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## Responsible tourism that creates shared value among stakeholders

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### ABSTRACT

This paper maintains that responsible tourism practices can be re-conceived strategically to confer competitive advantage. It looks at the extant literature surrounding the notions of “responsible tourism” and “shared value”. A qualitative research involved in-depth, semi-structured interview questions to discover the tourism and hospitality owner–managers’ ethos for responsible tourism. Secondly, telephone interviews were carried out with tourism regulatory officials. The findings have revealed that discretionary spending in socially and environmentally sound, responsible policies and initiatives can create shared value among tourism enterprises and their stakeholders. In a nutshell, this paper indicates that responsible tourism led to improved relationships with social and regulatory stakeholders, effective human resources management, better market standing, operational efficiencies and cost savings, along with other benefits.

### Introduction

The business case for responsible tourism focuses on building adaptive approaches and directing resources towards the perceived demands of relevant stakeholders. Businesses may be in a better position to understand the true bases of company productivity as they collaborate with stakeholders across profit and non-profit boundaries (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Therefore this contribution primarily suggests that there is scope for tourism businesses to identify and expand their extant relationships with key stakeholders. Secondly, this paper demonstrates that the real essence of responsible tourism also lie in the implementation of laudable behaviours. Very often, responsible behaviours transcend from attitudes and genuine organisational commitment, not only in policy formalisation (Hall, 2011). Therefore, the goals of this research have been reached through a combination of activities. This paper considers some of the unresolved theoretical and empirical issues pertaining to responsible tourism and the sustainability agenda. It also advances Porter and Kramer’s (2011) “shared value” approach. It addresses a knowledge gap in academic literature as it looks at different aspects of responsible behaviours in tourism (Buckley, 2012; King, 2010; Shaw, Bailey, & Williams, 2011). This study has used a qualitative research methodology to investigate human resources management, sustainable

environmental practices and marketplace policies among travel and hospitality businesses in Malta.

## Responsible tourism

Goodwin (2013) held that responsible tourism addresses the issues which matter locally across the sustainability agenda. He implied that this issue tackles the socio-economic and environmental problems and opportunities which arise as a consequence of tourism activities. Several intergovernmental organisations as well as academic commentators have long been contributing to the development of responsible tourism and the sustainability agenda (see Bramwell, Lane, McCabe, Mosedale, & Scarles, 2008; Buckley, 2012; Camilleri, 2014; Goodwin, 2011; Lee, Jan, & Yang, 2013; Sharpley, 2014; UNWTO–UNEP, 2012; among others). Globally, responsible tourism management can address issues such as climate change and scarce resource management (Frey & George, 2010; Iglesias, Garrote, Flores, & Moneo, 2007). Responsible tourism started gaining its popularity during the 1980s. Apparently, this notion as well as the other emerging concept of sustainable tourism (Krippendorff, 1987, pp. 138–139) became popular topics for academia (Bramwell & Lane, 1993; Hall & Lew, 1998; Sharpley, 2000). Other synonymous terms have been used in the past to describe responsible tourism. Similar notions included; alternative tourism, green tourism, soft, sustainable tourism, small-scale or appropriate tourism (Jones, 1987; Krippendorff, 1982). Interestingly, Wheeler (1991) explained that the developed western economies were in a better position to afford such luxuries. He pointed out that the developing countries' main concern was to increase their foreign exchange earnings through mass tourism. Evidently at the time, responsible tourism did not resolve the contentious effects of the unanticipated, sheer volumes of global tourism (Wheeler, 1991). Cooper and Ozdil (1992) have even suggested that responsible tourism was as an elitist, hedonistic activity that assuaged the guilt of the educated, affluent tourist. The authors noted that responsible tourism destinations were increasingly developing small-scale accommodation establishments. Cooper and Ozdil (1992) maintained that tourism was better controlled through the local community rather than at national or international levels. Moreover, others authors related sustainable tourism to a model form of economic development that was meant to improve the quality of life of the host community (Chiu, Lee, & Chen, 2014; McIntyre, 1993). In a similar vein, Crouch and Ritchie (1999) suggested that the concept of sustainable tourism sought the consensus of all segments of society (including local populations), so that the tourism industry and other resource users can coexist together for a thriving economy. Sustainable tourism ought to take into account the current accommodation capacity, the local population and the environment (Bramwell & Rawding, 1996; Hall, 2010).

