

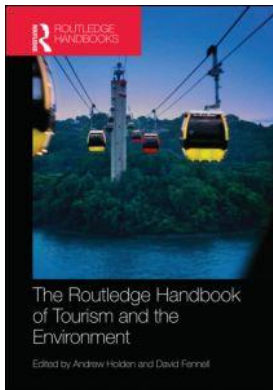
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On: 19 Apr 2021

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

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The Routledge Handbook of Tourism and the Environment

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Tourism and CSR

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203121108.ch46>

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Published online on: 02 Jul 2012

How to cite :- Ralf Buckley, Fernanda de Vasconcellos Pegas. 02 Jul 2012, *Tourism and CSR*
from: The Routledge Handbook of Tourism and the Environment Routledge

Accessed on: 19 Apr 2021

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203121108.ch46>

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Tourism and CSR

Ralf Buckley and Fernanda de Vasconcellos Pegas

Introduction

Corporate social and environmental responsibilities (CSR) are a significant concern throughout the tourism industry, but only sometimes under that name. Some mainstream hotel chains do refer specifically to CSR. Some tourism companies operate social benefit programmes and foundations, but without calling them CSR. There are community tourism enterprises where social benefit is the main aim of the business. In highly impoverished areas, tourism is promoted as a poverty alleviation mechanism, with associated broad-scale social benefits. A variety of organisations run social and environmental awards and certification programmes for tourism enterprises, which may fall within the scope of industry self-regulation as a form of CSR, and in many countries, commercial tourism development interests continually press for access to public conservation reserves and protected areas, using CSR rhetoric as a lobbying tool.

The research literature on CSR presents two main perspectives: either as something that companies actually do; or as something they only pretend to do. Actions that corporations do in fact carry out may have either commercial or philanthropic motivations. Actions they only pretend to carry out are generally politically motivated. As political manoeuvres commonly aim to improve commercial competitive positions, the various goals are not mutually exclusive. A wide range of business cases have been put forward for CSR (Crane *et al.* 2008). Different cases consider customers, staff and legal frameworks. Some of these suggestions have been tested, but not all, and only under limited circumstances. There is thus no general cross-sector CSR model that can be applied ready-made in tourism.

As an industry sector, tourism has several critical features: (1) the tourism industry must deliver its customers to its products rather than the reverse; (2) these products cannot be stored, but must be consumed as they are produced; (3) these products consist of bundles of goods and services, typically assembled from sources around the world, with highly distributed social and environmental impacts; and (4) most of these goods are not produced solely for tourism, and it is not until the final assembly that they become tourism products; so CSR in tourism necessarily involves consideration of extended supply chains.

CSR components of commercial tourism operations can be considered at two levels. Base-level CSR simply involves compliance with commercial, environmental and industrial-relations

laws, for example in relation to fair dealings with clients, suppliers, staff and lessors. This includes staff working conditions, truth in advertising and customer service. Relevant laws and practices differ considerably between countries, so assessing compliance is rarely straightforward. The relevant laws are largely those of destination countries, many of them in the developing world.

Higher-level CSR reflects external social pressures beyond the strict requirements of the law or the market place. Social expectations include both those of local residents in destination areas, and those of international clients from countries of origin. Often these expectations may be very different. They may include contributions to conservation, cultures or community well-being.

Depending on the country of operations, expectations may include pressures to: minimise social impacts associated with differences in wealth or culture; provide employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for local residents; train staff and customers in cultural sensitivity; contribute directly to local community health and education; encourage philanthropy in cases where rich tourists visit poor communities; and negotiate and uphold fair leases and contracts with community landowners. In addition, there are pressures for tourism corporations to: minimise, manage, monitor and offset their impacts on natural environments; contribute to conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services; and contribute to climate change mitigation measures. All of these differ between countries and market sectors.

Mainstream hotels and transport

Mainstream tourism means: large-scale hotels and resorts; high-volume passenger transport operations by air, land or water; and high-volume purpose-built urban tourist attractions and activities. All of these components are commonplace in both developed and developing nations worldwide. For the mainstream accommodation sector, the principal CSR issues are staff employment conditions and environmental management technologies. For the air transport sector, atmospheric emission and contributions to climate change are critical. For passenger ships, discharges to rivers, lakes or the ocean are most significant, as well as employment conditions for crews on contract. For land transport, the local impacts of road or rail access corridors and vehicle noise can be critical in some instances. Exhausts and emissions from engines of various types contribute to air pollution locally and to climate change at a global level.

