Business Environmental Responsibility in the Hospitality Industry

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In this paper, the literature is reviewed and analyzed to establish the connection between tourism and the physical environments. The review shows an inevitable link between tourism activities with both environments. This and the strong tourism growth in the past, implies that tourism has far-reaching negative impacts that must be mitigated, not only for the good of the physical environments, but also for the sustainability of the industry itself. The review also indicates a slow integration of responsible environmental considerations into tourism planning and development due to lack of consensus about the importance of sustainable tourism as the industry's new direction, lack of a single comprehensive meaning of sustainable tourism to ease operationalizing the concept, and the flawed acceptance of alternative tourism as the answer for all tourism ills. The paper ends by confirming the need for a new way of thinking that takes into consideration the fragmented nature of the industry and a collective and conscious effort of all tourism businesses, governmental policymakers and planners as well as the key stakeholders (the society, the NGOs, the CBOs and the tourists) to prioritize environmental issues in their daily undertakings. It also highlights the environmental impacts of a hotel operation and stresses the need for hotels, as one of the key tourism businesses to deal with its environmental obligations.

Key words: Business Environmental Responsibility (BER), hospitality industry, sustainable tourism, environment impact

Introduction: Business Environmental Responsibility

This article aims to show the relevance of the Business Environmental Responsibility (BER) concept in the hotel sector[1] from the context of developing countries. BER, hereby defined as 'the responsibility of business irrespective of size towards environmental issues relevant to its operation' is a term deemed appropriate when describing the

TABLE 1 Hotel statistics in Penang, Malaysia and Bucharest, Romania

Location	Number of hotels	
	4 stars and up	3 stars or below
Penang, Malaysia	20	125
Bucharest, Romania	21	76

SOURCE Kasim and Scarlat 2005a; 2005b.

wider responsibility of a tourism business, as opposed to the commonly used 'Business Social Responsibility' (BSR) or 'Corporate Social Responsibility' (CSR). The reasons for adopting the term BER are twofold:

- To have a clearer focus. The term 'Business Social Responsibility' may denote broad meanings and cover various issues such as human rights, poverty, AIDS, prostitution and child labour which may not be under the hotel sector's direct jurisdiction. A narrower set of social variables i. e. labour rights and local community development is assumed to be of priority to a hotel's institution.
- To include the small and medium businesses. Since tourism is a highly fragmented industry essentially made up of many small and medium sized businesses, the term Corporate Social Responsibility is deemed less suitable as it limits responsibility to larger businesses only. In tourism, this limitation may be erroneous because tourism's environmental impacts are essentially the accumulation of impacts from all of the industry's players (Kirk 1995).

The hotel sector in Penang, Malaysia, for example, is composed of 125 small and medium hotels (rated 3 star and below) as compared to 20 large hotels (rated 4 star and above; the rating is given by the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism Malaysia and is based on the number of rooms and types of facilities offered). Therefore, small and medium sized hotel companies could have a more substantial accumulated impact as opposed to big hotels. In this light, it seems apparent that small and medium hotels have social and environmental responsibilities as well. The hotel statistics in Penang, Malaysia, are compared to Bucharest, Romania in table 1.

In this paper, discussion draws upon observation in Malaysia and Romania to focus on understanding the relationship between tourism and environmental issues, and the changing expectation on tourism's role towards these issues. Then a background is provided to the shift of perspective from eco-tourism as the route towards sus-

tainability to a broader, more inclusive view of sustainable tourism which mirrors the wider Corporate Social Responsibility (csr) debate that has until now been focused on the manufacturing sector.

