the State of Chiapas, Mexico”, excerpt of the report of Rémy Montavon, Geneva 1972, and *Ganadería lechera en el trópico húmedo de México. Experiencia de una década en la Chontalpa, Compañía Nestlé S.A., México D.F.* 1986. CONESA’s continued efforts to foster good relationships with its environment are documented by (Montavon 1994; Soberón et al. 1995, pp. 17–18). However, there was also criticism that such efforts were not successful or only intended for the company’s benefit. See for instance (Bertolami 1983); *Convention d’actionnaires* (probably 1985); (Harrisson 1982).

³⁷ For one of his many public contributions on the topic, see also his opening speech at the First International Symposium on Productivity, and Quality of Working Life in Monterrey in 1979; see (Sada 1980).

³⁸ On CYDSA and the Grupo Monterrey in general, see (Montavon 1979; Cerutti 2000; Flores 2000; Pozas 2002).

³⁹ For an overview see (Gereffi 2003; Humphrey et al. 2000). On the change of labour relations in particular, see (Luján Uranga 2011; Pries 2000).

⁴⁰ The importance of the car industry is also stressed in (Calidad Total 1990; Gutiérrez 1991, p. 260).

The Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITESM), a university of applied sciences founded by the Grupo Monterrey, established the “Centro de Calidad” in 1982. Two years later, in cooperation with Ford, the ITESM launched a program to build up TQM capacities in the whole of Mexico’s automotive industry; later it was also incorporated in the chemical, metal manufacturing and service industries (Gutiérrez 1992, pp. 63, 279).⁴¹ In the same context of enhanced global market integration and competition, USEM Monterrey held two major conferences on CSR in the light of supply chains and stressed the importance of improved relations with workers, trade unions, suppliers, and even competitors (Farias Arizpe 1985, p. 5; Ardavín 1987).

The creation of the foundation FMCT in 1987, and the establishment and subsequent reevaluation of the National Quality Award (Premio Nacional de la Calidad) between 1986 and 1989, were milestones of TQM discourse.⁴² At least half of the 22 founding members of the FMCT, and most of the Award winners, were MNE subsidiaries or suppliers of such corporations.⁴³ The FMCT mission was “to boost and promote a Total Quality culture in Mexico, adequate to our context” (Gutiérrez 1991, p. 262). Precisely this context was seen as the greatest challenge. Julio Gutiérrez, the first FMCT president, acknowledged that “the tools and technologies of quality are useful and important. But the Foundation considers that they are insufficient to render the country really competitive.” Overcoming “obsolete beliefs” was needed, such as considering criticism as a lack of respect for the superiors, formal authority as always being right, the foreign as always being superior, or Mexicans as unable to work in groups (Gutiérrez 1991, pp. 264–65). In this quest for cultural change and economic success, history was evoked. FMCT director Joaquín Peón resorted to a famous anthropologist’s thesis of the two Mexicos that had existed since the

⁴¹ For the introduction of TQM measures in a Grupo Monterrey company as of the 1970s, see the speech by CYDSA chairman Andrés Marcelo Sada in *Calidad Total 1991*, Monografías 6.

⁴² The FMCT organised conferences, published “*Calidad Total*” (with the edition lines “Casos”, “Monografías”, and “Perspectivas”), and pushed the government for rehauling the National Quality Award launched in 1986. See the latter on Agustín Portal, of the Ministry of Commerce and Industrial Promotion, in: (*Calidad Total 1991*, Monografías 6, pp. 1–2).

⁴³ Among the founding members, Alcatel Indetel, Celanese Mexicana, Hewlett-Packard de México, Industrias Resistol, Unión Carbide Mexicana were MNEs. Suppliers were for sure: Alfa Corporativo, Conductores Latincasa, CYDSA, Grupo Condumex, Metalsa, Vitro Bienes de Capital. This does not exclude that among the following members there were more MNE subsidiaries or suppliers: Banamex, Celloprint, Cía. Industrial San Cristóbal, Consultoría en Productividad, Corporación Industrial San Luis, Gigante, Promociones Industriales Banamex, Rassini, Real Turismo, Seguros América, Texel. See (*Calidad Total 1989*), backside. The annual winners were presented in the various FMCT publications.