There is extensive academic literature on sustainable tourism, but with rather little quantitative information on any of the critical aspects of CSR identified above. There is a key distinction between corporate social and environmental marketing, management and performance, that is what they claim, what they do and what they achieve.

According to Rodriguez and Cruz (2007), improved social and environmental performance boosts the mean profitability of Spanish hotels by 2 per cent, but management or marketing alone have no detectable effects. Buckley and Araujo (1997) found that many of the mainstream tourist accommodation venues in a large-scale beach and theme-park destination in Queensland, Australia, had adopted at least some practices and technologies intended to conserve energy, water and resources, but that very few had done so systematically or sufficiently to yield any significant effect.

Dalton *et al.* (2007) found that tourism accommodation venues in Queensland only adopted renewable energy sources where they do not have access to grid power. Ayuso (2007), Kasim (2007), Kim and Miller (2008) and Pedreira and Souza (2008) found that CSR practices for hotels in Spain, Malaysia, Korea and Brazil are all relatively weak.

Owen and O'Dwyer (2008) found that only the larger tourism corporations report their CSR practices, and that their reports are unreliable. Holcomb *et al.* (2007) found that for the 10 largest hotel chains in the USA, even the CSR claims in their own marketing materials were

remarkably weak, with the main focus on vaguely defined vision statements, or equal employment opportunities, which are in any event mandated by law.

In Europe, Blanco *et al.* (2009) reported five previous studies, mostly from Spain, covering around 400 hotels in total. Their own analysis, however, was merely theoretical. They also reported one study of 164 hotels in Costa Rica. There are a number of additional descriptions of CSR-related activities by individual corporations for example in Indonesia (Ross and Wall 1999), Canada (Speck 2002), Australia (Buckley 2003: 194–8) and South Africa (Ashley and Haysom 2008).

In Brazil, the three main hotel groups in the coastal resort town of Costa do Sauipe all make claims of CSR, but only one has >50 per cent local staff, and other efforts were minimal (Neto 2003; Cardoso 2005; Oliveira 2007). In Praio do Forte, the principal resort supported a school with over 500 students (Cardoso 2005; Pegas 2009; Pegas and Stronza 2010), but was bought out by a Portuguese hotel chain, which ceased support despite continuing to advertise it. Of 33 hotels in Santa Catarina, 60 per cent had some form of energy conservation measures, but only 46 per cent had installed adequate treatment facilities for liquid wastes, which they promoted as CSR initiatives even though they were legally required (Moratelli 2005). Elsewhere in Brazil, Bogo and Dreher (2007) and Pedreira and Souza (2008) found that tourism industry representatives have extremely vague and general views of CSR, ranging from paying taxes, complying with legal requirements, and providing adequate working conditions for staff, to small-scale assistance for external organisations.

A number of large airlines and cruise ship lines have also established social and environmental programmes, or at least adopted relevant labels and applied for awards, notably the ‘World Savers’ award run by the magazine *Conde Nast Traveler* (Anon 2009). Qantas contributes funds to The Fred Hollows Foundation (2010) in its efforts to improve eyesight among Indigenous communities in Australia and elsewhere. In Brazil, the regional airline Gol (2009) has historically supported youth programmes aimed at health, nutrition, education and leadership. P&O Cruises (2011) has recently released its first ‘sustainability report’.

To the extent that these few reports allow, it does indeed appear that mainstream tourism corporations follow practices in other industries (Crane *et al.* 2008) in that: (1) they treat CSR largely as a public-relations exercise to distract attention from the impacts of their core businesses; and (2) they boost CSR visibility as a strategic tool in negotiating with government, either to gain development approvals in environmentally sensitive locations, or in reaction to social or environmental legislation.

Social benefits programmes and foundations in developing countries

Social welfare concerns are both more widespread, and less well-funded in developing compared with developed nations. In developed nations, social welfare requirements such as health, education and aged care are provided through private providers and purchases, through private or public insurance schemes, or through tax-funded government programmes. The detailed design and funding mechanisms are an endless topic of political debate. Most of the population in developed nations, however, does have access to welfare services through one means or another.

In developing nations, both the level of funding for social welfare programmes, and their technical quality, are considerably lower. In addition, much higher proportions of their populations lack access to large-scale schemes, and rely instead on local-scale extended-family or other traditional social support systems. In such circumstances, there are strong social and political expectations that private-enterprise employers, including those in tourism, will make significant contributions to the health and education of staff, their families and other members of

local communities. This has historical antecedents in countries that are now developed. In addition, national tourism policies in many developing countries refer explicitly to the role of tourism in so-called community upliftment: and the UN World Tourism Organization states that one of the goals of global tourism is to alleviate poverty.