Tourism and its Negative Environment Impacts

TOURISM INDUSTRY DYNAMICS

The impact of tourism in the global economy is significant. Being a worldwide phenomenon, tourism has become one of the fastest growing sectors of the global economy. In the year 2000, tourism-related businesses generated an estimated us$2 trillion and provided employment to approximately 15 percent of the world's economically active population (Faulkner, Mascardo, and Laws 2000). The share of the developing countries' international tourism at this point had also increased from approximately 10 percent in the 1970s to around 30 percent, with the largest growth rates being experienced by the East Asian and Pacific region. These developments encouraged the World Tourism Organisation (wto) to forecast annual growth rates of 4.3 percent during the next two decades, and they expect the figure to rise to 1,600 million international arrivals by the year 2020 (see www.world-tourism.org).[2]

THE NEGATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS
OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

The widespread and rapid tourism growth raises a question about its negative environmental impacts. By nature, tourism offerings depend greatly on environmental and cultural resources. As the industry offers predominantly resource-based activities that constantly interact with the natural systems, tourism has the capacity to initiate significant changes in the physical environment (Wahab and Pigram 1997; Hassan 2000). For example, tourists' desire for secluded and scenic accommodation may result in increased clearance of natural areas for the purpose of resorts and hotels development (Wahab and Pigram 1997). In addition, the transportation of tourists from one destination to another requires the use of some form of transport, and hence the use of fossil fuel, which releases significant amounts of greenhouse gaseous and other air pollutants (Holden 2000). As reported by the German ngo Forum on Environment and Development at the 7th Meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development (German ngo Forum on Environment & Development 1998, 5):

> Tourists consume about 90 percent of the primary energy required during a holiday for transportation during their arrival and related journey. The emissions generated by these

are one of the main environmental problems of tourism. Particularly pollution caused by air transport – which is largely for tourism – is continuously rising with an annual growth rate of about 5 percent. Air traffic is expected to double over the next 15 years. Worldwide civilian air transport already consumed 176 million tons of kerosene in 1990, releasing 550 million tons of carbon dioxide and more than 3 million tons of nitrogen oxides. While it has been possible to halve energy consumption per aircraft over the past 20 years, the rapid growth in global air traffic has meant that absolute energy consumption has nonetheless risen by 50 percent.

The link between tourism and the physical environments implies that tourism's survival depends highly on its ability to minimise its negative impacts on these environments and societies. In other words, the quality of tourists' interaction will be diminished considerably, if the natural setting of a tourism activity is polluted, degraded or loses its aesthetic qualities as a result of a poorly planned tourism development. Similarly, a destination may lose its tourist appeal if there are social problems such as the commercialisation of local cultures (which leads to the lowering of that culture's authenticity), increase in crime (from drugs/alcohol abuse and prostitution) and societal antagonism.

Therefore, the mitigation of these possible negative impacts appears essential in order to sustain the quality of tourism services.

However, the reality is that the industry had a lackadaisical attitude towards environmental protection up until the late 1980s, in spite of its emergence as an important developmental sector (McLaren 1998). Similarly, there has been no concrete initiative to minimise tourism's social impacts mentioned above. The lack of initiatives may be attributed to the widespread perceptions that tourism is a 'soft option' or a 'white industry', which can be developed relatively easily without much need for specific planning or resources (Butler 1997). For example, the industry has been praised as an important instrument for nature conservation because tourism income can (ideally) help to finance conservation of the protected areas and to protect ecologically fragile regions from other more environmentally degrading economic activities.

These misplaced perceptions have, however, been challenged (see Mowforth and Munt 1998; McLaren 1998; German NGO Forum on Environment and Development 1998; Pleumarom 2000). The numerous

environmental impacts of tourism as described earlier in this paper show that the industry can no longer be labelled as 'soft', 'white', or 'environmentally benign'. Instead, it is a complicated developmental sector that must be managed with expertise and professionalism (Butler 1997). The complexity and diversity of tourism functions require policy makers and professionals to keep abreast of changes (including those related to the environment and the society) at all times, to avoid the 'decline or immediate decline stage' proposed in Butler's model.

