



มูลนิธิเอกสัมพันธ์เพื่อการท่องเที่ยวที่ยั่งยืน

Ecumenical Coalition On Tourism [ECOT]

Corporate Social Responsibility: A Third World perspective
ITB Convention Berlin,
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CSR - a gift to the poor?

Is CSR truly good news for the communities in the Third World impacted by tourism?
Surely, the tourism industry would think it is.

The Ecumenical Coalition On Tourism (ECOT) acknowledges that a growing awareness of CSR has taken place at some levels in the tourism industry within recent years. The inclusion of a Corporate Social Responsibility Day in the 2009 ITB Convention program attests to this. This is welcome. Some good practices have emerged in this area: a recent report from Tourism Australia indicates an increase in tourism businesses seeking CSR accreditations. By integrating social, environmental and ethical principles, CSR contributes to a more positive image to tourism agencies and entities, some of whom are attending the 2009 ITB. And such an image is attractive in the market where increasingly people are concerned about the state of our planet – socially, economically and ecologically.

It is one thing, however, to display a CSR reference on one's website, letterhead or in advertising or statutory documents. As the saying goes, the proof of the pudding is in the eating! Does the operation of CSR in tourism have a real beneficial impact on the ground? A CSR that makes no difference to the sharp edge of reality remains at best a theoretical exercise despite the good intentions.

And what is the ground reality as far as tourism is concerned? ECOT has engaged, networked and advocated for over twenty five years in relation to the underside of modern tourism which in our experience has steadily worsened over the years. A taste of this can be seen for instance in the outcomes of an ECOT Consultation in Manila, 'Tourism in the Philippines: A View from the Underside'. Representatives of civil society and community groups in the Philippines reflecting on and analysing their firsthand experience of local reality stated:

'We question current tourism practices and the government's policy direction that

- Offer the country's lands, including cultural and heritage grounds, and other natural resources, for exploitation by big business and transnational corporations in the guise of promoting economic growth as well as the country's history and culture;



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- Make national interests subservient to the profit interests of tourism-related industries such as airlines and shipping, big hotels and restaurants, so-called medical tourism hospitals, resorts, escort services, and other commercial tourist destinations;
- Place culture at the service of tourism which is inimical to the development of national identity and genuine nationalism’;
- Promote ‘so-called’ traditional and indigenous culture and arts but in the process alienate indigenous peoples from their traditional way of life and their capacity to develop as a people;
- Develop tourist sites and leisure facilities without regard to and at the expense of the local population and the environment;
- Lure tourists through images of women and the prospect of inexpensive sexual services due to poverty;
- Make children more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.’

One way or the other, such a bleak context is a reality not just in the Philippines but in tourism destinations around the Third World. While ECOT commends the efforts to incorporate CSR principles, the effectivity of CSR application can only be measured by the yardstick of positive outcomes engendered, outcomes that reduce if not eliminate the negative effects of tourism in their lives and the life of the community.

A call to self-interest

The tourism industry operates in a world which faces social, economic and ecological challenges, and in such a world does have the responsibility to act as an accountable global citizen. Fortunately, the number of consumers who seek responsible, ethical, just and sustainable tourism is on the increase. This provides an opportunity to the tourism industry to venture beyond the formulaic, superficial, mass tourism that is not really sustainable in the long run. While responding to the enlightened tourist satisfies such a tourist, it also assists tourism interests to increase market share within this growing niche. The costs involved in implementing CSR guidelines that are truly effective is an investment in the development of a positive image which assists marketing to the clientele. Or will the current global economic crisis be an excuse to shy away from the path of such CSR?

It may be argued that achieving a high quality of CSR will take time and cannot happen overnight. What such argumentation loses sight of is that the impact of tourism is to be measured in real time and we are running out of time. A case in point is the phenomenon of climate change. There is now a worldwide recognition of the devastating impact it will inflict on the planet and its peoples if we do not change our ways of consumption and living. Reflecting the urgency of this, UNWTO’s theme for World Tourism Day last year was ‘Tourism responding to the challenge of climate change’.



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Given that various aspects of tourism (air travel, energy rich consumption patterns involved in high end tourism facilities such as hotels and resorts, etc) contribute to climate change, the tourism industry does not have much time to make real efforts to become more sustainable. Corporate Social Responsibility, with an emphasis on *responsibility* to the planet and its inhabitants beyond the profit basis of industry, can play an important role in making tourism an agent of service to humanity and not one that damages. Change is needed now.

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