

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THE HOTEL SECTOR: A SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Nowadays, Corporate Social Responsibility issues are of major interest for every stakeholder in our society, as it is reflected in the ever-growing number of reports and papers coming from both public and private agencies, like companies, universities, and NGOs.

Although CSR can be traced back to the first half of the twentieth century, only recent advances link CSR to strategy (Kotler and Lee, 2005; Porter and Kramer, 2006), enhancing the durability and trustfulness of such policies (Fray, 2007). When inserting business ethics into knowledge management processes, it becomes a more effective tool, enabling new business opportunities (Guadamillas and Donate, 2008). Lastly, communicating this commitment is of key importance, since every involved stakeholder is expected to receive a specific message.

Regarding the tourism industry, hotels represent a key player in its value chain, as they generate great impact in terms of employment and GDP (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2009), environmental degradation (Bohdanowicz, 2005), and social or cultural transformation (Brunt and Courtney, 1999). Given its economical and environmental impact, the hotel sector is one of the most obvious potential beneficiaries of applying CSR policies. Hotel managers are becoming more concerned about these policies, as they understand it as a must to achieve sustainable growth and long-term profitability (Erdogan and Baris, 2007).

There are several issues concerning the CSR debate in the hotel sector: whether there's a business case or not for CSR in this industry, if they generate a positive turnover, which operative areas must be involved in these policies, how to deploy a CSR communication plan, or even if there's a large enough market niche for developing a specific offer. In this paper, information is sorted according to managerial decisional factors and the specific characteristics of hotel activities, aiming to obtain a precise framework of CSR scientific knowledge in the hotel sector.

Environmental impacts of the hotel sector are heavily documented; therefore, hotel managers are fairly aware of the need to manage their environmental performance, and of the social pressure for being ecologically responsible. This results in managers communicating a greater CSR commitment than the real one. This gap is motivated by a lack of CSR knowledge, especially in the case of urban facilities (Bohdanowicz, 2005), and the utilitarianism of hotel managers (Knowles, 1999). CSR has been treated so far as a minor marketing factor; hence it can be still developed to focus in the socially responsible consumer niche (Dinan and Sargeant, 2000).

Although managers show great interest in CSR issues, and it is becoming a mainstream topic, most of them ignore the environmental and social impacts derived from their decisions and activities, showing an educational weakness in this area. Managers' previous knowledge and consciousness about CSR have a positive and direct relation to the application of this kind of policies (Ayuso, 2006). In an sector in which decisions are mainly motivated by the industry structure and legal requirements (Miller, 2001) CSR training is necessary, and it should include information about hotels' environmental and social impacts, the existence of a substantial market niche for CSR hotels, and CSR benefits, such as cost savings, increased customer loyalty, or strengthened economic performance, being this last point a widely discussed topic (García and Armas, 2007).

Referring to economical aspects of CSR, most papers highlight the positive returns of CSR investment in the hotel sector. There's evidence of stock value increases (Nicolau, 2008), and of higher profitability rates (García y Armas, 2007), in both short run and long run turnover. Managers who have checked CSR performance usually show higher trust and commitment about CSR policies (Lee and Park, 2009). These propositions apply for any kind of hotel company regardless of its size, since it is not a relevant factor when assessing hotels' economic or financial performance (García and Armas, 2007)

CSR can be attached to hotel strategy (Porter and Kramer, 2006), and thus communicating CSR policies both to customers or stakeholders can generate competitive advantages (Holcomb et al, 2007). Main hotel companies show their commitment using their Internet websites, and often offering a sustainability report, but this information lacks of auditing (Holcomb et al, 2007), so communications soundness can still be enhanced.

Revisiting existing literature of CSR in the hotel sector depicts an industry highly focused on environmental protection and ecotourism, evidencing a deficit of papers studying a wide range of CSR policies involving areas such as human resources, social impacts, etc. Further studies on cross-cultural or cross-country analysis are proposed, in an attempt to gain data richness coming from different points of view, and oriented to new recipients, like mid-range managers, operational workers in hotel companies, or even customers, shifting to a multi-stakeholder insight. Since most papers are top-manager focused, broadening the scope of scientific research is of major interest.