In a sense, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2002, 2011) was quite specific in its recommendations. For instance, during the WTTC meetings the tourism practitioners often referred to the use of local building material for tourist sites, the recycling of waste, water conservation, the recruitment of the locals for jobs in tourism, etc. This emphasis has further escalated to an international dimension through the implementation of Agenda 21 (Camilleri, 2014). Those fora had resulted in international guidelines which tackled sustainable tourism issues. The World Tourism Organisation (WTO) had established the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism in 1997; whose purpose was to guide stakeholders in

tourism development (Camilleri, 2014). These ten principles were never meant to be legally binding, but they served as guiding principles to governments, local communities, tourism operators and tourists, concerning preservation of the environment. In a similar vein, Goodwin and Francis (2003) explained how responsible tourism may bring high-quality engagement with local communities and their environments. Other contributions on the subject held that the most effective way to foster responsible tourism practices would be to support various environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs), green activists and responsible tourism associations (Miller, 2001). Yet, it may appear that this is the very opposite of what tourism hospitality practitioners were doing in reality. Merwe and Wöcke's findings (2007) indicated that smaller hotels in South Africa were not always seeing the benefit in enrolling themselves as members in responsible tourism organisations. Perhaps these entities did not necessarily meet the strict criteria for membership or accreditation that are required by tourism associations. Merwe and Wöcke (2007) held that small hotels do not always offer the same level of service as their larger counterparts. They also possess limited resources which may be a contributing factor for not implementing responsible tourism initiatives. Therefore, responsible tourism may not be perceived by all stakeholders as delivering any business advantage (Merwe & Wöcke, 2007). On the other hand, Bohdanowicz (2006) implied that the Scandinavian hoteliers were willing to make changes in response to emerging customer demand for "green" operations, combined with the growing evidence of financial benefits that are derived from managing resource-efficient facilities. She went on to suggest that the hotel industry would benefit from environmental pro-activeness among operators. This latter study posited that the geo-political, economic and socio-cultural contexts can have a significant influence on the environmental attitudes of hotel operators (Bohdanowicz, 2006). In this light, the European Union (EU, 2007) has raised awareness about sustainable tourism policies. It encouraged the business actors to respect its set of principles for a sustainable and competitive European tourism industry. Recently, the European Commission has launched the stakeholders' consultation on the first draft of the European Charter for sustainable and responsible tourism (EU, 2012). The purpose of this Charter was to encourage sustainable and responsible tourism policies and actions across Europe, by providing a common reference point for all stakeholders in tourism. The latest summit about sustainable development was held in Rio de Janeiro. This event has yielded a non-binding declaration that committed the world's politicians to modest goals. Generally, countries have committed themselves to pay more attention to climate change and to enhance infrastructural development. They also agreed to eventually develop long-term goals for sustainable development; global targets for both the environment and for eradicating global poverty, with no concrete action in this regard. This is in line with reaching the objectives of poverty reduction and unemployment as outlined by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Hall, 2010). One of the main outcomes of the Rio+20 Conference was the agreement by member States to launch a process to develop a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which will build upon the MDGs and converge with the post 2015 development agenda (UN, 2015). The SDGs seek to complete the unfinished business of the MDGs, and respond to new challenges. The goals and targets integrate economic, social and environmental aspects and recognise their interlinkages in achieving sustainable development in all its dimensions (Hall, 2010; Lloyd, 2015).

## Creating shared value

Goodwin's (2011) publication, "Taking Responsibility for Tourism" linked the paradigm of sustainable business to the business case for responsible tourism. He analysed the key perspectives of responsible tourism in practice; socially and economically responsible tourism, environmental responsibility, ecotourism and conservation. In his blog, Goodwin (2007) advocated that tourism's economic benefits are maximised "when local employment and economic linkages are maximised". In a sense, this argument is also replicated in a UNWTO–UNEP (2012) report which demonstrates how increased investment in sustainable tourism has the potential to boost the sector's contribution to economic growth, development and job creation, while simultaneously addressing the major environmental challenges of our time. Lately, Goodwin (2015) reported how the responsible tourism movement in Kerala has focussed on local economic development, on the creation of employment and enterprise opportunities. Similarly, the *SDG's* address a wide range of issues on the global social agenda including poverty eradication, hunger and food security, healthy lives and well-being, inclusive and equitable education, gender equality, water security, sustainable and modern energy access, unemployment, building resilience, sustainable consumption and production, climate change, conservation and biodiversity and peaceful and inclusive societies (UN, 2015). Undoubtedly, there is potential for the private sector to play a key part in tackling these challenging issues. There have already been numerous examples of successful businesses that are helping society by; building resilience, providing healthy lives and well-being, education, hunger and food security, as well as many other examples (Lloyd, 2015). Such corporate behaviours are consonant with Porter and Kramer's (2011) "shared value" framework. This notion is rooted in identifying the specific issues that improve the businesses' own performance. Yet, at the same time responsible behaviours can create large-scale social benefits. In some cases, this is a matter of reemphasising a firm's founding social mission. In a similar vein, Goodwin (2015) argued that tourism in Kerala was helping the rural communities. He asserted that tourism can "create shared value" as he indicated that the hotels support their neighbours by sourcing local food and cotton goods. Goodwin (2015) went on to suggest that shared value would not exist without the partnership agreements between the formal industry and the local communities. Therefore the notion of creating shared value is all about embedding sustainability and corporate social responsibility into a brand's portfolio where all business processes operate in an environmental setting within their wider community context (Camilleri, 2014).