In practical terms, this means that fixed-site tourism operations in rural areas in developing nations are commonly seen by local residents, as well as direct employees, as nodes of wealth and expertise that can be relied on for help. Such help may include: occasional transport for medical emergencies; the supply of nutritional supplements for sale; provision of condoms and arrangements for routine HIV testing; and the establishment of schools and health clinics. There are many examples of such programmes for hotels and lodges in Africa (Buckley 2003, 2006, 2010a; Lutalo 2007; Livingstone Tourism HIV/AIDS Partnership 2008) and Latin America (Ribeiro and Lacorte 2003; Oliveira 2007; Pegas 2009; TAMAR 2010).

The companies concerned may establish such programmes directly, or provide funds and technical assistance to relevant local community organisations to deliver the same services. They may provide funds either from their own (pre-tax) profits, or by establishing trusts and foundations to which their clients and other philanthropists may elect to make voluntary donations, generally tax-deductible. Irrespective of the mechanism, there are many reported programmes with successful outcomes, albeit mostly on small scales.

Community tourism

Community tourism provides an alternative model to harness the economic opportunities of tourism to contribute to local social welfare. Instead of relying on the philanthropy of private enterprise, or applying political pressure, a local community can choose to operate commercial tourism ventures directly. There are many barriers to this, relating especially to: legal rights over land, water and wildlife; expertise in hospitality and marketing; local community dynamics; and larger-scale political patronage (Mbaiwa 2005; Southgate 2006; Groom and Harris 2008; Spenceley 2008; Stronza and Durham 2008; Nelson 2010). In many cases, therefore, communities may opt for a middle road where they take control of tourism assets, but then lease these assets to private tourism enterprises under legal contractual arrangements of various types.

There are now many examples of community tourism in Asia (Pathak and Kothari 2003; ACAP 2008; Buckley 2010a), South America (Stronza and Gordillo 2008; Pegas and Stronza 2010) and sub-Saharan Africa (Mbaiwa 2005; Honey 2009; Castley 2010), but with mixed success.

Responsible tourism and ecotourism

The specialist tourism sub-sectors known as ecotourism and responsible tourism have particular interests in social and environmental responsibility (Spenceley 2008; Buckley 2008, 2009a). The term responsible tourism originated in South Africa (Goodwin, pers. comm. 28 Jan 2011), and has a strong focus on employment opportunities and economic returns to local communities (Spenceley 2008; Castley 2010). Ecotourism focuses principally on the natural environment, but does also include community issues (Weaver and Lawton 2007; Weaver 2008; Buckley 2009a, 2009b). Relevant components may include technologies and management measures to reduce energy and water consumption and to treat or recycle wastes (Buckley 2004), and contributions to conservation and community development (Buckley 2010a).

There are now a number of meta-analyses and case study compilations in ecotourism and responsible tourism (Buckley 2003, 2009a, 2009b; Kruger 2005; Gössling and Hultman 2006; Zeppel 2006; Spenceley 2008; Stronza and Durham 2008; Saarinen *et al.* 2009). These meta-analyses

have reached three main conclusions: (1) many enterprises use eco- or responsibility branding purely for marketing purposes; (2) some enterprises do contribute to conservation, principally by providing economic and political support for private and community reserves; and (3) some enterprises do contribute to local communities, by providing direct funding, community welfare services, markets for local businesses and new jobs that include training and good promotion prospects. Wages and working conditions for staff, including opportunities for employees from local communities to rise to senior management positions, have been a key concern for private lodges in sub-Saharan Africa (Castley 2010). Many of these lodges also provide organised mechanisms for their guests to make philanthropic donations to local community initiatives, especially in education.

Contributions to conservation and communities, as under (2) and (3) above, may be characterised as follows: (1) they are as yet relatively small in scale; (2) they are largely disconnected from business travel, urban tourism and mainstream resort sectors; (3) they are highly sensitive to global economic conditions; (4) they are largely confined to developing nations; and (5) they are particularly small in the large newly industrialised nations of India and China, in comparison with the massive and rapid growth of mainstream domestic tourism in those countries (Buckley 2003, 2006, 2010a).

