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Do Public Tourism Organizations Embrace and Report Social Responsibility?

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Keywords | Social responsibility, Public Tourism Organizations, Portugal, GRI indicators, social responsibility reports

Objectives | Based on the following research question: "Do Public Tourism Organizations Embrace and Report Social Responsibility?", this investigation intends to carry out an exploratory and descriptive analysis on whether Public Tourism Organizations (hereinafter referred to as PTE), such as Turismo de Portugal, I.P. and Regional Tourism Organizations, including Azores and Madeira, embrace social responsibility practices and report these practices. These organizations as responsible for national and regional guidelines for tourism, namely the sustainable tourism development, should themselves implement social responsibility and sustainability practices. Social responsibility has traditionally been associated to the private sector, in particular companies, and is defined as "corporate responsibility for their impacts on society" (EU Commission, 2011, p.6) and what they should do to fulfill this responsibility. Nevertheless, the concept of corporate responsibility has been developing and progressing (Agudelo, Jóhannsdóttir, & Davídsdóttir, 2019), and should be expanded to include other organizations such as public enterprises and all public administration organizations at central, regional and local levels (Di Bitetto, Chymis, & D'Anselmi, 2015; Garde Sanchez, López-Pérez, & López-Hernández, 2018). Regarding the tourism sector the issue of social responsibility and sustainability has been largely addressed by academics and practitioners (see Kim, Kim, & Kim, 2015; Manente, Minghetti, & Mingotto, 2014), but especially for the business sector and not for PTE. Therefore, there seems to be a gap in the literature about applicability and reporting of social responsibility in public administration, especially by the organizations that should promote (responsible and sustainable) tourism.

Methodology | Taking into account the literature review and objectives of this study, this work will be carried out in two phases: 1) examination on the PTE websites if social responsibility reports are available and analysis of reported practices; 2) semi-structured interviews to public managers responsible for collecting information about social responsibility practices. In this sense, we follow two research assumptions:

P1: Most PTE do not embrace socially responsible practices;

P2: Public managers of PTE are aware of relevance to embrace social responsibility practices by these institutions.

In order to achieve the objectives of this research and answer the research question, it is intended to take as a sample all PTEs at national and regional levels, totaling 8 organizations (Turismo de Portugal, I.P. and Regional Tourism Organizations, including Azores and Madeira). The social responsibility reports published online by these organizations over the last three years (from 2016 to 2018) will be analyzed to identify commonly reported practices. It will be also analyzed others documents and papers already undertaken by other researchers to prepare semi-structured interviews. These interviews will be used as the main source of data collection. The analysis will be eminently qualitative and descriptive.

Main Results and Contributions | This paper aims to contribute to the systematization of the theory and literature produced at national and international level on social responsibility in the public sector, namely in PTEs at national and regional levels in Portugal. It also aims to raise awareness that PTE should themselves be socially responsible and thus report on the practices embraced.

Limitations | The main limitation of this investigation is related with data collection, specifically the difficulty in meeting with the public managers responsible for PTEs. Such situation could undermine the purpose of the investigation. Additionally, the existence of few studies on social responsibility of public sector context and the impossibility to generalize the results, since we do not analyze the PTE at municipal level, are also limitations.

Conclusions | This research had as main goal to contribute for the awareness of PTE for social responsibility and the relevance to embrace social responsibility's practices and the accountability of those practices. As promoters of sustainable tourism development, PTE should be the example and therefore, they should implement and report it clearly to all its stakeholders. It also contributes to a systematization of the literature on social responsibility of public sector.

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