



**SOCIAL
RESPONSABILITY/
SUSTAINABILITY
POLICY**

**committments
& procedures**

2020 - 2025

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1. Introduction

This CSR strategy of Berati Tours Albania (BTA) links our entrepreneurial activities to its social and environmental impact. The business goals for sales and profits are not discussed here - the economic viability of BTA is tacitly assumed. Nevertheless we mention economic goals being part of the social impact on local communities, such as the creation of new income opportunities by an innovative tourism programme.

Our commitments towards ecological, social and economic goals are directly translated into promising actions that support the achievement of these goals. But, realistically speaking, the field of *possible* activities is very wide; not all desirable measures can be processed at the same time. Secondly, not everything is in your own hands when dealing with social processes. Being aware of these limitations, this CSR strategy of BTA *at least* puts together both, target horizons and promising actions, into **a clear and transparent medium-term planning horizon, a strategic framework** to decide on concrete action for the next 5 years. This framework is supportive of the annually updated business and action planning where further focal points are set, measures are selected and regularly observed, and are finally re-evaluated with the help of **internal quality management** (see 3. Sustainability Management System).

2. The commitments of our CSR/ sustainability strategy

*“Berati Tours Albania (BTA) is a well established **Destination Marketing stakeholder (DMC) for Albania**. We believe in self-empowerment of the local communities towards better and sustainable living conditions in this region. We contribute by raising awareness, by networking activities and by developing & realizing projects in different fields. Basically we operate as **incoming tour operator & travel agent for Albania and neighboring countries**, because we see international tourism as an important, if not most important potential for many places of this region. With a small team and an extensive network of local partners we focus on responsible kinds of tourism that bring benefits to local hosts as well as to our travel guests.”*

Being an incoming travel company & DMC who engage with various local and international stakeholders in tourism, namely transport companies, hotels and restaurants, tour guides, local attractions, other travel agencies and tour operators, and last not least the travel guests themselves, we see us in a **key role of influencing the sustainable development of tourism and hospitality in our region**. We aim to follow, implement and promote good sustainability practices to maximize positive impacts and minimize negative impacts on tourism of our operations and to influence our clients and partners to do the same. We are **committed to promoting sustainability** in general.

We further subdivide our sustainability policy into 4 fields of interaction. Each field consists of a set of principles and practical actions accordingly. Here we put together our **policy commitments**. After, we define a number of positive actions related to each of them in the following chapters.

1. Implementation of a sustainability management structure: We commit to sustainability management and to complying with all national legislation, regulations and codes of practice.

2. Sustainable business culture: We commit to an internal business culture that practices human rights, fair and transparent working conditions, and having a clear social & health policy. We also commit to practice environmental protection by reducing energy and water consumption, minimizing air pollution; solid waste reduction & recycling policy; preferring the use of sustainable goods and services.

3. Sustainable supply chain: We try to achieve a tourism supply chain that is fully sustainable. We are strongly against harming wildlife and polluting the environment. We aim at safeguarding the authenticity of the communities and the natural environment. More specifically, related to the travel services we provide:

a) *Transport Services:* Travel without transport is hard to achieve, but the transport solution is an important aspect of sustainable tourism. We do our best to decrease the pollution level of all of our tourism related activities.

b) *Accommodation Services:* The partner accommodations play an important role, and have to be stimulated and motivated to adapt sustainable practices.

c) Tour leaders, local representatives and guides: We prefer involving locals in our programmes, and allow them an opportunity of regular income.

d) Excursions and other local activities: We aim at tours that only leave a minor ecological footprint and safeguard the authenticity of the communities;

e) Distribution partners/ agencies: Our aim is to make sustainable development concrete to each and every partner within our business network, so to improve sustainability among our partners by implementing our policy;

f) Customers' relations: Customers welfare and proper information are key for us. We ensure best possible safety standards and clear & constant communication to our clients, prior to booking, while travelling and after the travel.

4. Development of the local communities: We aim to maximize positive impacts and minimize negative impacts in our destination to ensure the sustainable development of the places that we operate in. Local development projects and consulting are part of our business portfolio.