Spanish conquest. “Deep Mexico” was indigenous, traditional, and suppressed by modern, European “imaginary Mexico” (Bonfil 1987). Peón did not share this thesis. The point he made was that both their indigenous and modern heritage provided examples that Mexicans cared about the distinction between the bad, the regular and the best, and about excelling models. “The National Quality Award refers to this part of our collective ethos and responds to our necessity to have new heroes and to dispose of an instrument that fosters the optimum development of Mexican organisations [. . .]” (Peón Escalante 1991, p. 2). Accordingly, total quality was “as an updated form of giving continuity to the fundamental values [. . .] of our culture” (Peón Escalante 1991, p. 2).⁴⁴ José Giral, the second FMCT president, expressed the same when calling for a “synthesis”, a “Mexican modernity” (Giral 1991, pp. 23–24).

However, this vision of an evolutive and somewhat harmonious process was contradicted by the same protagonists who declared that Mexico needed a “cultural revolution” (Peón Escalante 1991).⁴⁵ From an embeddedness perspective, this ambivalence was no coincidence. TQM discourse worked two ways. The consideration of the company as part of society led Mexico’s National Quality Award, in contrast to contemporary awards in Japan, the U.S. and Europe, to pay special attention to a company’s impact on its environment.⁴⁶ The premise was that business had to respect and adapt to society and nature. Nevertheless, as a management idea and method, TQM aimed to understand, control, and use the social and material world. Accordingly, TQM discourse intended to shape society, to adapt Mexico to the “changed environment”.⁴⁷ This environment was described in terms of modernity and, in its most powerful form, the global market.⁴⁸ Despite horrendous economic hardship, carriers of TQM discourse connoted the forced change positively. The removal of attendance recorders, formalities in day-to-day communication such as titles, or car lots hitherto exclusively assigned to executives, were presented as symbols of a more equal and human “new corporate culture” (Giral 1991, pp. 235–55; Peón Escalante 1991, p. 2; Zárata in *Calidad Total* 1991, pp. 22–26). Total quality’s

⁴⁴ The minutes of the 1990 congress, at which Peón held this speech, were published in various “Monografías”.

⁴⁵ According to Giral (1991, p. 14), Mexicans needed to “revolutionise” their perceptions and attitudes.

⁴⁶ For the criteria, see “El Premio Nacional de Calidad”, (*Calidad Total* 1991, Monografías 4, pp. 16–22). This difference with other quality awards was highlighted in (Gutiérrez 1991, p. 266), by foreign speakers at the 1990 congress; see (*Calidad Total* 1991, Monografías 5, pp. 12, 23), and is still today on <http://www.pnc.org.mx/nuestra-historia-2/> (last accessed on 24 October 2019).

⁴⁷ See José Giral’s introduction in: *Más allá de la Calidad Total, Memorias del VIII Congreso Internacional de Calidad*, México D.F. 25./26.11.1996, p. II.

⁴⁸ See the paradigmatic book (1991), featuring many important businessmen as authors.

promise was a better Mexico in all possible aspects, and globalisation was perceived as a helping hand in this endeavour (Giral 1991, pp. 10, 17–18; Gutiérrez in *Calidad total* 1991, p. 268).

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, TQM and CSR discourses mutually reinforced each other. Catholic social teaching (CST) was rooted in the 19th century, for which it endowed catholic CSR discourse with a memory of modernity's and particularly capitalism's negative social and cultural effects. Consequently, this discourse was more conservative and sceptical of the sweeping economic liberalisation than TQM discourse. However, it also promoted the idea that the ethically good would prevail in the global market, that a virtuous circle of social responsibility, quality, competitiveness, and prosperity was possible and actually required by competitiveness.⁴⁹ TQM and CSR discourses were sustained and interrelated by people and companies, relatively small in number and partly identical,⁵⁰ which certainly contributed to the consistency of this message—but also to its limited reach.

The efforts and difficulties to spread the idea and practice of this virtuous circle can be exemplified by the second FMCT president José Giral. Born in 1938, a chemical engineer from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (*Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, UNAM*), he spent the first two decades of his professional career with the U.S. MNE DuPont. Between 1983 and 1993, he directed the Mexican corporations *Pliana* and *Grupo Xabre*. From 1968 until at least 2004, he belonged to an UNAM group that investigated culture and technology from

⁴⁹ On the necessity of breaking the “vicious” and entering the “virtuous circle”, see (Ardavín 1987, p. 12); Elizondo in (Ardavín 1987, p. 2), and Andrés M. Sada in “Foro Nacional Balance Social” (Sada 1989, p. 26). Significant was the manual (*Confederación USEM* 1993), which synthesized decade-long reflections at USEM, and integrated CSR and TQM discourse. For elaboration, see (*Revista USEM* 1997, p. 13).

