

# RESPONSIBLE TOURISM PRACTICES IMPLEMENTED BY TOURISM COMPANIES

Codruţa A. BĂLTESCU<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *Sustainable development is a key managerial concept for the management decisions of any company or organization. For the tourism industry, the need to assess sustainable development is all the greater, as tourism is inextricably linked to people and places. This article highlights the importance of responsible practices of tourism companies and emphasizes the importance of certifications and awards granted by foreign experts to validate their sustainable behaviour.*

**Key words:** *responsible tourism, responsible practices, sustainable development, sustainability assessments provided by external experts.*

## 1. Introduction

The necessity and benefits of sustainable attitudes in the global economy have important effects in the tourism industry. The relevance of measures and strategies aiming to implement sustainable development determined the use of a concept known as responsible tourism. United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 stipulated responsible entrepreneurship to play a major role in improving the efficiency of resource use, reducing risks and hazards, minimizing wastes and safeguarding environmental qualities (UN, 1992, p.291). In 1992 the Pacific Asia Tourism Association (PATA) introduced the concept of responsible tourism to strengthen the principles of conservation in the region, soliciting membership in its Green Leaf programme (WTTC, et al., 2002). The report issued by major global tourism associations in 2002 stated tourism as an industry partner for sustainable development and also highlighted responsible tourism as a comprehensive goal in tour operators' policies with direct action and indirect impacts (WTTC, et al., 2002). In 2001 a report published by Tearfund, a development agency based in UK, Glasgow, pointed out the responsible tourism practices of UK tour operators, among which supporting the local economy, educating tourists, long-term investment and offering a high-quality product being not only essential but also highly appreciated by tourists (Tearfund, 2001). The same research mentioned that tour operators have the ability to implement operations to generate positive differences to the lives of local people.

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<sup>1</sup> *Transilvania* University of Braşov, [codruta.baltescu@unitbv.ro](mailto:codruta.baltescu@unitbv.ro)

As a result of responsible tourism importance and impact, dedicated networks were created, one of the best-known being ICRT – The International Centre for Responsible Tourism, an independent organisation established in 2002 (Goodwin, 2017). The members of the ICRT network share a common purpose in developing and promoting the concept of responsible tourism and they also consider that ‘responsible tourism cannot be reduced to the green agenda - in all its activities the triple bottom line and the ethic of responsibility are addressed’ (Goodwin, 2017, p.1). ICRT hub is based in the UK and has numerous affiliated centres, among which, one is in Romania.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

Responsible tourism is defined as ‘tourism that promotes responsibility to the environment through its sustainable use; responsibility to involve local communities in the tourism industry; responsibility for the safety and security of visitors and responsible government, employees, employers, unions and local communities’, the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) being the core of responsible tourism (DEAT, 1996, cited in Van der Merwe and Wöcke, 2007, pp. 1-2). At the same time, at the centre of responsible tourism practice is the concept of sustainability (Budeanu, 2005; Musavengane, 2019). Mihalic (2016) delimits the two concepts, considering that sustainability is the theory and the term responsibility relates to practice and actions undertaken for implementing sustainable goals. She also introduces a compound term, i.e. ‘responsustable tourism’ in the attempt to explain that responsible tourism behaviour is based on the concept of sustainable tourism (Mihalic, 2016, p. 461).

Responsible tourism practice is considered the foundation for a stronger relationship between tourism development and the quality of life and also the solution in combating the adverse effects of tourism development (Hanafiah, et al., 2016). Spenceley (2007) analysed the responsible tourism policies undertaken by tour operators in South Africa which, generally, were in the form of a set of principles, a written code of conduct for tourists, or a written set of aspirations, or an unwritten code of practice (Spenceley, 2007, p. 19). Actions related to the responsible tourism response motivate tourism entrepreneurs to achieve long-term sustainability (Tai, et al., 2016). Tai, et al. (2016, p. 35) categorized responsible tourism practices into six groups: raising awareness, cleaner production, local capacity development, green supply chain management, internal management and sustainability reporting. One of the main problems related to the implementation of responsible tourism practices is related to the lack of coordination, as tourism entrepreneurs prefer to act individually, mainly due to the dissonance of their interests (Tai, et al., 2016, p. 39). Responsible tourism practices are internally and externally driven (Musavengane, 2019). Endogenous or internally motivating factors refer to organisational values, i.e. altruism, legitimacy and competitiveness (Garay and Font, 2012). The exogenous factors are grouped in four main categories: pressure from stakeholders, pressure to conform to responsible tourism practices between business to business (B2B) relations, regulatory pressure which oblige businesses to conform to statutory requirements such as environmental and health and safety, and economic advantages provided by responsible tourism

practices, especially when they can improve efficiency (Musavengane, 2019, p.788). Many tourism companies are connected to contemporary desideratum and are aware of the importance of responsible practices. The managers actively engage in more responsible behaviour, adopting concrete management practices to enhance sustainability. Besides own-established actions, reaching expected results also require short to medium-term mentoring and capacity building support from responsible tourism experts which offer assistance for implementing the practical actions able to tackle responsible goals in the long run (McCombes, Vanclay and Evers, 2015).