THE ENVIRONMENT IMPACT OF THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

As a key sector in tourism, hotel business regardless of sizes and types therefore needs to play a role as well, because hotels have several key environmental impacts (see International Hotel Environmental Initiative 1995; Kirk 1995; www.ggasiapacific.com.au):

- energy consumption,
- water consumption,
- waste production,
- waste water management,
- chemical use and atmospheric contamination,
- purchasing/procurement,
- local community initiatives.

Therefore, an attempt to address environmental responsibility may begin by addressing any or all of these key areas.

In the water consumption issue, it can be argued that hotel use is similar to that of a household, but ont a much larger scale. In addition, as more hotels are developed, more pressure would be exerted onto the local water resources. Water use in hotels, especially in resorts, is also leisure oriented – swimming pools, golf courses and in-room bathing facilities – rather than need oriented. Thus, during dry spells utility providers may be faced with a dilemma of either supplying for the leisure needs of the tourists or else for the basic needs of the domestic users. This brings about not only an environmental issue, but an ethical issue as well.

An example of such a scenario is Malaysia – a country that used to have an abundant amount of clean water. Malaysians enjoy a per capita renewable water supplyof more than 20,000 cubic metres per year, as opposed to 95.25 cubic metres per year enjoyed by the Spanish (see http://greenfield.fortunecity.com/leo/184/p62.htm). However, this has changed drastically in recent years with longer

TABLE 2 Water consumption in hotels compared to domestic user

Consumer	Number of rooms	Water consumption*	Average use of water**
Hotel	50–200	50,000–100,000	17
Hotel	200–300	120,000–180,000	27
Hotel	300–400	180,000–250,000	40
Hotel	over 400	300,000–500,000	100–130
Domestic consumer	Average	256	–

NOTES * Per month, in litres; ** per overnight stay, in litres.
SOURCE Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (www.northern.fmm.org.my); The Sustainable Penang Initiative 1999; EMTHIR 1998.

dry spells and growing demands on water resources due to population growth, urbanisation, industrialisation and the expansion of irrigated agriculture (Lee and Facon 2002). A combination of these factors has caused a water stress situation in Malaysia despite its wet climatic backgrounds, leading to increasingly frequent water supply shortages that affect many parts of the country. In 1998 when the country felt the effect of El Niño – a climatic phenomenon that leads to longer dry spell and shifting weather patterns – the long dry spell (which occurred again in early months of 2002, though less severe) exhausted many of the states' water reservoirs causing low water pressure to households and denying many citizens the pleasure of running water. But, personal communications with hoteliers and hotel associations in the affected areas revealed that hotels operated as usual during the dry spells and that operations were not interrupted by lack of water supply.

The above example raises a complex ethical issue that will not be dealt with in this paper. However, it highlights the role of hoteliers during water stress times. Obviously, continuing business as usual at this time is inappropriate. Considering the high amount of water needed for hotel operation (see table 2), hotels need to play a better role by adjusting their operation to mitigate the existing problem.

Hotels also need to play a role in relation to the water quality issue. This is especially so within the context of a developing nation such as Malaysia where water pollution is a widespread problem due possibly to the open drainage system, which allows the public to simply dispose all sorts of solid and organic wastes, and also to inappropriate sewage handling. Orwin (1999) observed that out of the 1.2 million septic tanks in the country, only 12,000 had their sludge removed for treatment. Approximately 65 percent of the sewage was dumped untreated into rivers and ultimately the ocean, adversely affecting the quality and appearance of those water bodies. Con-

sequently, many rivers in Malaysia are considered polluted or extremely polluted. In 1998, 13% of the rivers in Malaysia were considered 'very polluted' and 59% were 'slightly polluted' (Lee and Facon 2002).

Water quality in Malaysia is declining in tandem with the declining availability of clean water supply. Population growth, urban migration and urbanisation galvanized by rapid economic growth in the 90s, have led to increasingly intense competition among various water users and problems of water pollution (Oorjitham 1998; The Sustainable Penang Initiative 1999).

