

Chapter 76

Corporate Social Responsibility in Tourism Businesses: The Spanish Case

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is configured as an activity that has a specific weight in the economy of a country, being a palpable reality especially in the case of Spain. Tourist activities have undergone a major evolution, switching from developmentalist models to environmental paradigms. It is in this scenario that Corporate Social Responsibility acquires a specific weight, which can be succinctly defined as the kind of leadership that has in mind, when planning organizational activities, the impact of the activity on the environment, customers and local community. In this contribution we analyze the evolution that have suffered tourism businesses in our country, focusing specifically on the current situation, marked by Corporate Social Responsibility. This way of understanding tourism is particularly relevant and peculiar in a time of economic and sociological changes like the current, and specifically influenced by the international crisis. Tourism businesses, more than any other businesses, have adapted to the turbulent changes that have occurred in the worldwide scenario.

INTRODUCTION

Today, tourism activity constitutes a sector that has a substantial weight in the global economy of a country. That is, income from spending by tourists in countries contributes significantly to the balance of payments, especially in developing countries. The contribution that tourism makes to a country's economy as a consequence of its ability to generate foreign exchange is usually analyzed. This is evident when the income generated by this concept is compared with other parts of the balance of payments, generally with imports, services of the country's external debt with exports.

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In the case of Spain, tourism is very important since it has been marked by a very important evolution, which has led to a change of scenery: the tourism passed from a developmental model to a very environmentally friendly (the current paradigm). It is at this stage, precisely, where acquires a specific weight the corporate social responsibility, which is described as a type of direction that planned activities of organizational nature by taking into account the impact on the environment and on the local community.

Spain participates in various international programs to promote sustainable tourism, among them are the FITUR Green Sustainability and Tourism Forum. Among the organizers of this event is the Technological Hotel Institute, a Spanish organization promotes the efficiency and sustainability of companies linked to the hotel and tourism industry. The result is translated into Spanish tourist companies with a marked ecological and sustainable profile. Also, for the protection of its wetlands, Spain participates in the Ramsar Convention or Convention on Wetlands of International Importance which includes more than 70 Spanish natural spaces. They are aquatic bird habitats in which they try to maintain their ecosystem and guarantee their future.

In this chapter it will explain, in a very succinctly way, how has been the evolution that has characterized the most hotel and tourist companies in Spain. Mainly, this work will be focusing specifically on the current situation, which, as it was explained in previous lines, is clearly marked by corporate social responsibility. This way of understanding the tourism business acquires its own dimension at a time of economic and sociological changes as important as the current, also strongly influenced by the international crisis which has seriously affected Spain. Tourism businesses, more than any other organization, have adapted to the turbulent changes produced in this changing scenario, configured as a model to follow for the good practice they have shown in the conduct of their business.

In fact, it can be ensured that one of the strategic lines and business of the hotel and tourist companies in general has been precisely environmental responsibility, which in tourism is framed by the sustainable tourism. It has not always been so, since in the recent past, the tourism phenomenon did not participate in the canons of sustainability and was joined, in many cases, with excessive town planning. Fortunately, this reality is part of the past and today we find a scenario of respect for the environment and commitment to the natural and cultural capital of the people.

Corporate social responsibility has recently been defined by the European Commission (2001) as “the responsibility of companies for their impact on society”. This concept includes social, economic and environmental resources. The companies that decide to assume the social responsibility in their daily management, modifying the management of the company, the means of communication, of communication among others etc.) and on the other the need to measure and to reduce their environmental impacts.

In the Charter for Sustainable Tourism, approved by the World Tourism Organization, which marked a before and after, states in its first principle: *Tourism development shall be based on criteria of sustainability, which means that it must be ecologically bearable in the long term, as well as economically viable, and ethically and socially equitable for local communities. (...) As a powerful instrument of development, tourism can and should participate actively in the sustainable development strategy. A requirement of sound management of tourism is that the sustainability of the resources on which it depends must be guaranteed* (UNWTO, 1995).

Sustainable tourism refers to those tourism activities that respect the natural, cultural and social environment and the values of a community, which allows to enjoy a positive exchange of experiences between residents and visitors, where the relationship between the tourist and the community is fair and the benefits of the activity are evenly distributed, and where visitors have a truly participatory attitude in their travel experience.

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