

CSR and ethics in tourism: introducing the special section

This special issue of *International Journal of Tourism Cities* on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and ethics in tourism was originally conceived as a point of departure for a call for papers based on the international conference on Tourism, Ethics and Global Citizenship: Connecting the dots in Apeldoorn, the Netherlands. The conference was co-organised by Breda University of Applied Sciences, Saxion University of Applied Sciences and Wageningen University, and was held in July 2017.

The concept of CSR is a frequently debated topic in tourism and was coined for the first time in 1953 with Bowen's publication *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman*. Bowen (1953, p. 6) defined CSR as the obligation "to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action, which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society". Nowadays, the expansive literature on CSR covers several definitions of the concept. Crépin (2012) pointed out, for example, that the concept of social responsibility suggests that companies should take into account social, environmental and economic concerns in their operations and their interactions with their customers, employees and shareholders. A similar definition is given by Aguinis (2011, p. 855), who states that CSR is defined as "context-specific organisational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders' expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social and environmental performance".

Many scholars have attempted to define CSR (Dahlsrud, 2008), but there is still no universal consensus (Gatti *et al.*, 2012). One of the reasons for the difficulty in establishing an agreed-upon definition for CSR lies in the many structures and intersections of academic discussion that have contributed gradually to a shared understanding of CSR (Coles *et al.*, 2013; Dahlsrud, 2008). As Orlitzky and Shen (2013) point out, CSR is not a homogenous concept and there is no one-size-fits-all strategy for businesses.

The on-going academic discussions about the definition of CSR introduced new concepts and theories to address the ethical dimension of the phenomenon. In particular, Weeden (2002) takes the definition of CSR a step further by introducing ethics, along with the three "classical pillars" of sustainable tourism: economic, social and environmental indicators. Although ethical tourism is a relatively new concept in the field, it has been embraced widely on a cross-disciplinary level.

Within the past couple of decades, ethical tourism has become an important point of reference, not only as an academic subject of study but also as a business practice (Fennell, 2006; Lovelock and Lovelock, 2013). As a result, enterprises are urged to commit to CSR by operating ethically and contributing to economic development while ensuring the wellbeing of employees and the local community, which is impacted by the business.

Tour operators and airlines followed the dominant trend and promote the concept of ethical tourism in the context of their commercial activities (Coles *et al.*, 2011). In particular, various businesses and websites endorse the ethical tourism discourse by offering relevant products, which target people across the globe who consider themselves socially aware and responsible citizens (Butcher, 2015). This could be explained by the fact that tour operators are often confronted by ethical and human rights dilemmas. Critical human rights issues come up in daily business operations and in communication with customers, as well as in broader business relations. This responsibility also applies to human rights related to supply chains, labour rights, security, information technology, freedom of expression, forced and child labour, and investment

issues (Posner, 2016, p. 705). As Lovelock and Lovelock (2013, p. 32) argue, “ethical tourism is therefore not merely a form of tourism, but a way of thinking that applies to all forms of tourism”. While it might raise more questions than answers for those involved in tourism practices, it still lies at the heart of ethical decision-making.

On an academic level, only recently have we witnessed the inclusion of ethics, moral and existential issues (Isaac and Platenkamp, 2013) in scholarly tourism debates. Freedom of movement, the right to travel, and simultaneously, the rise of a multitude of alternative forms of tourism have provided sufficient justification for discussing the manifold relationships between tourism, CSR and ethics. It is, therefore, important that scholars from different disciplines converse and debate this noteworthy and timely theme. In particular, there is a need for understanding the relations and effects between the way we, as scholars, tourists or hosts, interact with each other and the environment and how people reflect on these encounters in terms of hospitality, inequality, gender, [de]colonisation, human rights, poverty, movement restrictions, identity and so forth.

