

The CSR Confusion in the South-East Block

All we hear about is sustainability, CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility), CR (Corporate Responsibility) and a bunch of other acronyms. Everyone shows how much they know about it, how “green” their business is, and how the world will be a better place, only because this person and his/her company went “green”... But who are these people and is their perception of CSR the true one?

Recently Guy Bigwood asked the great question in his blog LessConversationMoreAction.com – “What does Social Responsibility Mean To You?” – a great and a very complex question, especially to those in South-East Europe. While in West Europe and other more developed countries, the notion of greenwashing is not something new, in South-East Europe this concept does not exist just yet.



The media confuse people with unclear reports while companies confuse the public by using PR moves and calling them CSR, then when one uses the term sustainability at the end, the general person is not sure what has been referred to. This is sad, especially when it is the professionals that are unsure of what it is supposed to mean.

The big misperception of CSR in Bulgaria, for example, comes largely from the media. They talk a lot about the green movement and about sustainability. They refer to recent Awards in Corporate Social Responsibility, they talk about those great efforts of the big companies. But when you look at those “great efforts” they are just simple donations, or offering a free ride to the company’s employees, or even adopting for a year a bear from the local zoo. Does this simple little thing mean a company operates in a sustainable way? While these actions can be a part of a CSR strategy it is certainly not CSR in its full meaning! And the worst thing is that the public is getting it wrong.



Why the rest of the world can move forward and South-East Europe is stuck? Now we have to understand that we need to learn from those more experienced in the area. There are a lot of foreign

hotel-chains opening new hotels with great facilities in Bulgaria (and the case applies to most South-East European countries) and these are chains with firm CSR policies, the industry needs to embrace them and try to reach up to these standards.

Still, we must put our heads down and say that here we do not support the infrastructure that is required for a green venue, and we do not even have recycling plants. The circle gets more vicious, once we go up the ladder. If the government does not realize that we need a separate Ministry to handle our tourism, how can we move forward? How can sustainable tourism become a part of the small businesses (family hotels, tour operators, rural facilities) that the government supports so widely, when the country has no CSR strategy itself?

At the end of 2006 the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supported by the European Commission launched a regional project for accelerating Socially-Responsible Business (Corporate Social Responsibility) in new EU member-states and candidate-countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Slovakia and Turkey. The project's main aim was to advance within the new boundaries of the European Union the implementation of the practices of socially-responsible business in order to achieve harmonization, improved competitiveness and social cohesion in the EU (UN Global Compact Bulgaria Study 2007).



The UN Global Compact has done a great job analyzing the situation and also developing a CSR strategy for the country. Yet, the government's priority is not that, the media is not talking about that so the public stays away from the issue. And people must know about the effort of those who realize where the confusion is and want to help educate the public. What is left is the hope that the media will catch up with the fast development of sustainability and the really sustainable businesses. We are left to hope those that are ready to offer services on a local level, those with the know-how, ready to educate the public, will soon be the focus of the media. And then we can really hope we will live in a better and greener world!

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Date: 2010-08-30

Article link:

<http://www.tourism-review.com/travel-tourism-magazine-bulgaria-struggle-for-sustainable-events-article-1275>