⁵⁰ For instance, Carlos Llano, Augusto Pozo Pino, and Andrés Marcelo Sada belonged to the FMCT Board of Directors (enlisted in all publications). They all played an important role in CST-oriented CSR discourse as of the 1970s. See *Actas del Consejo Central de Delegados de América Latina de la Uniapac*, Caracas, 18–21 November 1970, or *Acta del CCDAL de la Uniapac*, Quito, 26–28 September 1973, both in: *Conf. USEM, CCDAL 1970, 1971 and 1973*; or the news section in: *Boletín USEM México*, (Jun. 1973, p. 4). At the beginning of the 1970s, *Condumex* corporation, headed by the later FMCT president Gutiérrez, collaborated with USEM to promote best practices in stakeholder relations. See *Visita a Condumex*, in: *Boletín USEM México*, Mar. 1972, pp. 2–3; news section in *Boletín USEM México*, (Aug. 1972, p. 4). Moreover, *Grupo Bimbo* of the leading USEM members Lorenzo and Roberto Servitje both referred to and were present in TQM discourse, see *Tarin* (1990, pp. 8–12); and Servitje (in *Más allá de la Calidad Total*, pp. 186–97).

a management perspective and offered consulting services.⁵¹ In his 1991 book “Culture of Effectivity”, Giral wrote that management could not force cultural change, “only guide, facilitate and accompany it” (Giral 1991, pp. 23–24). He was optimistic that “in any circumstances, our people can act with great productivity, creativity, and responsibility, if they are inspired and freed from obstacles” (Giral 1991, foreword). In the book’s second edition of 1993, he recognised that changing corporate culture was proving difficult, especially with small companies, and explained it with Mexican culture (Giral 1993, pp. xi–xiv, 11–12). Acknowledging culture’s importance was one thing, re-engineering it quite another.⁵²

3.3. *Polarisation and Consolidation of the Two Mexicos (1990s and 2000s)*

The gap between ambition and reality was revealed in a brutal and unequivocal manner by the so-called Tequila crisis, a financial and economic crisis that began in December 1994 amid the change of presidency from Carlos Salinas to Ernesto Zedillo (1994–2000). Growth picked up in 1996, again, but did not prevent rising bankruptcies, unemployment, and poverty (Dussel Peters 2000, Middlebrook and Zepeda 2003; Pozas 2006). Already in early 1994, in a manifesto for the future administration, three major business associations had jointly called for a “market economy with social responsibility” (Propuestas 1994, ch. IV). This implied that the “big part of medium, small and micro enterprises”, for which liberal policies had brought about “adverse results”, should get a bigger share of economic growth (Propuestas 1994, pp. 3, 16).⁵³ Indeed, the dual structure of Mexico’s dual economy had been taking shape since the early 1980s, as a result of companies’, sectors’, and regions’ highly different capacities to react to international competition. The “Tequila crisis” and its aftermath revealed and exacerbated this polarisation.⁵⁴

Between 1999 and 2004, José Giral co-authored four more books on competitiveness. They all insisted on the central message of CSR and TQM discourses that socially and ethically responsible business behaviour paid off economically

⁵¹ See quiminet.com/articulos/forjadores-de-la-quimica-en-mexico-jose-giral-barnes-2634425.htm (4 October 2019), and interview with J. Giral on 11 April 2016.

⁵² A business consultant and bestselling author shared Giral’s appreciation, see (Münch Galindo 1992, pp. 144–55). The book was updated twice and still sold in 2006.

⁵³ A fourth business association criticised that an “oligopolistic market structure” left only crumbs for the “immense majority” of businesses, see (Concamin 1994, p. 3).

⁵⁴ Dussel Peters (2000) and Pozas (1994, 2002) demonstrate that big domestic and multinational enterprises were in a much better position than SMEs, and that regions with no or little MNE presence and integration into global value chains fared particularly badly.