Interestingly, the notion of "shared value" has become an ongoing and popular theme during the World Economic Forum in Davos. The Sustainable Business blog has reported some interesting conversations from chief executives of big businesses about this notion (Guardian, 2014; Lloyd, 2015). Some of these latest developments are increasingly focusing on the training of suppliers, improving social conditions, buying from cooperatives and paying premiums and working with certification programmes (such as Fairtrade or other eco-labels). Effective communication with stakeholders is a very important element of responsible business behaviour (Camilleri, 2015). Through shared value initiatives, businesses are identifying emerging issues, shape their responses and continue to drive improvements in their corporate performance. Porter and Kramer (2011) held that the shared value proposition sets out new business opportunities as it creates new

markets and niches; it improves profitability and strengthens the competitive positioning. The shared value proposition focuses on the scale of impact and degree of innovation that companies can bring towards the societal requirements where traditional NGOs and governments have often lacked (Kramer, 2012). Pfitzer, Bockstette, and Stamp (2013) maintained that there are five ingredients for shared value: social purpose, a defined need, measurement, the right innovation structure and co-creation. The Intercontinental Hotel Group (IHG) is a relevant example of a multinational organisation which has embraced Porter and Kramer's (2011) "shared value" approach. IHG has identified innovative opportunities within the environment while fostering closer collaborations with the communities where it operates its business (Jamal & Getz, 1995). IHG aligned its corporate responsibility report with the Global Reporting Initiative Scorecard (IHG, 2012a). At the time, the hotel chain claimed that it could reach reductions in energy consumption of up to 10% in the following three years. IHG planned to achieve this target by using an online sustainability tool named "Green Engage". IHG suggested that this tool has helped them in measuring and monitoring energy, water and waste management (IHG, 2012b).

### Research objectives

The over-arching aim of this research project was to identify and analyse the determinants which explain why tourism enterprises are (or are not) engaging themselves in responsible tourism practices. Previous theoretical underpinnings may have paid limited attention to how tourism enterprises create shared value for themselves and for society (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Therefore, this research will be analysing the business case of responsible tourism (Goodwin, 2011; Graci & Dodds 2008; Haywood, 1988; Kirk, 1998). This study was built on the foundation of the following research questions.

- What are the tourism enterprises' current insights, perceptions and attitudes of responsible behaviour? What is their ethos for responsible tourism?
- Are the tourism owner-managers communicating their laudable behaviour and promoting their adoption of responsible practices among stakeholders?
- What is their commitment to social and environmental behaviours? Are the tourism organisations dedicating enough energy (in terms of financial, human and time resources) to responsible tourism practices?
- What is their business case? Are the tourism enterprises successful in using responsible tourism as a strategic tool to leverage their internal and external organisational behaviours?
- Does organisational size and the availability of resources matter in their responsible tourism agenda?
- How are tourism organisations capable of creating shared value opportunities for their business as well as for society?

### Methodology

This research gathered qualitative data from informants in the tourism industry of the Southern European island state of Malta. The first phase of this study has adopted a collective case study approach, which involved thorough discussions with 16 managing directors (MD) or owner-managers, human resources managers or marketing

communications managers whenever the MD was not available. It explored these informants' attitudes and perceptions through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. These informants hailed from exemplary companies who had a proven track record in responsible tourism and sustainable activities such as social initiatives, environmental management and stakeholder engagement (Bramwell & Lane, 1993; Crouch & Ritchie, 1999; Hall, 2011; Sharpley, 2000). The interviewees were purposely selected from a search for enterprises that were awarded Eco labels, or whose activities had been highlighted as best practice by their respective industry association. The researcher's questions sought to explore the tourism owner-managers' ethos for responsible tourism. The informants were asked about their organisation's articulated vision and mission statement. There were open questions about their organisations' social and environmental practices and whether their enterprise had any written policies in this regard. The informants were asked to describe their relationship with their internal stakeholders (i.e. employees). They were requested to elaborate on their human resources' policies and practices. There was a discussion that sought information about the organisations' environmental awareness. Generally, the informants were given relevant examples of energy conservation, waste minimisation and recycling initiatives. Subsequently, the interviewer asked questions about the enterprises' relationships with external stakeholders. The informants were requested to describe their relationships with customers and suppliers. The interviewees were requested to speak about their purchasing policies, provisions for consumer protection and the like. Later, the informants commented about their community involvement practices and whether they were supporting any particular activity and/or projects. Generally, there were very engaging conversations about the tourism organisations' policies and practices. In the main, a trusting rapport was established with many informants, as the small talk progressed into a dialogue. Table 1 describes the sample of informants, hailing from the tourism enterprises in Malta.