Overall, therefore, CSR in the ecotourism and responsible tourism sub-sectors may be summarised as follows: (1) a large proportion of enterprises that use these terms in marketing may not adopt their principles to any significant extent in practice; (2) a small number of enterprises have indeed successfully adopted those principles, can justifiably claim a positive triple bottom line and meet all or most of the various criteria proposed for corporate responsibility; (3) most of these are in developing nations, and they make up a significant proportion of the tourism industry as a whole only in less wealthy nations with strong reliance on international inbound tourism; (4) these enterprises are indeed growing in number and in some cases also in scale, and to some degree they are linking in to the large and growing international adventure tourism sector and to improved environmental management in mainstream tourism; and (5) on a global scale, they remain a very small proportion of the tourism sector overall, especially in large newly wealthy nations.

Codes and certification schemes

The most powerful of the seven types of CSR in the classification put forward by Auld *et al.* (2008) is the type they refer to as non-governmental soft law. In the context of CSR, this phrase refers to rules developed, accepted, monitored and enforced by the private sector, not by governments. As with public-sector legislation, such rules may range from vague, brief statements of intent with no clear criteria or effective mechanism for enforcement; to detailed and practical sets of instructions, supported by institutions that have sufficient resources and support to ensure that they are followed frequently enough to influence real-world outcomes.

Such rules can be important for several reasons: (1) if they are widely followed, they provide a level playing field; (2) competing corporations can all adopt a particular CSR practice or practices, without any of them suffering commercial disadvantage; (3) if they are advertised publicly, they provide an accepted guideline as to what particular corporate activities are considered as socially responsible; (4) a company that follows them can thus make a clear claim, which is valuable in bolstering its reputation; (5) within an individual corporation, these rules can form part of the corporate culture and staff performance management systems; and (6) where such rules are established by professional or industry associations, they provide a mechanism for peer scrutiny.

If rules of this type become generally endorsed and accepted by the industry sub-sector concerned, they may later be adopted into hard law through various forms of government recognition. Codes of conduct may be seen as descriptions of standard industry practice, which can be referred to in actions under common law. Governments may provide explicit legal recognition to certification programmes operated by professional industry associations, such as wilderness medicine and river rescue; sometimes, rules developed by private corporations may be written directly into government legislation and regulations.

Many different organisations have compiled codes of practice covering either social or environmental issues in tourism (Buykx 2001; Buckley 2002; Lorimer 2006). Garrod and Fennell (2004), for example, identified 58 different codes for whale watching tours. Many of these are regulations requiring legal compliance, but even so, many operators ignore them (Scarpaci and Dayanthi 2003; Waayers *et al.* 2006).

There are numerous privately-run eco-certification programmes (Font and Buckley 2001; Black and Crabtree 2007). Most of these are checklist-based approaches, which refer only to the presence or absence of particular technologies or practices, although a few do prescribe quantitative thresholds. They are thus similar to codes of conduct, but with third-party certification of compliance. Such systems contain innate incentives for abuse (Gunningham and Grabowsky 1998; Nunez 2007).

There are also customer-feedback approaches such as those trialled by tour packager Touristik Union International or booking agency World Hotel-Link, but these are less effective than blog sites such as TripAdvisor. Within the CSR typology proposed by Auld *et al.* (2008), these are information-based approaches that rely purely on public reporting to provide pressures for corporate responsibility.

Some tourism operators have internal codes of practice, which are significantly more stringent than third-party systems. Staff are more likely than external auditors to detect breaches, and companies have immediate sanctions against any employee who breaches the code. There are also codes of practice developed by syndicates of tourism enterprises offering similar products in the same region, where each can observe behaviour by the others; as, for example, at Madikwe private game reserve in South Africa (Castley 2010).

Individual enterprises are more likely to follow syndicated codes if four conditions are met: (1) they were involved in drafting them; (2) everyone who uses the resource also subscribes to the code, so there are no spoilers or freeriders; (3) breaches of the code are readily observable, and can be attributed unambiguously to particular individual enterprises; and (4) there is an accepted and practically implemented mechanism to apply realistic penalties to any enterprises that do breach the code.

Boat-based tourism in the Antarctic offers a good test of syndicated codes, as individual nations have no direct legal jurisdiction there. Most relevant tour operators are members of the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators (IAATO), which developed a code of practice for expedition cruise vessels. This code has deficiencies (Buckley 2010a), but it does address key issues such as passenger landings at wildlife sites, and sets quantitative rules for key parameters such as minimum approach distances to nesting seabirds. Difficulties arose when much larger conventional cruise ships also began visiting the Antarctic. Two large US-based cruise ship companies were apparently reluctant to subscribe to the IAATO code. As one large ship can create as much environmental impact as many smaller ones, this threatens the entire function and stability of IAATO as a self-regulatory organisation.

