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Corporate Social Responsibility And Marine Tourism Organisations

Exploring the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility between Government, Business and Higher Education academies in the UK

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1. Overview of paper

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become an important issue for some governments but the tourism industry appears to be slow in adopting CSR strategies. By focusing on CSR, we argue that the implementation of CSR audits could help to integrate environmental and social considerations into the concept of marine tourism. We consider that a socially responsible tourism organisation will fully consider what impacts on communities and the environment will result from strategic and operational decisions, as well as better balancing the needs of all stakeholders.

In the UK, the concepts of CSR and sustainable development (SD) are beginning to be understood as related concepts. Implementation of CSR lags behind the progress being made on sustainable development in tourism. In contrast both concepts are relatively new to the developing country of Taiwan and decision-makers and developers are lacking expert knowledge in these fields.

The aim of this paper is to report on a research project at doctoral level that will develop a formal description of CSR for businesses at marine tourism destinations, and to examine its likely applications in a cross-cultural setting. CSR concepts and techniques developed in other sectors will provide a benchmark for marine tourism organisations. The challenge of adopting CSR benchmarking management techniques in marine tourism organisations in the UK and Taiwan opens up a door to help examine the extent of the influence of organisational culture in a cross-cultural setting, enabling the generated models of CSR to better handle and understand cultural dynamics.

2. Research Questions

The main research question in this thesis is: *What are the challenges for adopting a CSR benchmarking strategy in marine tourism organisations in the UK and Taiwan?*

This research strategy will answer the question in three main steps. Firstly, historical reviews will contextualise the problem of how CSR has been conducted in the public and private sectors in developed countries. This stage is reported below. Secondly, an exploration of contemporary CSR will be used to describe and analyse the transformation of CSR strategies from the public sector into a private sector partnership, as a way of addressing social and environmental challenges. Thirdly, detailed case studies of CSR activities that support marine tourism destinations in the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, Wales, and the East Coast National Scenic Area, Taiwan will be undertaken. These case studies will allow the exploration of commonalities and differences between the U.K. and Taiwan, in order to create a relevant CSR benchmarking tool that can be used by marine tourism organisations that best accomplishes the primary concerns of this research.

The particular research questions framing this case study are: *What influence does CSR play in the public and private sectors in a developed Western country and in a developing Eastern country? How does the concept of CSR differ between the developed and the developing country?*

This research will investigate and recommend a contemporary CSR measurement model for businesses located at marine tourism destinations. Important questions in

this study are related to the nature of key stakeholders involved and the nature of the decision-making process – such as *who has the decision making power? Where is the CSR strategy balance between the organisational level and destination level? Do CSR direct marine tourism organisations achieve sustainable development or is it just a brand extension?* The hypothesis driving this case study is that marine tourism organisations are yet to assume social responsibility at the organisational level. Marine tourism organisations have not explicitly considered ethical and political awareness in relationships focusing on dynamic external environmental changes towards sustainable development in marine tourism destinations.

3. Exploration of the concept of CSR in Government, Business and Higher Education academies in the UK

As an initial stage in this research project one of the authors attended a series of workshops where CSR was being discussed. All of these events occurred in March 2006 in London, Birmingham and Liverpool. The first event focused on central government and targeted business executives mainly from human resources. The second and third were university led events. The second was a meeting of a subject association representing departments of business and management studies. The third was a joint meeting of three subject networks of the Higher Education Academy. The intensity of this activity tells us that CSR is gaining momentum in the UK and the meetings represent some of the ways that the UK government, businesses and universities are engaging with CSR. Below we describe the nature of the events and analyse some of the themes emerging from discussions at these meetings.

Case Study 1 – The CSR Academy

The first case study involves the main UK central governments thrust around CSR. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) includes a junior minister with responsibility for the CSR agenda. This meeting was designed to encourage business sector development in CSR skills by adopting the CSR competency framework, designed by the DTI's CSR Academy. The CSR Academy was established through close Government, industry and key stakeholder co-operation (DTI, 2006). Most participants in the meeting were HR professionals from different types of organisations including both non-profit and profit-based organisations. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has thus supported work to explore the "Business Case" for CSR. The DTI also worked with Forum for the Future and AccountAbility on projects looking at the links between CSR/sustainability and business performance (DTI, 2006).

The Academy specifically focuses on developing CSR skills and competencies for managers, and its CSR Competency Framework was launched to integrate CSR into management decision-making (AccountAbility, 2006). This was to encourage business start-ups, including small and medium sized enterprises, with an understanding of CSR's potential benefits, and to develop their corporate social responsibility skills. The evidence presented at the meeting also showed that the UK government is currently encouraging non-governmental organisations to use a "Business Case" to persuade managers or HR professionals of non-profit/profit organisations to adopt the CSR concept and techniques to improve business performance.

Case Study 2 – The Association of Business Schools

The second case study demonstrates how universities are engaging with CSR in the design of curricula. The meeting brought together academics involved in designing and delivering CSR inputs into programmes at all levels and also those responsible for overall programme design and delivery. Attendants were mainly Business School lecturers. The Association of Business Schools (ABS) hosted this programme. ABS, one of five national partners in the DTI CSR Academy, is the representative body and authoritative voice for all leading business schools in UK universities, higher education institutions and independent management colleges (ABS, 2006). The National Subject benchmarks for business and management were developed by ABS for the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education (Slack, 2005). Slack (2005) pointed out that the terms of CSR, and the acronym CSR, have only recently been adopted into business language; so neither was specifically included in the older QAA benchmarks that were produced in 2001. The UK government has concerned itself with the term 'CSR' for future generations, by suggesting that business schools adopt the CSR competency framework into teaching programmes, in order to develop students' CSR knowledge.

Case Study 3 – HE Academy

Finally, the third case study was a collaborative project between the Higher Education Academy (HEA) Subject Centre for Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism (HLST), Sociology, Anthropology and Politics (C-SAP), and Geography, Earth & Environmental Sciences (GEES) organisations. Participants were primarily higher-education lecturers. HEA is an independent organisation funded by grants from the four UK higher education funding bodies, subscriptions from higher education institutions, and grant and contract income from specific initiatives (HEA, 2006). This case study explored how three educational subject networks perceived learning and teaching of CSR. It mainly explored opportunities to enhance student employability and citizenship, provided by the increasing interest in issues of corporate social responsibility and business ethics. This was achieved by introducing theories of sustainable development, with social and environmental responsibility, using experiential methods in developing staff teaching abilities and learning skills.

These three case studies will be analysed to understand the various debates surrounding CSR in the UK. The government, business and higher education academies stakeholders are all trying to determine the most effective methods to embed the principles and practices of CSR within organisations. The outcome of this stage of the research is intended to evaluate the responses to initiatives such as the CSR competency framework, CSR reporting, and corporate activities.

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