

Corporate Social Responsibility in the Catalan hospitality chains

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Abstract

The Corporate Social Responsibility has acquired some kind of legislation from the first contributions of Bowen (1953) and from the different theoretical approaches but without any real applications to the business. It was not until the arrival of the economic liberalism at the end of the twentieth century and beginnings of the 21st century that has represented an era of big management benefits accompanied by massive dismissals, together with bankruptcies of companies like Enron, Arthur Andersen, Parmalat, etc,... The ecological disaster of the Prestige, the denouncing for the use of child labour force by some international companies and the financial scandals in the City Bank and in the Banco Bilbao Vizcaya, the first one accused of turning aside money and the second one of hiding money in tax havens has produced a social response against these international financial practices. The international institutions like the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, the OECD, the World Bank and the European Union will be obliged to propose new recommendations in order to try that these companies adopt a new code of practices of social responsibility. These recommendations will influence in different ways on the legislative process of the countries of the European Union. In Spain, the legislative influence is still very insignificant and it basically comes down, to promoting some changes in the annual corporate report, in the regulations of the shareholders meetings and in the Board of Directors. The application of the most significant criteria of corporate social responsibility depends on the goodwill of the companies.

Most of the theories related to the corporate social responsibility have an influence on the responsibility of the company in the economic, environmental and social aspects, which are necessary to prove by using the method of the triple bottom line. Thus, the theoretical contribution that has resulted, the stakeholder theory, beginning with the contribution of Freeman (1984, 1999) that makes the business responsible in front of a diversity of stakeholders and that without their support the company could not survive or the Clarkson theory (1995), which establishes a difference between primary and secondary stakeholders until the establishment of six levels of a stakeholder strategy published by Preble in 2005. In this way most of the academic contributions think of the need to meet

the demands of the stakeholders, because according to Munilla and Miles in 2005, each group of stakeholders has different interests in their relation to the company. That is the reason why the satisfaction of all those interests through the strategies of the corporate social responsibility will improve the reputation, the recognition and the economic benefits in a responsible way.

To be precise, the tourist activity has indeed a great diversity of stakeholders that can decide the success or the failure of a tourist destination or a tourist company, according to what Swarbrooke and Homer (1999) describe as determinants. The tourism represents the 11% of the Spanish GNP, with 54 million visitors that represent the 7% of all the world tourism and the 13% of the tourism that arrives in Europe. From all those figures, Catalonia receives more than 24 million foreign visitors and more than 5 million tourists from the rest of the country. That represents an economic impact of 13,473 million euros every year and the 67% of this amount is directly attributable to the tourist expenses and the rest, the 33% has indirect effects on other sectors of the economy like the suppliers, the financial sector and the real state sector. This is the reason why the tourism has a big importance in the Catalan economy. To attend all these great number of tourists, we need some infrastructures and some services that historically were developed during the Franco's dictatorship without any political guaranties and with a considerable impact on the environment and based on a managerial strategy of low prices that have stimulated a massive demand that started with only 500,000 foreign visitors in 1954, ten years later there were 10 million, 49 million in 1989, and finally to achieve 54 million visitors last year (2005).

Although the access to democracy and some years later the membership of the European Union has allowed a more respectful legislation with the environment, the change in the tourist planning policy and the many efforts that have been made in the last years to correct and to improve the image of the Catalan and Spanish tourist products, the consequences of the important aggression suffered by our landscape and the cultural habits of the tourist companies remain sometimes the same, especially in the hospitality industry. This hospitality industry is based on a seasonal occupation and has always expected to obtain a continuous economic success and the availability of abundant and temporary human resources in an atmosphere of continuing growth and in an environment where the diversity of stakeholders involved is very important.

All these reasons determine the importance of applying the criteria of the corporate social responsibility applied to the hospitality industry and the reason of this investigation. This research explores the use of strategies of corporate social responsibility in the Catalan hospitality chains, using a sample of 24 hotel chains with 4 or more hotels, totalizing 495 hotels, which represents the 60% of all the Catalan hospitality chains of those characteristics and the 73.3% of all the hotels.

The results will show that the hospitality chains are not developing strategies of corporate social responsibility, although in some cases they try to justify themselves alleging the development of some social policies as an example of social responsibility. We haven't found any certification in the international standards like GRI, SA 8000, Accountability 1000, etc,... and even any support in the documents of international institutions, we have seen that there is a lack of knowledge of these institutions recommendations. At the same time we have also discovered a low level of relation and dialogue between the hospitality chains and their main stakeholders.

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