

Chapter 20

Social Responsibility as Form of Governance in Tourism: The Study of Fuerteventura Biosphere Reserve

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ABSTRACT

This work is the result of an exploratory study of introduction to a research conducted by a group of professors from the University of La Laguna, entitled: Design of optimal scenarios of tourism governance in Biosphere Reserves (GOBTUR) (CSO2012-38729-C02-01). This project is funded by the Directorate General of Research and Management of the National R+D+i (Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness), led by Agustín Santana Talavera. The objective is to analyze the role of Corporate Social Responsibility as form of governance in the tourism sector and collects a set of empirical studies about business cooperation and Corporate Social Responsibility. It analyzes public-private cooperation in the tourism sector and the role that the agents involved can play, as well as their strategies and their limitations. Afterwards, it focuses on the characterization of the Canary island of Fuerteventura (Spain). An example of actions cooperative public-private and the general format of the survey that shall complete the responsables of tourist accommodations are also disclosed.

INTRODUCTION

At present, the tourism industry needs to improve the competitiveness and sustainability of its destinations. Both concepts are linked. Competitiveness implies taking into account the environment and the context in tourism planning (Velasco González, 2010) and this, in turn, should incorporate the basic principles of sustainable development (OMT, 2005): 1) optimization of the use of environmental re-

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sources and respect for ecological processes and natural resources, 2) contribution to the maintenance and improvement of the particular cultural assets of tourist receiving societies and 3) viability of long-term economic activities.

However, these tasks are not carried out by companies in an individual way. Competitiveness and sustainability require cooperation among various stakeholders and shared social responsibility. Thus, new forms of management have emerged, in those tourist areas where they are aware of this situation, based on the creation of inter-administrative cooperation instruments and on the creation of networks where public and private agents participate in decision-making. In this type of environment one can talk about governance, as this involves the participation of private agents in governance tasks (Ibáñez, 1999). It is not efficient for the public sector and the private sector to set objectives and instruments without coordination. The governments who play a guiding and coordinating role and the companies who understand their social role within the environment in which they operate are on the road to a new setting. If, in addition, the area concerned is a Biosphere Reserve, as is the case of the island of Fuerteventura (Canary Islands, Spain), central object of the GOBTUR analysis, this circumstance is not only accentuated but it becomes an indispensable requirement prerequisite.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a concept that is gaining more presence in the tourism sector with particular relevance to the hotel industry. CSR highlights the changes currently being experienced in the socioeconomic, political and legal model. It is redefining not only the role of business, but also that of the state and, in general, all public and private agents in society (Mira Vidal, 2012). The question then is; to what extent is Social Responsibility (SR) limited to companies when planning tourism in a Biosphere Reserve?

Public policies that promote and drive the development of a specific territory consider cooperative relations as a useful procedure to achieve efficiency in the tourism sector. This explains the reason why, in a given space, growth is more intense, ordered and distributed than in others with a similar potential (Velasco González, 2010).

The tourism destination brings different sectors, different levels of government and even conflicting interests together. It is, therefore, necessary to move from planning carried out with political and administrative criteria to another style that uses other elements to address some of its problems. In this regard, the idea of governance and shared social responsibility makes sense. Tourism and nature are closely connected. The prosperity of the tourism industry depends directly on the state of the ecosystems where the activities and services it provides take place. Tourism activities that respect the recreational values in these environments are one of the main cultural services in the area, as well as the associated educational and aesthetic values (Blanke & Chiesa, 2011, p.82). On the one hand, tourism has significant negative impacts on biodiversity and the natural environment that can lead to degradation of ecosystems (loss of habitat from tourism development related to tourism facilities, habitat damage caused by tourism activities, advanced use of non-renewable energy and water, with the consequent difficulty of removing solid and liquid waste from the accommodation, bars and restaurants, for example). At the same time, tourism also has a positive effect on environmental conservation. Tourism provides an economic incentive for governments and communities to protect the biodiversity and nature that attracts tourists and to provide quality services in ecosystems, to increase awareness about biodiversity and conservation in tourists and to develop activities to support conservation.

Despite the crisis, the tourism industry has continued to grow and the development of new information and communication technologies (ICT) and improved transport have increased the globalization of and competition between the tourist destinations. This process has increased the pressure on destina-

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