**Table 1.** The research participants.

*Informants from the tourism enterprises*

Code	Organisational type	Established	Staff count	Informant position
SC1	Hotel	1995	39	Owner
MC1	Hotel	1990	65	Owner
MC2	Hotel	1967	140	Director HRM
SC2	Hotel	2002	23	Owner
MC3	Hotel	1995	95	General Manager
SC3	Hotel	1996	44	Owner
MC4	Tour Operator	1982	21	Owner
MC5	Tour Operator	1989	32	Owner
SC4	Travel Agent	1976	6	Owner
MC6	Hotel	2005	102	General Manager
MC7	Tour Operator	2001	46	Marketing Manager
SC5	Travel Agent	1999	6	Owner
SC6	Travel Agent	1972	2	Owner
SC7	Travel Agent	2000	6	Owner
SC8	Travel Agent	1992	7	Owner
SC9	Travel Agent	1995	3	Owner

*Informants from the tourism regulatory authorities*

Code	Organisational type	Informant position
MTEC	Ministry for Tourism and Culture	Head
MTA	Tourism Authority	Senior Manager

In phase 2 of this research, there were two semi-structured telephone interviews with informants. These interviewees were purposely selected in their regulatory role as government officials. The two civil servants were chosen to shed light on the government's regulatory policies and guidelines in the realms of responsible and sustainable tourism. The interviewees were asked to describe the standards for responsible behavioural practices across the tourism sector. They were expected to give their opinions on how they believed that sustainable tourism policy had (or had not) been successful in the Maltese context. In addition they were requested to indicate which initiatives were aimed at reducing tourism impacts. Afterwards, they explained how they promoted the concepts of responsible and sustainable tourism. The interview questions sought to uncover the key issues and challenges for a sustainable tourism industry in Malta. In conclusion, these two informants were asked to describe their relationships with the tourism industry practitioners and other stakeholders.

Generally, the semi-structured interviews (in both phases) were drawn on a number of key themes on the subject of responsible tourism ([Appendix](#)). The researcher compared the interviewee responses and analysed them. This qualitative research was not intended to make generalisations on the tourism industry as a whole. Quotes were used to illustrate some of the key research findings. Inevitably, this study's bias lies in its sample selection, as the tourism enterprises were not chosen at random. The hotels and tour operators were selected on the basis of their credentials in responsible tourism as they had previously been recognised by their peers and were awarded for best practice or have been eco-certified. This bias was deliberate as this research intended to uncover responsible tourism practices that can create shared value for both business and society.

## **Analysis and results**

The 16 owner-managers or directors who participated in the first phase of the study were somehow involved in setting the agenda for responsible behaviours. All interviewees revealed that their personal values and beliefs mirrored their firms' business ethos and company vision. MC2, MC3, MC4, MC6 and MC7 suggested that their engagement in responsible tourism was motivated by their economic responsibility (towards achieving profitability, increasing their sales, improving reputation, etc.). MC3 declared that his hotel enjoyed a good reputation among stakeholders, as it had high CSR credentials. Afterwards, this informant provided some interesting details about his hotel's innovative environmental management. He pointed out that his hotel adheres to ethical norms and international standards. The Director of Human Resources of a five star hotel, MC2 had clearly elaborated and explained her organisation's commitment for responsible tourism. She started by referring to the 140 families who depended on her company's success for their living. She implied that social responsibility is primarily aimed towards the enterprise's internal stakeholders. Her organisation wanted to improve the level of job satisfaction and employee morale. She went on to suggest that the hotel's strategy intended to instil "a sense of belonging" among the employees. The informant provided details about her hotel's "employee reward schemes", which were aimed at incentivising employees' productivity. Throughout the years she alleged that her hotel had also assisted various external stakeholders, which comprised environmental causes, heritage protection, philanthropic activities as well as cultural and sport-related initiatives. Generally,



the informants often resorted to cite their mission statements which inspired their guiding values. The keywords often related to: “collaboration, trust and trustworthiness, duty, caring, identity, honesty, respect, friendliness, civic engagement, integrity, and legitimacy” (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999; Jamal & Getz, 1995; Nunkoo & Smith, 2013).