(Giral et al. 2004, p. 98).⁵⁵ According to Giral and his co-authors, a major reason why most companies were unable to enter this virtuous circle was that the crisis had devastated most value chains. Globalisation “conspired” against re-articulating them, because corporations imported supplies instead of integrating national SMEs into their value chains (Giral et al. 2002, pp. 17–18). For the authors, an aggravating factor was foreign control of most corporations, because they were even less inclined to invest in national suppliers and commit themselves to Mexico. They suggested measured state intervention, including incentives for Mexican-controlled big business to create local value chains (Giral et al. 2002, pp. 17–18; Giral et al. 2004, pp. 118–19). About 25 years after the question of foreign capital had been excluded from business CSR discourse, they brought it back. However, such criticism had little echo in Mexican business and politics. Only one major business association seems to have broadly shared Giral and his fellows’ analysis.⁵⁶ For several reasons, even in the context of renewed and massive economic hardship, the role of MNEs was not broadly questioned. Mexican corporations were becoming multinational themselves. Then, there were important differences between foreign MNEs, which can again be illustrated with Nestlé and Ciba-Geigy/Novartis. The former expanded its activities in Mexico. Today, the country is the company’s fifth largest market worldwide.⁵⁷ Novartis México, on the other hand, divested during the 1990s,⁵⁸ and has further reduced its capacities in the country since then.⁵⁹ Most importantly, by the mid-1990s, MNEs had acquired a position of economic power and normative authority, which protected them from broad criticism.

Business CSR discourse is revealing of this privileged position. After the “Tequila crisis”, representatives of USEM continuously denounced the global market for its economic effects and normative foundations (Milanés 1995, p. 1; Milanés 1996, p. 1;

⁵⁵ For the importance of business ethics and CSR for competitiveness, see (Giral et al. 1999, p. 7; Giral et al. 2000, p. 5; Giral et al. 2002, p. viii; as well as Giral et al. 2004, pp. 100, 127–35).

⁵⁶ Though it did not explicitly mention corporations as co-responsible for the country’s malaise, see (Concamin 2000). For its part, contemporary academic research confirmed Giral’s and his co-authors’ analysis, see for instance (Zepeda and Lugo 1999).

⁵⁷ Today, Nestlé México has more than 13,000 employees, see (Nestlé 2018). In 1983, when the subsidiary was facing bankruptcy, it counted less than 3500, see the letter of then General Director C.E. Represas to José Daniel of 28 February 1984 in: AHN, NES C1.5/1700-4.

⁵⁸ For the development of Novartis’ activities in Mexico until the turn of the century, see (Zeller 2001, pp. 146, 491–96, 525–39).

⁵⁹ Today, there is no production facility anymore. See (El Universal 2018).

Loza Macías 1998, p. 1; Castillo Peraza 1999, pp. 15–24; Revista USEM 2001).⁶⁰ However, MNEs as the agents of the global market were anathema. The example of CEMEFI (Centro Mexicano para la Filantropía), which was founded in 1988 and became the most important carrier of CSR discourse in Mexico at the turn of the 2000s,⁶¹ is even more telling. CEMEFI differed from USEM in various aspects. For instance, it was secular (not adherent to CST), it tackled CSR as a corporate issue (not as a question of personal leadership, integrity, and spirituality), and foreign MNEs played a crucial role. U.S. corporate foundations served CEMEFI as financial supporters and role-models for Mexican civil society.⁶² MNE subsidiaries such as CONESA were among its first members and partners for campaigns.⁶³ In 2001, CEMEFI launched the “Distintivo ESR”, which was based on a self-assessment and grew rapidly to become Mexico’s best-known CSR award.⁶⁴ The overwhelming majority of the first companies to receive the award were MNE subsidiaries. Again, CONESA and Novartis México were among them.⁶⁵ Economically successful and complying with relatively high standards, they served as examples that the business case of CSR promoted by CEMEFI actually worked. Vice versa, CEMEFI’s discourse promoted the cognitive and normative ideas, and the institutions—the cultural context—that facilitated MNEs’ integration and the cooperation with them. It even represented MNEs’ enhanced embeddedness in globalised Mexico.

⁶⁰ An interview with Kenneth Arrow was entitled “Stop the savage economy!”, even though this economist did not use the expression. See ¡Basta con la economía salvaje!, in: Revista USEM, May–June 1995, pp. 12–13, 205.

⁶¹ On CEMEFI’s status, see (Agüero 2005, p. 121; Gordon Rapoport 2008, pp. 83–89; Grayson and Nelson 2013, p. 25).

⁶² For the CEMEFI’s official account, see (CEMEFI 1996, p. 14) and (CEMEFI 2016). (Fernández 1995) is an example of the model character ascribed to civil society in the U.S. and Canada. For an academic contribution, see (Gordon Rapoport 2008, pp. 67–68, 78).