3. Implementation of a sustainability management structure

As a precondition of a strategy aiming towards sustainability, we have to set some **normative standards** to our business management. It is important to implement a **quality management system** which allows to monitor and evaluate not only success in sales & marketing, but also the progress made towards the commitments expressed before. Going more into detail we go for the following actions:

- Appoint a **sustainability coordinator** responsible for sustainability aspects;
- Dress a **sustainability mission statement** and written **sustainability policy** (*this one!*) that aims for an improvement of the socio-cultural, economic and environmental impacts of BTA's activities; publish & communicate it to our staff, customers, partners and suppliers;
- Have an **action plan** with clear & realistic targets, actions, measures, responsibilities and time planning, also in terms of sustainability;
- Have in place a documented **monitoring and evaluation process** measuring also the success of the sustainability policy, objectives and targets;
- Conduct **baseline assessment of the company's performance** on sustainability; have in place an assessment system allowing to identify the **sustainability performance of key suppliers/partners**;
- To ensure company's transparency in sustainability by **public reporting** and communicating;
- Collaborate and actively **be involved in external forums and working groups** which are supportive to sustainability in tourism;

This all - it goes by itself - by complying with national legislation, regulations and codes of practice.

4. Promising action: sustainable business culture

4.a. Internal practices on Human rights & Social policy

We commit to **practice human rights, intergenerational & interethnic social justice** by the enforcement of following practices:

- **We prohibit discriminations**, regard to recruitment, conditions of employment, access to training and senior positions, or promotion in terms of gender, race, age, disability, ethnicity, religion/beliefs or sexual orientation;
- We ensure all employees have an **equal chance and access to resources and opportunities** for personal development through regular training, education;
- We declare not to hinder trade union membership, collective labor negotiations and **representation of members by trade unions**; to comply with a (sector wide) collective labor condition negotiation structure;
- We provide **medical and liability insurance** according to the national law;
- We grant **just & transparent labour conditions** to our employees & service providers according to national labor law; working details are put down in a **written work contract**; this work contract includes, among others:
 - a clear job description and a wage rate that equals or above the national legal minimum wage;
 - fixed paid yearly holiday and sick leave and unpaid annual leave allowance (according to national law);
 - the freedom of employment and contract termination with notice (minimum 2 monthes) and without penalty;
 - compensation of overtime working hours based on agreement;
 - have a clear disciplinary procedure that is effectively communicated with employees (according to national law);
- We have documented effective procedures in place for employees to voice out their complaints and expectations; to have a **measurement system for employee satisfaction** on a regular basis;
- We encourage employment opportunities for persons with special needs, and we create opportunities for students in participating in **traineeship/internship/apprenticeship**;
- We have **health and safety policy** for employees which complies to national legal standards; more specifically...
 - We provide periodic guidance and training for employees on roles, rights and responsibilities regarding health and safety issues; this also includes fire and relevant natural disasters;
 - We have first aid sets available at relevant locations and trained staff;

4.b. Internal practices on Environmental protection

We commit to **practice environmental protection** by ensuring the enforcement of the following practices, monitored on a regular basis for benchmark purposes:

- **Follow an active policy to reduce water consumption and pollution,**
 - Use sustainable water sourcing, which does not adversely affect environmental flows, where this is feasible;
 - Install water saving equipment in toilets, re-use waste water, collect rainwater;
 - Minimize and substitute the use of harmful substances; proper storage, handling & disposal of chemicals; use lead-free and water based paints, inside & outside;
- **Active commitment to reduce energy consumption,**
 - Calculate & compensate CO2 emissions; compare different periods;
 - Purchase green energy and energy efficient lighting for all areas;
 - Switch off lights & equipment when not in use; use automatic switch on/off system with timers or movement sensors; use energy saving mode, if possible;
 - Prefer low energy equipment when buying new items, including considerations of cost and quality;
- **Implement practices to minimize air pollution from its buildings;**
 - Reduce staff related travel and use more sustainable modes of transport; encourage staff to use public transport/ sustainable transport means financially;
 - Reduce transport related impacts by tele-work, tele/video meetings, work-at-home policies or other means;
 - Maintain and properly check motorized company vehicles, to reduce emissions and energy use;
- **Implement a solid waste reduction and recycling policy;** separate materials which can be recycled and organize collection and proper disposal;
 - Actively reduce the amount of disposable and consumer goods used;
 - Take measures to reduce the amount of packaging materials and not provide non-recyclable or non-biodegradable package materials;
 - Take action to reduce the amount of (non-refillable) plastic bottles of drinking water for office use; recycle or properly dispose of batteries;
 - Implement waste reducing methods when using ink and toner cartridges for printing and copying, whenever feasible;
 - Purchase products in bulk to reduce the packaging materials;
 - Go for a “paperless office” policy; set copy and printing machines by default to double-sided printing or other forms of paper saving modes;
 - Use cleaning materials which are non-hazardous, non-eutrophic and biodegradable and are certified with an eco-label, if locally available;
 - Print brochures on environmentally friendly paper; partner with a printing company that works with a certified environmental management system, *if feasible at reasonable costs and locally available*;

- **Favor the purchase of sustainable goods and services**, office and catering supply, giveaways and merchandise, *if locally available at reasonable costs*;
- **Provide periodic guidance, training and/or information to all staff members with respect to internal environmental practices**, about their roles and responsibilities;

5. Promising action: sustainable tourism supply chain

For our tourism activities we try to **achieve a tourism supply chain that is fully sustainable**, firsthand by development own sustainable travel products, and from a more general perspective by ensuring the enforcement of the following practices:

5.1. Transport Services

- **Identify and offer the most sustainable travel solution** when selecting transport options *to/ from and in* the destination; taking into account price, comfort, and practical considerations;
- **No domestic/ short-haul flights!** Prefer sustainable shuttle transport.

5.2. Accommodation Services

- **Prefer accommodations locally owned and managed** and accommodations that employ members of the local community;
- **Clearly and actively communicate our sustainability objectives and requirements** regarding contracted and other relevant accommodations;
- **Have accommodations sign a sustainability addendum**; push to provide evidence (report) about their sustainability goals, strategies and practises, (e.g. by *sustainability inquiry*, or by including *sustainability clauses into contract*);
- **Preferrably select partner accommodations that comply with sustainability and quality standards**, have a signed sustainability contract (certificate), and/ or conduct CSR activities or are locally engaged;
- **Encourage accommodations to follow best practices/trainings on responsible tourism**, e.g. by offering incentives, and to become sustainably certified; giving preference to accommodations that work with internationally acknowledged (e.g. GSTC recognised) and/or Travelife certification;
- ...

- Ensure that through our accommodation supply chain, **the rights of children are respected and safeguarded** by;
 - Having a clause in contracts throughout the value chain stating a zero tolerance policy of sexual exploitation of children;
 - Training employees in children's rights, the prevention of sexual exploitation and how to report suspected cases;
 - Supporting, collaborating with, and engaging stakeholders in the prevention of sexual exploitation of children;
- **Work with accommodations and restaurants that incorporate elements of local art, architecture, or cultural heritage**; while respecting the intellectual property rights of local communities;
- **Terminate cooperation in case of clear evidence that contracted accommodations jeopardize the provision of integrity of basic services** such as food, water, energy, healthcare, or soil to the neighbouring residents or companies.

5.3. Excursions and other local activities

- **NOT offer any excursions that harm humans, animals, plants, natural resources** such as water & energy or being socially/ culturally unacceptable;
- **NOT be involved with companies that harvest, consume, display, sell, or trade wildlife species, and not offering any excursions in which wildlife is held captive**, except for properly regulated activities in compliance with local, national, and international law;
- **Dress an inventory of the environmentally or culturally sensitive excursions** we offer and evaluate the impact in each case;
- **Communicate our sustainability objectives and requirements to contracted and other relevant excursion providers** (e.g. by *code of conduct, social media, meetings, ...*) to minimise negative visitor impact and maximize enjoyment;
- **Have skilled and/or locally specialized/ certified guides** to guide our guests in sensitive cultural sites, heritage sites, or ecologically sensitive destinations;
- **Advise guests on behaviour standards during excursions and activities** with a focus on respecting the local culture, nature, and environment;
- **Promote excursions and activities to our guests which directly involve and support local communities** by purchasing traditional crafts and local (food) production methods, or visiting social projects;
- **Promote excursions and activities to our guests which support local environment and biodiversity** such as visiting protected areas or environmental protection projects.