MC2, MC3, MC5 and MC7 have developed their own corporate responsibility and sustainability policies which were clearly reflected in their existing operations and business practices. It transpired that the first step towards developing a responsible mentality is to redefine the values and principles of the respective company. Arguably, the role of the business owner/s and or directors is crucial in aligning the company's ethos to responsible behaviours. This qualitative fieldwork has shown that the investigated firms were implementing social and environmentally responsible practices. The larger enterprises were proficient in integrating their sustainability and responsibility policies within their internal and external activities. MC1, MC2, MC3, MC4, MC5, MC7 and SC2 also suggested that they were truly committed to be as transparent and accountable as possible. In a sense, they reiterated the importance of communicating what they are doing. Other informants from the smaller enterprises, namely SC1, SC3, SC7 and SC8 affirmed that legitimacy was their motivating principle. It seemed that they had a genuine desire to provide their share of reciprocal benefits and investments to the communities in which they operate. The informants were asked to give concrete examples about their past responsible practices in human resources management; environment and the marketplace.

### **Human resources management**

Arguably, the tourism industry may be characterised by a number of contentious issues which are absent in other sectors of employment. The hospitality industry's human resources are often required to work for very long hours (Getz & Carlsen, 2000; Pavesic & Brymer, 1990; Poulston, 2009). The food and beverage operations and the front office staff are usually required to work on varied shifts and extended hours; including the weekends and public holidays, often without being able to take time-off during high season and shoulder months. This study has shown that a major concern in the Maltese hospitality industry is attracting quality employees, employee retention, training and maintaining high staff morale (similar issues were also noticed by Davidson, Timo, & Wang, 2010; King, 2010). The long working hours may possibly hold back the employees' taking up training courses. The informant of the youngest enterprise, SC2 held that his small hotel often consulted with his employees on important issues. However, he stressed that his focus was to improve his human resources' competencies. He went on to say that his firm organises frequent on-the-job training sessions and courses to all employees. Past training had been carried out in customer services, language skills and food and beverage operations. An interesting fact that came out of this project was that the larger enterprises (e.g. MC2, MC3, MC6 and MC7) were often delivering education and training programmes about their environmental awareness and sustainable development practices along other operational courses and training. Another relevant subject which was raised during the interview meetings was the issue of promoting a work-life balance to employees. The question asked the employers whether they were sensitive to the personal circumstances of their employees (e.g. children of staff, family members in need of care and volunteering activities). MC2 responded that in the past, two of her members of staff were sponsored to

pursue professional training courses. Their studies had necessitated their temporary absence from work. Yet, in general the informants did not elaborate much further about considering the adoption of flexible working hours or reduced hours from work for their employees. Unfortunately, the work-life balance is not a viable option in the hospitality industry, due to the particular nature of work where at times the employees are required to work unsocial hours.

## The environment

The tourism firms recognised that there are benefits in engaging in responsible environmental initiatives. It has been widely agreed that some environmental practices may contribute to the long-term success and sustainability of the enterprise itself (Ayuso, 2007; Jones, 1987). This study revealed that some of the larger hotels (MC2, MC3, M5 and MC6) were publishing their annual environmental reports along with their financial statements. On the other hand, the smaller firms did not always report their environmental performance. However, the interviews have shown that they were carrying out responsible practices, often without communicating what they do. The informants were asked whether they were trying to reduce their enterprises' impact in terms of their environmental performance. MC2, MC3 and MC5 affirmed that their responsible behaviour led to increased productivity and efficiency. MC3 explained how his hotel recycled green waste from their gardens, used a biological fertiliser and avoided hazardous chemicals.

"Through reusing, reducing and recycling policies there was a significant reduction in waste". "... we are trying to minimize our landscape watering in our premises by contributing to biodiversity", "The hotel's commitment to the green policies brought added value and mutual gain to the business and the external environment". (MC3)

"One of the major changes in the hotel is the continuous investment in energy-efficient equipment, such as energy lamps, reverse osmosis units, a waste water treatment plant and gas burners". "... Implementing new measures and changing attitudes is however an uphill struggle but environmental awareness can now be felt and seen". (MC3)

"Environmental performance often makes financial sense as well. Energy efficiency, waste minimization, pollution prevention and recycling have resulted in significant cost-savings for us", "... well, it seems that it has also enhanced our reputation and market standing". (MC2)

Most of the informants maintained that they were aiming to increase their sustainable environmental behaviour through: (i) the usage of renewable energy in their facilities; (ii) increasing the current reuse and recycle; (iii) water conservation and waste minimisation programmes. The informants came up with very interesting, yet innovative environmental ideas. For instance, MC3 maintained that his enterprise recycled green waste from the hotel's gardens. Other hotels communicated that they were limiting the usage of disposable packaging. The literature review as well as the research fieldwork has covered certain aspects involving sustainability instruments such as the codes of conduct, best environmental practices, eco-labels, environmental management systems and environmental performance indicators. Such instruments represented the most commonly applied self-regulation methods which are frequently used by hotels in the international arena. Surprisingly, there was an informant (MC3) who has been awarded the prestigious Gold Award by "Travelife—Sustainability in Tourism" for the enterprise's high standards of environmental management. Many informants have indicated that energy usage was one of their main