Increased flooding and numerous environmental degradations associated with economic development also threaten water supply with organic pollution. This is worsened by public apathy about the importance of water conservation. Wastage and negligence by the apathetic general public have been pointed out as one of the contributing factors to the water problem in many states including Penang (see http://greenfield.fortunecity.com/leo/184/p62.htm).

Linking this with the hotel sector, it is common sense that dirty, smelly and unsightly water can lower the economic value of properties located around it. On the other hand, water bodies such as rivers, lakes and the sea are major assets to the attractiveness of a hotel or resort. Considering this, it can be argued that any initiatives to reduce water pollution could help maintain the attractiveness of a destination, which in turn will benefit the hotel sector itself. Therefore, hotels need to integrate water quality measures in their operations.

In another key area of hotels' environmental impact i.e. energy, the need for responsible measures is also clear because of high electricity consumption for heating/cooling, lighting, cooking etc, leading to pressure on local resource and increased costs. Thus, energy conservation measures have a more direct and strong impact on the total cost consumption of a hotel. According to the EMTHIR report, the cost of heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC) in a tropical climate could range from 25–50 percent of the total energy cost of a hotel, depending on the size and usage of air conditioning. Lighting requires approximately 15 to 25 percent of a hotel's energy consumption, while laundry consumes varying amounts of energy – depending on the type of equipment or type of fabrics, and whether it is managed in-house or subcontracted. The situation may be graver for hotels in tropical areas because, according to the Inter-Continental Hotels and Resorts benchmarking study, the energy use for a luxury hotel in a tropical climate could go beyond 280 kWh/m² per year as

compared to 200 kWh/m² per year for that in a temperate climate. Solid waste is also a major environmental impact in this sector. A hotel's solid waste is not only huge but also diverse.

A typical solid waste production comprises: 46% food and non-recyclables, 25% paper, 12% cardboard, 7% plastics, 5% glass, 5% metals. In other words, approximately 47% of the waste can be recycled (this may be higher in developed countries where some plastics can be recycled).

The financial benefits of managing solid waste in hotels may also make recycling a worthwhile initiative to hoteliers. For example, reducing and reusing materials could cut down costs (from reduced packaging) while recycling could serve as a side revenue-earning practice from payment made by scavengers and recycling firms for the recyclables. In other words, responsible solid waste practices are not only practical but also beneficial to hoteliers.

Tourism's Need to Address Environmental Issues

RAISING AWARENESS

Clearly, hotels do have impacts and need to address them by demonstrating responsible behaviour. How they can go about addressing these impacts would require a discussion of its own, taking into account issues such as resource capability and barriers that may exist. However, guidance on how the sector could be more environmentally responsible, in the form of 'how to' books written in a technical manner, is well-documented. The lack of a dynamic dialogue has been blamed on the inability to agree on and clarify important concepts such as 'environmentally friendly' and 'sustainability'.

Case studies and examples of 'best practice' have also been documented. The International Hotels Environment Initiative (1996) for instance, provides examples of measures taken by various hotels all over the world. However, most examples and case studies come from developed countries or established tourism destinations such as Costa Rica and Jamaica, which are arguably more enlightened about responsible issues. In addition, efforts appear to be piecemeal environmental measures that emphasize cost cutting and resource minimization rather than a comprehensive approach to environmental responsibility. Such emphasis, rather than some altruistic one, is understandable because as a business entity, costs and resources are of fundamental concern to hotels.

For businesses or destinations that demonstrate 'best practice', they have done so primarily for the purpose of some form of cer-

tification or eco-labeling. An eco-label is a procedure that involves a third party evaluation on a product, process, service or management system based on specified requirements (Toth 2000). In Costa Rica for example, hotels and destinations strive to perform according to the Costa Rican Certification for Sustainable Tourism standards.