In this introduction, we think it is important to introduce the concept of polyphonic dialogue. As Clifford and Marcus (1986) argued, a polyphonic dialogue replaces the truth claims of isolated parties with a careful process of persuasion in which no voices or parties are excluded. It is comparable with multilogicality (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) and, in honour of Hannah Arendt (1958), to the concept of “agora”, or a public place for discussion. Arendt introduced the agora as an open or public space, similar to the *forum Romanum*, where people present themselves as individuals with independent thoughts. This special issue is a public place for discussion like the “agora”.

Nevertheless, we would like first to briefly elaborate on three concepts before talking about the papers presented in this special issue: morals, ethics and meta-ethics. In general, we distinguish between morals, ethics and meta-ethics as follows. Morals is about good or bad behaviour, whereas ethics is about the principles that are fundamental for good behaviour, and meta-ethics is about the legitimisation of these principles. For example, in a moral discussion, someone could ask whether poverty or slum tourism is good or bad? An ethical discussion, on the other hand, would be concerned with the principles behind this judgment. For example, is exhibiting places associated with death and suffering for tourism acceptable, ethical or correct? In this case, we would focus on the underlining principles that guide this judgment. In meta-ethics, we should address the central question, which is, what are the foundations and meanings of moral values.

In ethical and meta-ethical discussions, scholars are challenged to find their way between relativism and absolutism. The fundamental challenge is to develop points of view between relativism and absolutism. One approach to resolving this dilemma can be found in an old discussion introduced by the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who distinguishes two discourses, one based on scientific knowledge and another based on a moral discourse dealing with “wise” human actions, which leads to a moral practice called “phronêsis” (Nussbaum, 1990). Phronêsis is defined as a “good action” or “practical wisdom”. In such a practice, the dilemma between relativism and absolutism will not be solved in an absolute manner. It will be included in an ongoing discussion in which principles are used in a flexible way to support the arguments of different voices. In a polyphonic dialogue (mentioned above), people realise and respect differences, but nevertheless confront their positions in a critical and respectful way in the “agora”. This special issue offers just such a space for public dialogue.

Outline of this special issue

This special issue aims at strengthening the academic and professional networks that are necessary to push forward discussions of tourism’s manifold intersections with existing and emergent CSR ethical approaches. In parallel, it endeavours to encourage and advance theoretical, conceptual and empirical research on CSR and ethics in the context of tourism.

The six articles of this special issue are organised into three sections. Each section consists of two articles, which are grouped thematically. The first section deals with “the perceptions and practices of CSR” in specific geographical contexts, while the second section focuses on the

“interplay of CSR and ethics” in the tourism sector. The last section discusses the “subject of ethics in tourism as a social practice and as a discipline”. In the following paragraphs, we will briefly introduce the subjects of study, the research methods used and the main argument(s) of each article.

The first article, by Borges, Vieira and Rodrigues, assesses the perceptions of domestic and international tourists in relation to practices of social responsibility in the city of Porto, Portugal. It is a quantitative study based on close-ended questionnaires and explores the level of visitor awareness of CSR practices in the fields of environment, customer relations and community. Perceptions of the brand image of the city and how visitor demographics may influence that image are also explored. The authors argue that tourists have an overall awareness of the social responsibility of Porto, but that the environment is less acknowledged in comparison with concepts of community and customer. Tourist demographics like education level, employment status and place of residence also influenced participants' level of awareness of the CSR image of the city.

The second article is a qualitative study that explores the relationship between leadership, responsibility and resilience in the tourist destination of Bavaria, Germany. Pechlaner, Zacher, Eckert and Petersik's findings endorse the Destination Network Responsibility approach by highlighting the need for the destination manager to maintain good relationships with all stakeholders in the urban setting, while coordinating key tourism players in rural areas. On the level of Destination Management Organisation (DMO), it is argued that the process of building resilience requires the active participation of employees, local residents and, more importantly, destination managers. In short, resilience is a shared responsibility of various stakeholders in the DMO that can only be achieved through efficient communication, collaboration and coordination of short-term and long-term strategic goals.