operating costs, which necessitated careful consideration. Currently there have been some recent spikes in energy tariffs and charges in Malta. Moreover, there were campaigns which have heightened the awareness for more energy efficiency. The Malta Resources Authority has even offered grants and subsidies to commercial entities to engage in renewable energy sources. Generally, the investigated enterprises recognised that it was in their interest to prevent pollution (e.g. emissions to air and water, effluent discharges, noise, etc.) as they were committed to protect their natural environment. Better resource management is often enabled through improved technologies. Sometimes, good practices spread across the value chain to suppliers, customers and competition. This was evidenced during the interview meetings, as many of the informants indicated that they were aware that the Malta Council for Science and Technology has recently promoted an innovative wastewater recycling process for hotels, namely HOTER. This research project involves re-using and the conservation of water. A HOTER test prototype (with a treatment capability of 15,000 L day) was installed in a leading hotel since summer 2008. The wastewater treatment process has recovered as much as 70–80% of the water and provided first class water (EU Drinking Water standards) for the guest rooms of the hotel, while also meeting all second class water requirements (irrigation standards). The tests were successful and the project has also received international acclaim.

## The marketplace

The informants agreed that good relationships with stakeholders often spurred their activities across the value chain. Social networking is always a very basic requirement for businesses, including tourism enterprises. Normally, the firms' fair policies and practices are valued by marketplace stakeholders. In the main the informants admitted that their firms strived to ensure that there was continuous dialogue with customers and suppliers. They maintained that they wanted to keep good relationships with the people they do business with. In their own words; "Firms are similar to humans, as they rely on creating relationships which are crucial for their success" (MC2). "We have a good dialogue with our customers and suppliers"; "... our aim is to retain our existing customers and attract new ones" (SC2). "... if we deliver good customer service to our guests, our customers will be our ambassadors" (MC7).

The business partners and suppliers are also a very important part of the marketplace, as responsible enterprises assess their potential impact in their business operations. MC1, MC2 and MC6 highlighted that in line with their procurement policy, they try to purchase locally produced products and fresh organic products, as much as possible. MC2 suggested that her hotel even stimulates suppliers to adopt sustainability initiatives. Interestingly, all of the informants maintained good business relations with their suppliers, as they claimed that they pay their bills when due. Many informants agreed that there are reputational gains, often resulting in stronger partnerships, increased efficiency and better mutual understanding in marketplace relationships. Reputation is fundamental to ensure success within the marketplace. In SC3's own words; "... it's important to consistently 'do the right thing' with our business partners ... we try to minimise problems with our suppliers by keeping good relations. This way, we are keeping up our reputation". MC3 went on to say; "... our restaurants' food and beverage products and service have to be of a high standard, as we have a duty to satisfy the needs and expectations of our valued hotel guests".

Many tourism owner–managers asserted that such responsible procurement practices often result in significant cost-savings. Notwithstanding, strong relationships with the marketplace stakeholders often lead to better quality products (fresh organic products) which are sustainable and of a high quality. On many occasions, the hotels held that they ensured effective feedback, consultation and dialogue with suppliers and the other people they do business with. The first phase of this research has indicated that the tourism owner–managers would like to learn more about the business case for sustainable environmental practices. Perhaps, more seminars and courses can be organised to raise awareness about responsible tourism TM practices. This is a key area where policy-makers and regulatory authorities could provide further assistance (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999).

### Regulatory policies and guidelines in responsible tourism

The researcher believes that there is scope for government and regulatory authorities to channel resources to firms which demonstrate high responsible tourism credentials. Organisations ought to be encouraged to improve their potential capabilities. A supportive framework can possibly foster the right environment, where enterprises can learn from each other in order to develop their responsible tourism strategies (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999; Fleischer & Felsenstein, 2000). The second phase of this research involved telephone semi-structured interviews with two regulatory informants from the tourism industry (Appendix). The informant who worked in the Ministry for Tourism, Environment and Culture declared that his department coordinates the EU funding (covering the period 2007–2013) on programmes and projects in liaison with many tourism and hospitality enterprises including, hotels, tour operators, travel agencies, restaurants, etc. He explained how the current EU funds are being allocated to tourism zone upgrades to improve the landscaped urban spaces and other facilities and in sponsorships for on-going training of staff in the tourism industry. MTEC stated that direct funding in the tourism industry was available from various European Union sources including; EDEN—European Destinations of Excellence, Networks for the competitiveness and sustainability of Tourism, Leonardo Da Vinci Programme and Cordis. The informant was asked to give particular examples about how the policy translated to sustainable tourism activities which increased the sector’s contribution to the economy. MTEC referred to a recent sustainability plan for Gozo (which is the second largest island of Malta). An innovative concept, dubbed as “Eco-Gozo” was aimed to increase tourism earnings, per capita expenditure, in the island. He suggested the Eco-Gozo initiative can generate multiplier effects, as it increases Gozo’s competitive advantage. In MTEC’s own words;