Eco-labeling gives international or regional recognition as it affects stakeholders from the entire supply chain of a tourism product. Briefly tracing the history of eco-labeling, the first eco-label ever developed was the Blue Flag, in 1985. Now, there are over 100 eco-labels worldwide, involving organizations such as Green Globe 21, Green Seal, Business Enterprises for Sustainable Travel, Fair Trade in Tourism and Costa Rican Certification for Sustainable Tourism.

NEW DIRECTION IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

Tourism's negative environmental impacts indicate a challenge for tourism's key players to pursue growth by having the flexibility to respond positively to a changing global environment and societal structure, while being responsive to the principles and practices of sustainable development. Thus, tourism needs a new direction in order to address the flaws of its conventional (mass) form. Wahab and Pigram (1997, 279) state that: tourism must offer products that are operated in harmony with the local environment, community attitudes and cultures, so that these become the permanent beneficiaries and not the 'victims' of tourism development.

There have been many different propositions about tourism's new direction offered. A prominent conference held in Canada on global opportunities for business and the environment came to the conclusion that sustainable development holds considerable promise as a vehicle for addressing the problems of modern tourism. Likewise, the roundtable session on trends and challenges in tourism at the tenth general assembly of the WTO in October 1993 in Bali, agreed on the rising importance of environmental issues and highlighted the need for environmentally-friendly tourism development and nature based tourism (Plimmer 1993).

Tourism's social concerns were also addressed in the Manila Declaration on the Social Impact of Tourism (1997), with recommendations on greater local participation in tourism development and stronger governmental priority given to social impacts in tourism planning. Although these dialogues offered different propositions, they imply strong endorsement for a sustainable form of tourism development.

**Sustainable Tourism: the Complex Search
for Meaning and Operationalisation**

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Incorporating sustainable development within the tourism context – or sustainable tourism – has been affirmed as the new direction for tourism. This concept draws attention to the need for balance between commercial and environmental (and later social) interests in tourism. Among the first attempts to define sustainable tourism was the one made by Butler (1991), who defined it as the long-term viability of a tourism entity (products, services) in an area. In other words, sustainability is tied solely to the survival of tourism players. Butler's definition tallies with that of Reinhardt (1998) who links sustainability to the fundamental preoccupation of tourism business managers – productivity, investment and profit.

However, they are misleading because tourism is viewed as being isolated from other uses of an area's natural resources. In reality, tourism competes for resources with other forms of economic activities, including agriculture and fishery.

Thus, resource competition and land use conflict are inevitable issues that need to be addressed. Butler seems to have recognised this when he proposed a later definition that takes into consideration the multiplicity of land use and the trade-offs that must exist between sectors before sustainability can be achieved. His improved definition of sustainable tourism is (Butler 1993, 29):

> Tourism which is developed and maintained in an area (community, environment) in such a manner and at such a scale that it remains viable over an indefinite period and does not degrade or alter the environment (physical, human) in which it exists to such a degree that it prohibits the successful development and well-being (sic) of other activities and processes.

Moore (1996) defines sustainable tourism development in line with the World Tourism Organisation's characterisation – that is, to be sustainable tourism development must meet the need of the present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. Sustainability, according to Moore, also involves total integration with the community in which the tourism organisation is located. Total integration here is referred to as involving health and safety issues, conservation of natural resources, renewable energy supplies, and other environmentally friendly manifestations. Leposky (1997) also dwells on the issue of

total integration, and emphasises that it entails 'maintenance and preservation of lifestyle and dignity of the local inhabitants' via the protection of the social fabric of the local community, assuring local economic opportunities, and guarding against exploitation by the outside world (Leposky 1997, 10).