⁶³ For the corporate philanthropy program “Mira por los demás”, see Informe 1995–1996, p. 28, and Acciones y logros en 10 años de trabajo. Resumen del documento de Dr. Rubén Aguilar del CEMEFI presentado en la reunión previa a la Asamblea de Gobernadores del BID en 1998 en Cartagena de Indias, p. 5, in: CEMEFI, MIC f 57. Moreover, CONESA set up an important health fund in the 1990s (Soberón et al. 1995). In 2000, about half of CEMEFI’s corporate members were of foreign origin, see Informe Anual 2000, p. 40.

⁶⁴ CEMEFI: Distintivo ESR a la Empresa Socialmente Responsable®, Edición 2003, in: CEMEFI, F1288. In 2001, 17 companies received the award, in 2002 28, in 2003 41, in 2004 61, in 2005 84, in 2006 124, and in 2017, 1505. See (CEMEFI 2007, p. 21) and <https://www.cemefi.org/buscadoresr/#/> (8 December 2017).

⁶⁵ See (CEMEFI 2006, p. 23).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Business' CSR and TQM discourses in Mexico represent a profound change of MNEs' embeddedness in this country during the period from the 1970s to the early 2000s. They turned from actors with little social legitimacy to the centres of the globalising part of Mexico's dual economy. MNEs' central role consists of both their "hard" economic power, especially their ability to coordinate global value chains, and their "soft" power, which refers to their perception as role models that succeed in creating a virtuous cycle of competitiveness and social responsibility. Indeed, the emergence of Mexico's dual economy was both an economic and cultural phenomenon. Local business did not only engage in economic activity with MNE subsidiaries but shared and jointly promoted cognitive and normative ideas about the challenges of the global market, and how they could be met. This cultural process implied a better adaption by MNEs to the Mexican context, but local actors' increasing compliance with the standards set by MNEs. MNE's enhanced embeddedness worked two ways; it was about adapting to and shaping society. It meant a new, an increasingly trans-nationalised governance for the Mexican economy.⁶⁶

In the light of SDG 8, this analysis offers various conclusions. Globalised Mexico could serve as an example that, in the context of the global market, economic growth, decent working standards and corporate social responsibility, in the wider sense, are compatible, if not mutually beneficial. However, it also demonstrates the limitations of this dynamic. The majority of businesses, consisting of micro, small- and medium-sized enterprises, have not entered the virtuous cycle of economic competitiveness and social responsibility. Obviously, this positive interplay is contingent; it works under certain circumstances, but not necessarily and not for all. This is even demonstrated by globalised Mexico itself. Recent studies suggest that working conditions in MNE subsidiaries are still clearly better than the national average, but that employment stability and remuneration have come under increasing pressure (Bensusán et al. 2018, p. 13; Bensusán and Carrillo 2017, p. 36).⁶⁷

The positive economic and social effects of global capitalism are neither enjoyed by everyone nor can they be taken for granted. Such are the rules of this game. However, the legitimacy of this social order requires that these rules not be applied

⁶⁶ On the concept of transnational governance, and the importance MNEs play in it, see (Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson 2006; Folke Schuppert and Zürn 2008; Gereffi et al. 2005, pp. 78–104).

⁶⁷ On the different types of foreign direct investment, and the opportunities and risks associated to them—such as a "race to the bottom" of wages and working conditions in the face of global competition—see (Carrillo et al. 2012b, p. 84; Mortimore 2006).

too strictly. Otherwise, resistance grows. Since the “first globalisation” of the 19th century, expanding global capitalism and economic nationalism have been two sides of the same coin.⁶⁸ It depends on the historical context what side is up; neither force can be considered dead. By adapting to and shaping society, MNEs have had important merits. However, expressing both the rejection of nationalism as a zero-sum ideology directed against other nations, and the confidence that private business is key to globally sustainable development, the UN Agenda 2030 bestows MNEs with an even greater responsibility. They have to deliver more.⁶⁹ This is what the example of Mexico suggests, too.

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⁶⁸ See for a historical perspective (Osterhammel and Petersson 2003). For multidisciplinary, especially political-science perspectives, see (Helleiner and Pickel 2005; Lechner and Boli 2015, esp. parts V and XI).

⁶⁹ Not in the context of the Agenda 2030, but of globalisation, this idea can be considered as “political” CSR, see (Scherer and Palazzo 2011).

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