Commercial tourism in public protected areas

The appropriate role and regulation of commercial tourism operations in national parks and other public protected areas can provide a powerful test of CSR in tourism. Most countries have public

protected area systems and management agencies, although levels of funding, legal protection and enforcement differ greatly between nations. Most parks allow limited recreational use, and parks agencies use well-established tools to manage visitors and impacts (Buckley 1998, 2009c; Butler and Boyd 2000; Manning 2000; McCool and Moisey 2001; Lockwood *et al.* 2006). Commercial tourism operations in public protected areas, however, are much more contentious.

Small-scale, low-impact mobile tour operators are permitted by many parks agencies. These guide small groups of clients to undertake the same activities as are permissible for independent visitors, and must commonly comply with the same rules regarding access, activities, fees, group sizes, bookings etc. These operators must usually obtain permits from the parks agency, covering issues such as insurances, indemnities, safety equipment and guide skills. Complications can arise when commercial tour operators ask for special privileges, such as: exclusive access to particular areas; pre-assigned quotas or special booking rights; permission to carry out particular activities not otherwise permitted; or exemptions from particular restrictions, for example on maximum group sizes, or the opportunity to use packstock or motorised vehicles to transport baggage. Permissions such as these, however, can be reversed by the parks agency should the need arise. The agency does not surrender control, and thus does not rely on CSR (Buckley 2010b).

Once privately funded infrastructure or accommodation is constructed within a public protected area, in contrast, it is effectively impossible to remove, either for legal or political reasons or both. Such developments thus provide a further test of self-regulation within the tourism industry. Tourism industry associations lobby continually for access and development rights, using a wide range of political and legal manoeuvres (Buckley 2010b). Private tourism developments inside public protected areas gain a number of commercial advantages, including: exclusive access to highly desirable attractions; publicly subsidised infrastructure and marketing; and immediate access to a stream of potential clients. Only rarely, however, is there any net environmental, social or even economic gain for the public parks agencies (Buckley 2010a, 2010b; Castley 2010). Claims of CSR by tourism industry lobbyists thus fall largely in the political rather than the practical category, as distinguished earlier.

Conclusions

The academic literature of CSR provides a useful framework to analyse the social and environmental aspects of corporate behaviour in the tourism industry. The CSR perspective is valuable not because tourism corporations are necessarily responsible, but because the broader literature in this field can provide insights into the behaviour of individual enterprises and industry associations alike. Relevant perspectives cover political lobbying, advertising and marketing, adoption of environmental management technologies and practices, philanthropy, and organisational culture and dynamics.

CSR in the mainstream tourism industry is very weak. Few companies do significantly more than the minimum required by law. Many do not even comply with legal minimal standards. Those that do, often advertise compliance with taxation, industrial relations or planning and pollution control law as CSR. Voluntary initiatives that go beyond compliance are miniscule in comparison with the overall scale of corporate core business, in tourism as in other sectors. Even these initiatives can be co-opted as political tools to gain permits for high-impact commercial developments. Similarly, the widespread use of ecolabels in tourism seems to be principally political in nature.

In rural areas in developing nations, tourism operations can provide significant sources of local employment, social welfare and community benefits. There are considerable complexities, however, where private tourism enterprises are established on land under communal ownership,

whether through modern or traditional tenure systems. In such cases, responsibility may not be easy to define.

For tourism in protected areas, including marine as well as terrestrial parks, regulations and minimal-impact codes are commonly more stringent and detailed than elsewhere. For mobile tourism enterprises operating under permit, these define legally mandated responsibility. There are many good examples worldwide. There are also good examples of syndicated common-property resource management in the nature-based tourism sector, including Antarctic regions outside the jurisdiction of individual nations.

In a number of nations worldwide, tourism property developers have lobbied intensively for increased opportunities to build and run private tourism accommodation and facilities inside public protected areas. These lobbying efforts have employed a variety of arguments, many of them spurious. From an analytical perspective this is a typical use of CSR rhetoric for financial gain through political processes.

From a research perspective, CSR claims and practices have been analysed in much more depth in other sectors than in tourism. There are thus excellent opportunities to apply CSR approaches to analyse a range of real-life practices, pressures and organisational behaviours within the tourism sector, including government as well as private-sector components.

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