All the interpretations of sustainable tourism have merits. However, they are not without their weaknesses. Integration as proposed by Moore (1996) and Leposky (1997) as an essential element in sustainable tourism cannot take place without a united effort towards the same goal. Considering the highly fragmented nature of the tourism industry, the feasibility of a united effort seems remote. Similarly, protecting the local social fabric as Leposky (1997) suggests is difficult because local tourism business in developing countries is often spearheaded by capital-intensive foreign companies. These companies and their business operations inevitably bring foreign culture to the local scene. One example is the building of tourist entertainment facilities such as night clubs and pubs in a Muslim country, which contradicts the local religious belief against alcohol consumption. In addition, the inevitable exchange between locals and tourists will always bring some degree of change to local culture and lifestyle.

COMPLEX SEARCH FOR MEANING AND OPERATIONALISATION

The controversy surrounding the concept 'alternative tourism' makes it difficult to operationalize the meaning of sustainable tourism. This concept emerged in the 1980s as a possible route towards sustainability. It was thought of as the best medium to attain conservation of natural areas in order to maintain resource sustainability, avoid environmental damage, maintain resources quality and bring in new economies to local people. Alternative tourism was also associated with benefits to the local communities, educational value for tourists, and a foreign exchange earner for the struggling developing countries (Boo 1992; Brandon 1996). The excitement has had a profound effect on the development of tourism in these countries, with many of them opening their doors for tourism development under the pretext of 'eco-tourism', 'responsible-tourism', 'green tourism', 'acceptable tourism' and many others (Faulkner, Mascardo, and Laws 2000). What these new kinds of tourism supposedly offer is a change from the environmentally and culturally degrading mass tourism to a more 'gentle' tourism that supports the whole notion of sustainability.

Much praise was given to the new forms of tourism between the

late 1980s and early 1990s, and much criticism centred upon mass tourism. However, a report by The World Bank (Brandon 1996) reveals that alternative tourism has generally failed to live up to expectations regardless of variables such as the size and management type of protected areas, local cultures, types of tourism enterprises and levels of government involvement. In other words, alternative tourism also carries negative environmental impacts traditionally associated only with mass tourism.

As argued by McLaren (1998) the disassociation of alternative tourism from conventional mass tourism's problems is in fact inaccurate, because the new form of tourism is essentially an excuse for a continuing colonisation and control of a destination and all its resources. In other words, these new forms of tourism have been used merely to legitimise and prolong the mainstream industry.

Theobald (1998) also emphasises that equating sustainable tourism development with eco-tourism is an exceedingly restricted outlook of the potential tourist interest in sustainable tourism, because it implies an 'elitist overtone' and support for a small market segment. He further argues that for sustainable tourism to be effectively supported, its appeal and relevance must be extended beyond eco-tourism. He points out that although mass tourism is often dissociated from sustainability, there are now signs of increased interest in environmental protection of mass tourism destinations. To illustrate his point, he describes the development in Hanauma Bay, a popular marine park outside Waikiki, Hawaii that has been overwhelmed by tourists. Yet, these mass tourists have indicated willingness to pay fees and accept limits in numbers in order to reduce the problem of crowding which would have ultimately destroyed the park.

One of the major problems with alternative tourism is the unsubstantiated, often refuted claims of eco-friendliness. McLaren (1998, 98–99) writes:

> An eco-tourist, like any other tourist, uses tremendous amounts of natural resources to jet halfway around the world to enjoy an outdoor experience […] eco-tourism popularity is actually magnifying the negative impacts upon the earth, since it promotes development (destruction) of wilderness. For a tourist to have a truly minimal impact, she/he would have to walk to the destination, use no natural resources, and bring her/his own food, which she/he grew and harvested. She/He would also have to carry along her/his low impact accommodation (a tent) or stay in a place

that is locally owned and uses alternative technologies and waste treatment. [she/he would also] have to leave the destination in a good or perhaps even better condition than she/he found it and contribute funds to the local environmental protection and community development [...] eco-tourism may be worse off to the (host community) since they have few facilities to support tourist population and fewer policies and regulation to monitor its development [...] many conservation projects were opposed by local people and created conflicts in the nearby communities [...] eco-tourists are loving nature to death and disrupting the lives of local people.