The second section of the special issue focuses on “the interplay of CSR and ethics” in the tourism sector, while making an effort to take into consideration the conditions that may influence this relationship negatively or positively. Particularly interesting is Skinner's study in the third article, in which she examines whether the economic restraints and cultural values imposed on small-to-medium-sized organisations have an impact on the level of unethical and illegal practices they engage in. The author uses a mixed research method with an emphasis on qualitative data by focusing on Corfu, an island in Greece. Skinner collects quantitative data via close-ended questionnaires, while enriching her study with an exploratory case study that takes into consideration the context in which the social phenomenon under study occurs. It is argued that the socially responsible and ethical practices of Small-Medium Tourism Enterprises (SMTEs) should apply to all actors involved and are not necessarily linked to legal requirements. Cultural values and economic difficulties have an impact on the practices of the SMTEs, while the economic crisis in Greece has led a number of enterprises to compromise socially responsible and ethical practices in order to survive financially.

Also of interest is Biaett's exploration of the ethical and social responsibility of event organisers when they estimate event attendance. The article draws on the understudied problem of publishing unrealistically inflated participant figures for various events and its ethical, social, environmental and economic implications for the stakeholders involved. To investigate the topic, the author applies the content analysis method to a number of articles that include both academic and popular media narratives. The findings reveal that academic articles and popular media have not been preoccupied with the ethical dimensions of estimating event and festival attendance. Biaett suggests a three-step process that will re-establish the lost validity in the estimation of participant figures and that will embrace the ethical and social responsibility, not only of organisers, but also of those who are responsible for reporting this information.

Picking up where section two leaves off, section three focuses mainly on “ethics in tourism as a social practice and as a discipline”. The fifth article of the special issue investigates whether tourism as a social practice has a potential role to play in social justice and worldwide peace. Schneider explores tourist reactions to the “dual narrative” tours offered in Israel and West Bank, Palestine by Israelis and Palestinians, respectively, where each group addresses the conflict from its own historical and political perspective. The author uses a mixed research

method approach based on quantitative data from post-tour surveys and qualitative data retrieved from open-ended impact questions asked of the tour participants. Schneider challenges some of the pre-existing literature by arguing that tourism has the power to shift people's attitudes towards a more holistic understanding of complicated political issues. The dual narrative approach shifted the attitude of the vast majority of respondents to a more supportive and compassionate stance towards both sides of the conflict. It was also noted that this process enabled participants to have an in-depth understanding of the complexity of the issue, as opposed to a more simplistic and absolute judgement. Schneider's findings reveal that tourism as a social phenomenon and practice has the power to contribute to building bridges of understanding and cultivating ethically and socially responsible tourists who will actively contribute to peace and justice activism.

The final article of this special issue is very different from what we have been conditioned to recognise as an academic article. Munar takes a very critical stance towards academia in general, and more specifically towards tourism as a field and a discipline. In this theoretical paper, the author draws inspiration from classical and post-disciplinary approaches in order to critically reflect on the academic ranking and metric culture that dominates academia today. This paper indirectly proposes an academic writing style different from the mainstream, highly structured, sterilised and citation-sensitive one that the vast majority of academics have been conditioned to produce. The author analyses the concept of "hyper academia" in a non-mainstream approach in a space where alternative conceptual tools can be used, such as audio-visual elements, philosophical experimental thought, storytelling and a manifesto that proposes the "humanisation of academic cultures and environments".

Summing up, this special issue contributes to the development of a tourism research agenda that challenges academic disciplines to incorporate CSR and ethics, as subjects and principles, into their research. In other words, the aim of this special issue is not to offer a conclusive assessment of the relationship between CSR and ethics, but to open up the academic discussion to questions that have never been asked and subjects that remain unexplored. As scholars, we ourselves have the ethical responsibility to raise the kinds of questions that will revolutionise not only our discipline, but the world as a social space.

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Further reading

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