... Whilst retaining Gozo’s characteristics and adopting responsible practices and processes, we will support the development of tourism related activities that contribute to support the principles of responsible travel and sustainable development such as the green passport for tourists (green awards for those hotels attracting the highest amount of green tourists), the generation of employment such as green tourism jobs, awareness about the industry and eco principles. (MTEC)

The second informant was an official at the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA). MTA1 held that his organisation’s mission was to strengthen the (tourism) industry’s human resources. He went on to suggest that businesses should have really high standards

and quality in their tourism product. MTA1 mentioned Malta Tourism Authority's "Eco-certification scheme", which has been successful in encouraging the hotels' engagement in responsible practices. The informant remarked that at the time of the interview there were approximately 15% of the hotels in Malta which had achieved the "Eco-certification" mark. This translated to almost 30% of all hotel rooms. Interestingly, one of the interview respondents had revealed that his hotel was "Eco-certified". MTA1 affirmed that such hotels must comply with a number of criteria to be eligible for "Eco-certification".

"The set criterion is aimed at improving the hotels' environmental performance and to increase their environmental awareness". "... There are many benefits for them (Hotels), as they will improve their corporate image, tap into the growing market of environmentally-conscious travellers, and more importantly, they will be reducing their own operational costs". (MTA1)

MTA1 asserted that an added benefit of forming part of the "Eco-certification" scheme is that hotels were gaining MTA's technical support on environmental issues, especially through their annual training seminars on sustainability and responsible tourism. Therefore, MTA also facilitates the sharing of positive experiences in environmental management. Finally, MTA1 quoted a research which was conducted by the Malta Tourism Authority in 2009. The study revealed that 68% of the surveyed tourists have expressed high levels of interest in environmental issues, while 57% were even willing to pay an average of 8% more for their hotel accommodation (MTA, 2015).

## Discussions and conclusions

This study revealed how different tourism organisations were engaging in responsible behaviours with varying degrees of intensity and success. It has identified cost-effective and efficient operations. There was mention of some measures which enhance the human resources productivity. Other measures sought to reduce the negative environmental impacts. At the same time, it was recognised that it was in the businesses' interest to maintain good relations with different stakeholders, including the regulatory ones:

The researcher believes that responsible tourism can truly bring a competitive advantage when there are fruitful communications and continuous dialogue among all stakeholder groups (including the employees, customers, marketplace and societal groups). The tourism enterprises ought to engage themselves in societal relationships and sustainable environmental practices (Chiu et al., 2014). The tourism owner-managers admitted that responsible behaviours have brought reputational benefits, enhanced the firms' image among external stakeholders and led to a favourable climate of trust and cooperation within the company. Similar findings were reported by Nunkoo and Smith (2013). This study reported that a participative leadership boosts employee morale and job satisfaction which may often lead to lower staff turnover and greater productivity in the workplace (Davidson et al., 2010). Evidently, stakeholder relationships are needed to bring external knowledge sources, which may in turn enhance organisational skills and performance (Frey & George, 2010).

This research posits that sustainable and responsible environmental practices leverage the tourism enterprises performance as innovations can help to improve their bottom-line. This finding was also consonant with Bohdanowicz's (2006) contribution. This research indicated that the investigated enterprises were increasingly pledging their commitment

for discretionary investments in environmental sustainability, including; energy and water conservation, alternative energy generation, waste minimisation, reducing, reusing and recycling policies, pollution prevention, environmental protection, carbon offsetting programmes and the like. Indeed, some of the interviewees have proved that they were truly capable of reducing their operational costs through better efficiencies. Nevertheless, there may be still room for improvement as tourism enterprises can increase their investments in the latest technological innovations. This study indicates that there are small tourism enterprises that still need to realise the business case for responsible tourism. Their organisational culture and business ethos will have to become attuned to embrace responsible behavioural practices.

The governments may also have an important role to play in this regard. The governments can take an active leading role in triggering responsible behaviours. Booyens (2010) also reiterated that greater efforts are required by governments, the private sector and other stakeholders to translate responsible tourism principles into policies, strategies and regulations. Governments may give incentives (through financial resources in the form of grants or tax relief) and enforce regulation in certain areas where responsible behaviour is required. The regulatory changes may possibly involve the use of eco-label and certifications. Alternatively, the government may encourage efficient and timely reporting and audits of sustainability (and social) practices. The governments may provide structured compliance procedures to tourism enterprises. Responsible tourism practices and their measurement, reporting and accreditation should be as clear and understandable as possible. The governments' reporting standards and guidelines may possibly be drawn from the international reporting instruments (e.g. ISO, SA, AA and GRI). Nevertheless, it must be recognised that the tourism industry is made up of various ownership structures, sizes and clienteles. In addition, there are many stakeholder influences, which affect the firms' level of social and environmental responsibility (Carroll & Shabana, 2010). Acquiring new knowledge must be accompanied by mechanisms for dissemination. Perhaps, there is scope in sharing best practices, even with rival firms. It is necessary for responsible businesses to realise that they need to work in tandem with other organisations in order to create shared value and to move the responsible tourism agenda forward. Therefore, this study's findings encourage inter-firm collaboration and networking across different sectors of the tourism industry.