Mowforth and Munt (1998), support this by arguing that it is necessary to scrutinise the actions of environmental organisations or the armies of backpackers whose actions are largely seen as benign or benevolent. This challenges the tacit assumption that the emergence of new forms of tourism is both designed for, or will result in, conquering the problems of mass tourism. In addition, these new forms of tourism have drawn developing countries into a highly unequal relationship with developed countries instead of overcoming inequality as was promised.

Clearly, the sustainable tourism concept is that it is still elusive, with few concrete indicators about its operationalisation. Thus, the concept remains vulnerable to different interpretation by different people. However, the attainment of sustainable tourism needs to be viewed as a progressive process rather than an absolute goal that can be swiftly realised. Sound environmental practices such as alternative tourism, though not yet proven, enable tourism planners to progress towards a better approach in tourism development. Of course in the context of developing countries this cannot be attained without the governmental and policy support for sustainable tourism in the first place. We need to look beyond ecotourism to see how each entity in this highly fragmented industry could contribute towards sustainable tourism. In addition, it is important to recognise that the impact of tourism is not limited to direct interactions with the natural environment alone. Tourism's numerous activities such as transport (travel and tours), accommodation (food and lodging) and entertainment (leisure and pleasure pursuits) can accumulatively cause more environmental damage.

Defining sustainable tourism need to take into account the diverse and fragmented nature of the industry, and any attempt to-

wards sustainable tourism practices needs a united and coordinated effort among all parties involved. Therefore, sustainable tourism must be the collective and conscious effort of all tourism businesses, governmental policymakers and planners as well as the key stakeholders (the society, the NGOs, the CBOs and the tourists) to prioritise environmental issues in their daily undertakings. This definition precludes the idea that tourism impact management is solely the responsibility of one key tourism player or the government alone, because without cooperation from the numerous and diverse key stakeholders in tourism, any move towards sustainable tourism would seem incomplete.

A good example of responsible civic attitude of NGOs in aggregating the interested groups and key stakeholders to protect the environment of Vama Veche village (on the Romanian Black Sea coast) is the campaign developed under the slogan 'Save Vama Veche!'

However, the above involves real efforts rather than merely 'a committment' to environmental standards as proposed by many ecolabelings that exist today. As proposed by Sharpley (2000) one critical element of sustainable tourism is the adoption of a new social paradigm relevant to sustainable living. However, this is doubtful due to lack of specific evidence on the demand towards sustainable living especially by consumers, despite the proposition by several authors that knowledgeable and demanding customers, prepared to adopt the modes of behaviour more appropriate to the environment of the receiving destinations, are rising in numbers (see Wahab and Pigram 1997; Cater 1993).

Empirical evidence on consumer demand for responsible tourism is also limited. The findings of Eagles (1992) indicate that the increased number of tourists preferring nature tourism is not specifically related to the emergence of green consumerism. Middleton and Hawkins' (1993) research also found little evidence of a major shift in consumer attitudes backed by willingness to pay for environmental quality. Similarly, McNaghten and Urry's (1998) research reveals significant ambivalence among consumers to different environmental issues, and indicates that stated environmental concerns are rarely translated into consistently green consumer behaviour. These findings imply that the existence of a widespread propensity among tourists to adopt a new, sustainable form of lifestyle during travel is highly unlikely.

This problem is worsened by confusion about ecolabeling. With the sheer number of ecolabels that exist today, there is confusion

as to what each ecolabel really means and which to follow. On the other hand, the diverse and fragmented nature of the tourism industry present a challenge in establishing one applicable, fair and cost effective criterion as proposed by Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council in 2001 (Maccarone-Eaglen and Font 2002).

