

UK National Marine Parks: Managing Tourism and Recreation Through A Paradigm Shift of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

*Dr. Richard Stones. Honorary Research Fellow - University of Exeter And Founder
Corporate in Nature - r.stones@exeter.co.uk*

In 2012 the author George Monbiot (noted for his environmental and political activism) stated in *The Guardian*, ‘a marine-protected area in the United Kingdom is an area inside a line drawn on a map - and that's about it.’ In more recent times, perhaps extending from such commentary, there have been calls for greater, robust designations of protected marine areas in the UK: to extend opportunities from the UK’s renowned and respected National Park systems - to create new National Marine Parks. In 2017, Luke Pollard, the Labour MP for Plymouth Sutton and Devonport, a marine city located in the SW of England, suggested one such opportunity. According to the Labour Party’s website it was proposed that Plymouth could be the first National Marine Park of its kind in the UK, that the city should aim high and expand its world credentials; most notably it would be ‘...about managing space robustly...’ Such robust management would require a strong consensus to sustainable development, so that the new National Marine Parks offer more than what Monbiot described the majority of the UK’s current marine protected areas as; ‘...nothing but paper parks.’ The new designations would need to offer internationally recognised areas of protection for our seas and coastlines that conserve biodiversity, whilst also allowing tourism, recreational and commercial use. However, the balance between protection and use - the ability to ensure sustainable development is absolute - has created many issues for UK National Park management, since they were ‘enabled’ through the 1949 National Park Act. Fundamental to managing conservation alongside tourism and recreation is a binding mechanism created through the Sandford Principle. Campaign for National Parks (2017), a UK Charity dedicated to promoting and protecting the 13 parks of England and Wales states, the Sandford Principle ‘...is a long-established mechanism for ensuring that priority is given to the conservation of National Parks where there are irreconcilable conflicts with other purposes and duties. This simple principle has been central to the protection of our beautiful National Parks for decades. Without the Sandford Principle, there is a real risk that economic interests will be given priority over the conservation and enhancement of National Parks.’ This mechanism may provide a framework for conservation but it also requires tourism managers and recreational users to follow an acceptance of corporate social responsibility (known through its renowned acronym of CSR). This process underlies the management of access for all, in other words the public rights of accessibility alongside a need for conservation. It focuses the acceptance of ‘fair share’, yet responsibility is a strange process to use in order to manage sustainable outcomes. Not only is it, in the main a voluntary and subjective code but, ‘Responsibility does not equal sustainability! Responsibility is relative: [tourism] companies can take it a lot, somewhat, a little, or none’ (Ketola, 2010: 324). As Stones (2018) states, ‘with so many demands on humanity to overcome social injustice and environmental degradation it does seem absurd to rely on a ‘relative’ model to progress sustainable outcomes from tourism and recreation management strategies. So, with an entirely new model of national park being proposed in the UK, how will a National Marine Park look to progress sustainable outcomes from tourism and recreational use? Will it be through a similar

principle of responsibility or will it endorse a paradigm shift and look to progress a new model of responsibility?

The character and style of this presentation will use the presenter's extensive expertise in national park and tourism management to provide a conceptual framework addressing this new model of management. The presentation will argue a contemporary paradigm of CSR, asserting that accessibility and protection may be better managed through a new lens of 'R', which no longer represents responsibility!

It should also be noted, to understand the character and style of the presentation, that the presenter is a practitioner in global National Park strategy, Board Trustee of one of the founding organisations of UK National Parks (Campaign for National Parks) and an Honorary Research Fellow of the University of Exeter. As such, this robust argument builds, not only from practitioner expertise but also develops from extensive research undertaken as part of a PhD, looking into a new paradigm of CSR and sustainable development within a land based national park in the USA, namely Yosemite National Park.

References

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