This contribution contends that the notion of shared value is opening up new opportunities for responsible tourism and the sustainability agenda, particularly with its innovative approach to configure the value chain (Pfitzer et al., 2013; Porter & Kramer, 2011). There are competitive advantages that may arise from creating and measuring shared value. Evidently, there is more to responsible tourism than, "doing good by doing well" (Garay & Font, 2012). As firms reap profits and grow, they can generate virtuous circles of positive multiplier effects. This paper has indicated that the tourism enterprises, who engage themselves in responsible and sustainable practices, are creating value for themselves and for society. In conclusion, this research puts forward the following key recommendations for the responsible tourism agenda:

- Promotion of laudable business processes that bring economic, social and environmental value;
- Encouragement of innovative and creative approaches, which foster the right environment for further development and application of sustainable and responsible practices;

- Enhancement of collaborations and partnership agreements with governments, trade unions and society in general, including the marketplace stakeholders;
- Ensuring that there are adequate levels of performance in areas such as health and safety, suitable working conditions and sustainable environmental practices;
- Increased awareness, constructive communication, dialogue and trust;
- National governments may create a regulatory framework which encourages and enables the implementation of sustainable and responsible behavioural practices by tourism enterprises.

## Implications and limitations

This research has investigated tourism owner–managers and the regulatory experts' opinions and perceptions about responsible and sustainable tourism practices. Low-level employees did not take part in this study. Moreover, the generalisability of this research project is limited by the nature and the size of the sample. This research is representative of a few informants from the tourism industry in a Southern European context. This study merely reflects the specificities of an island that relies on the tourism industry for its economic growth. Moreover, there can be different practices across tourism sectors, in other jurisdictions. Future studies could investigate responsible tourism in other tourist destinations. Other researchers could consider different sampling frames, research designs, methodologies and analyses which may obviously yield different outcomes from this study.

Yet, this paper puts forward the “shared value” approach. It is believed that since this relatively “new” concept is quite straightforward and uncomplicated, it may be more easily understood by business practitioners. In a nutshell, this shared value proposition requires particular areas of focus within the businesses' context, at the same time it looks after societal well-being. It appears that this notion contributes towards sustainability by addressing societal, environmental and community deficits. A longitudinal study in this area of research could possibly investigate the long-term benefits of responsible tourism as it may establish its positive (or negative) effects on tourism practitioners. Presumably, shared value can be sustained only if there is a genuine commitment to organisational learning for environmental sustainability, and if there is a willingness to forge genuine relationships with key stakeholders.

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## Appendix

### The Interview Questions

#### Interview Questions with the Owner–Managers of Hospitality Enterprises

- For how long have you been engaged in the tourism industry?
- Does your enterprise have a clearly defined mission statement, articulated vision and written policies?
- How would you define responsible tourism?
- Are human resources management, environmental management and supplier relationships a central component in your business ethos, in terms of economic responsibility, legal responsibility, ethical responsibility, philanthropic responsibility, stewardship principles and environmental sustainability issues?
- Does your enterprise possess a Human Resources Department or a manager devoted to human resources issues?
- Do you consider that responsible tourism policy can be directed at your own employees? What are your views in this regard?
- Can you mention some examples of responsible tourism and sustainability practices which have been carried out by your enterprise?
- Is your enterprise environmentally-sound, in terms of energy and water conservation, waste minimisation and recycling initiatives?
- How would you describe your relationship within the marketplace and with the community around you?
- What are your enterprise's intentions with regards to your participation in corporate social activities for the future?

#### Interview Questions with the Officials from the Regulatory Authorities

- What is the role and function of your department (agency or council) in advancing the responsible behaviour in tourism and sustainable development in this area?
- How are you promoting the acceptance and application of responsible tourism and the sustainability agenda?
- Are there any instruments which set standards for responsible behavioural practices in the tourism sector? If so, what are these? Please provide a copy if available.
- What characteristics of responsible and sustainable tourism policy have been particularly successful? Are there any initiatives which are aimed to reduce tourism impacts and promote sustainable tourism?
- What are the key issues and challenges for a sustainable tourism industry in Malta?
- How would you describe your relationship with the tourism industry stakeholders? Please elaborate about the existing channels of communication with the hospitality enterprises.