

ENGAGEMENT AT ALL SCALES: CORAL REEF CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES WITH SMB AND CORPORATE TOURISM CSR PARTNERS

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ABSTRACT: Small-Medium Business (SMB) scale tourism enterprises are the main access points for younger tourists in coastal Asia. Corporate tourism enterprises are likewise ubiquitous in tropical islands and coastlines, and focus on older and wealthier customers than SMB operations. An increasing number of these enterprises that cater to the dive tourism market are realising that positive engagement with environmentally sustainable practices provides a clear marketing edge, since it is indisputable that customers of all wealth and educational backgrounds respond positively to healthy reef communities, and negatively to degraded environments. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is increasingly recognised as conferring market advantage in the competitive island resort industry. Unfortunately, reef rehabilitation and the restoration of ecosystem services are seen as prohibitively expensive and technically difficult, and beyond the scope of usual CSR paradigms for either SMB or corporate operators.

Here, we document two case studies examining how a coalition of dive shops and small hotels engaged with conservation groups and government resource managers to create a roadmap for sustainable development and active impact mitigation, as well as to act cooperatively to enhance their marine environment. We also examine a similar coalition of multinational corporate resorts who have engaged with government agencies and NGOs to integrate their CSR programs to augment marine resource use sustainability in the intensive tourism market of Phuket. Our data indicate that forming coalitions of tourism enterprises is the most effective way of engaging government agencies. We have taken the experience of developing the low-cost models of small enterprise and community NGO conservation groups to capture the resourcing potential of large enterprise CSR, enabling the rescue and rehabilitation of reefs adjacent to large resorts, which are effectively under the management of the tourism enterprises. We intend to develop standard models for conservation engagement and cost-effective practices that would encourage large and small tourism enterprises to promulgate the concepts through their networks, creating easily applicable CSR pathways for them.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility, Thailand, coral reefs, multi-stakeholder, public-private