### **3. Responsible Tourism Practices Applied by the Leading Tourism Group - TUI**

TUI Group develops its own sustainability strategy, entitled Better Holidays, Better World (TUI Group, 2018). This sustainable strategy affects all business areas and is developed over a period of time. The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development defines 17 sustainable development goals expressing the scale and ambition of the global change (UN, 2015). Out of these, only 3 goals focus in particular on sustainable tourism – SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth, SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production, and SDG 14 on life below water. TUI targets and implements effective responsible practices for seven of the SDG goals, thus reflecting group's meaningful contribution to sustainable development (TUI Group, 2018).

For SDG4 – Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all - TUI Group is committed to training and people development, the Better World Detective programme has been rolled out to 60,000 students since it was developed. TUI Care Foundation aims to empower 10,000 careers through TUI Academy in Namibia, Tanzania, Dominican Republic, Vietnam, Marocco, and Greece. SDG7 - Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all - is at utmost importance for the group. TUI invests in its airlines, aiming for Europe's most carbon-efficient airline by the end of 2020. TUI Airlines are 19% more carbon-efficient than the average of the six largest European airlines. The carbon target improvements are implemented also in other areas, such as cruise ships, hotels, ground transport, shops, and offices. TUI hotels reduced carbon emissions per guest night by 10%. SDG8 - Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all – TUI Group employs 70,000 people in over 115 destinations and operations contribute to direct and indirect job creation. TUI Care Foundation aims to enhance 10,000 local livelihoods through the TUI Cares programme. SDG12 - Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns – is linked to group's intentions to deliver 10 million greener and fairer holidays by 2020, taking customers to hotels with credible sustainability certifications. Through the TUI Care Foundation, the group supports sustainable agricultural projects linked to tourism. SDG13 - Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts – is supported by efficiency and renewable energy measures. In the Philippines, the group trains 2,200 families from two vulnerable communities for sustainable farming and fishing. SDG14 - Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development – is implemented through numerous measures: cruise ships use exhaust

gas systems to minimise pollution and protect marine environment, beaches were cleaned across 300 km of coastline, reduce of single-use plastics, protection for more than 1 million turtles through the TUI Care Foundation programmes. SDG17 - Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development – is accomplished through extensive collaborations with customers, suppliers, educational and training establishments, governments and UN organizations.

#### **4. Sustainability Assessments Provided by External Experts**

An important element for the responsible tourism practices implementation is represented by the sustainability assessments of different external experts.

FTSE Russell is a leading global provider of benchmarks, analytics, and data solutions. Considering environmental, social and governance issues (ESG) of critical importance to the business and to capital markets, FTSE Russell launched in 2018 its Stewardship, Transition and Engagement Program for Change (“STEP Change”), to meet the concerns of asset owners, managers and others involved in the investment chain which understand that sustainability themes are core investment priorities (FTSE Russell, 2019). The support provided to managers and investors is represented by a range of instruments, such as indexes, data, ratings, and analytics for a wide range of companies, elements necessary to understand operational and product-related ESG risks and opportunities. FTSE Russell provides services to different tourism subsectors, the indexes being determined in accordance to the specificity of these companies: airlines, companies providing travel and tourism related services (travel agents, online travel reservation services, etc.), hotels and motels, recreational services, restaurants and bars. TUI, for example, was listed on the FTSE4Good Index for 13 consecutive years. FTSE4Good Index Series is designed to measure the performance of companies demonstrating strong ESG practices.

Forum Ethibel is a Belgian organisation aiming to facilitate and accelerate the transition to a sustainable society and is recognised as an expert in the area of audits and certification of both financial and non-financial products and services. The organisation develops specific services and products, such as quality labels, audits, and certification of financial and non-financial products and cooperates with investors, savers, financial institutions, companies, governments and NGO’s. Forum Ethibel’s initial focus – the development and implementation of its own sustainability policy - has since been complemented with tailor-made support and societal embedding (Forum Ethibel, 2019). Forum Ethibel awards certificates to demonstrate that a product or service is in line with self-imposed criteria and guarantee compliance with conditions concerning corporate social responsibility (CSR). The certificates have validity over a period of time, new audits being carried out to check whether the client still meets the criteria.

RobecoSAM is known for its pioneering work in sustainable investing. RobecoSAM-labeled strategies have been designed to have a positive, measurable impact on the environment and society. Also, it developed Robeco’s range of rankings of both companies and countries in terms of their sustainability to help investors make

responsible choices. The Annual Sustainability Yearbook shows the sustainability performance of the world's largest companies. Sustainability Yearbook 2020 included 4710 companies assessed in the SAM Corporate Sustainability Assessment (CSA). Following the application of precise assessments and scores' calculating, companies are ranked into different groups, specific Sustainability Award being granted: Gold Class, Silver Class, Bronze Class, and Industry Mover.

CDP Global is an international non-profit organisation that runs a global disclosure system for investors, companies, cities, states and regions to manage their environmental impacts. The organisation supports companies in making their environmental impact transparent to stakeholders, better understanding how they can reduce their impact, and acting to become environmental leaders (CDP, 2020).

## 5. Conclusions

Performance in sustainable development implementation is more and more a major coordinate in tourism. The examples offered by large tourism companies are meant to inspire small and medium sized companies and to highlight the fact that sustainable development is an essential and achievable goal. The approaches of the external institutions which are specialized in sustainability objectives' assessments represent vectors for improvement and also extensions for future positive competition.

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