The proliferation of certification schemes or ecolabeling has also caused confusion among consumers as to what each label means. The trend of consumers in Germany for example, is to perceive eco-labels from the point of view of environmental quality (35%), environmental protection (27%) or simply cleanliness or hygiene (13%) (Maccarone-Eaglen and Font 2002). According to World Wildlife Fund (2000), the problem is exacerbated by the tendency of Green Globe 21 (see www.ggasiapacific.com.au), i. e. the most widely recognized certification scheme to award almost similar logos to companies that commit themselves to undertaking its certification system and to companies that have managed to fulfill certification. The difficulty in distinguishing the meaning of each certification has led to lack of demand for certified holidays. This undermines the primary objective of certification to promote sustainable tourism.

Certification is even more complex to apply in the context of LDCs. Flores (n. d) has challenged the benefits of ecolabelling in the context of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) by emphasizing that tourism is supposed to be a multicultural experience, to be enjoyed for its authenticity and diverse local possibilities. Therefore, standardizing tourism products may be an oxymoron. Local initiatives should therefore not be subjected to an international accreditation that is often a top-down instrument that refuses to consider local contexts. In many ways, Flores' observation is reflective of what is happening in many developing countries. These countries are often tourist receiving regions that depend on local initiatives and infrastructures to fulfill travel motivations of people from tourist generating regions. Tourism makes up the bulk of their earnings and employment. But at the same time, the tourism infrastructure and initiatives are primarily the collective effort of small and medium entrepreneurs who are either unaware of international developments or simply cannot comply with internationally developed standards. In addition – since many of their customers are enlightened citizens of the western countries – poor customer awareness and the demand on environmental management make it doubtful that these businesses will be prepared to venture into getting an eco-label – a procedure that is often tedious and costly.

If eco-labeling is not a justifiable means for sustainable tourism, then we need to find a new line of thinking. Perhaps sustainability is not simply about alternative tourism, or global standards or labeling. Instead it must be about real, proven efforts (as seen by the local community) from the industry and all its fragments – hospitality, travel agency, air transport and tour operator and the other actors – to act in ways that are helpful towards improving the quality of the local environments and the life of the local people. The focus should be on improving local livelihood and not fulfilling top-down global standards that disregard the local context.

Conclusions

This paper has established that tourism and the hotel sector has a direct relationship with the physical environments. The inevitable link between tourism and hotels' activities with both environments, and the strong tourism growth in the past, implies that tourism and all its sectors has far-reaching negative impacts that must be mitigated. This is important not only for the good of the physical environments, but also for the sustainability of the industry itself.

The slow response towards integrating responsible environmental considerations into tourism planning and development indicates the need for a collective and conscious effort of all tourism businesses, governmental policymakers and planners as well as the key stakeholders (the society, the Nongovernmental Organizations, the Community Based Organizations and the tourists) to prioritise environmental issues in their daily undertakings. The hotel, as a key trader in the industry needs to play a greater role. The number and range of impacts it has on the environment in particular, indicate an urgent need to address those impacts. The role would be stronger, if social issues (local community initiatives which include the issues of local employment, staff welfare and the preservation of local culture) were taken into account as well.

Nonetheless, the effort should start somewhere and the sector's role needs to be developed. This means that further discourse on this issue should concentrate on understanding the drivers of and barriers to adopting responsible behaviours, and possible ways to enhance the former while mitigating the latter. Such knowledge is crucial in the effort to increase hotel business' involvement the and adoption of responsible behaviours.

Finally, education and training should play a major role focused both on managers and staff from the tourism and hospitality industry (Scarlat 2001) as well as on industry customers.

Notes

1. The content of this paper is largely based on the authors' recent scientific reports (Kasim and Scarlat 2005a; 2005b.).

2. Several global incidents such as the September 11, 2001 terrorism disaster in New York, usa, and the sars epidemic that affected several countries all over the world in 2003 have had a detrimental effect on the global travel and tourism industry, thereby dampening the optimism of this forecast.

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