5.4. Tour leaders, local representatives and guides

- **Prefer work with locals: tour leaders & guides**, local representatives, porters, drivers, cooks, and other local staff in case of equal ability; complying with applicable international, national, local laws and regulations;
- **Ensure that all employees and employed freelance by us have a written job contract** and fully understand the terms and conditions; payment at least equal to or above the legal minimum standard;
- **Ensure that our local employees are informed on relevant aspects of our sustainability policy** and comply with it (*inform e.g. by newsletters, references/ supplements to contracts, emails, or similar*);
- **Ensure our tour guides and locals under contract are qualified and trained regularly**; by offering our own training program with a special sustainable travel module, and with safety and human rights issues;
- **Have our local guides being promoters of sustainability** and inform travel guests on relevant sustainability matters in the destination.

5.5. Distribution partners/ agencies

- **Preferably work with organisations who have a written sustainability statement in their business policy** and ready to establish a cooperation contract including key sustainability clauses;
- **Inform key partners about our sustainability policy and expect of them to comply with it**, because it is relevant for our customers; informing key partners on the Travelife tourism standards;
- **Suggest more ecologically sound cooperation practices**; raise awareness among key partners on sustainable consumption; minimize the ecologic footprint of the cooperation by working as paperless as possible;
- **Regularly evaluate the sustainability practices of our key partners** to ensure their practices are truly sustainable or improving; establish an internal ranking about the degree of sustainability of partner agents.

5.6. Customers' relations

Prior to booking

- **Ensure we comply with the standards of the European consumers rights** in terms of clear, complete and accurate product and price information; our privacy policy and voluntary codes of conduct in marketing and advertising;
- **Provide information about our company including sustainability claims; information about the travel destination including sustainability aspects**, which is factually correct, balanced and complete;
- ...

- **Inform clients about the environmental impact of different transport options to reach the destination** (in case these are not included in the package), and to offer sustainable alternatives, where available;
- **Inform the customer about sustainable alternatives of local transport, accommodations, and excursions;** promoting certified services as the “better” option; combining several sustainable travel products in packages;

While travelling

- **Provide practical travel information** (e.g. health, safety, other risks) to our guests as well as general info about local environment and culture;
- **Inform our guests about key sustainability aspects and issues in the destination** and give recommendations on how to make a positive contribution;
- **Keep a contact person and a telephone number permanently available for emergency situations;** train personnel and keep guidelines available, on how to deal with emergency situations;
- **Provide clients with documented guidelines and/or codes of conduct for sensitive excursions and activities,** to minimize negative visitor impact and maximize enjoyment;
- **Inform clients about applicable legislation concerning the purchasing, sales, import and export of historic or religious artefacts and articles** containing materials of threatened flora and/or fauna in the destination;
- **Encourage clients to donate** to local charity and sustainable initiatives;

After the travel

- **Have clear procedures in case of complaints** from clients;
- **Measure systematically client satisfaction** and take into account the results, for service and product improvements; include sustainability as an integral part of our guests' satisfaction assessment (*questionnaire*);
- **Give our guests an opportunity to link back to the travel destination,** for ongoing social impact (info exchange, charity, or similar).

6. Promising action: local community development

The structural support of the development of local communities are part of our business portfolio and expertise. So it goes by itself we believe in self-empowerment of the local communities towards better and sustainable living conditions in this region, and we contribute by raising awareness, by networking activities and by developing & realizing projects in different fields. More concretely we aim to ensure the sustainable development of the places that we operate in, by ...

- **Develop innovative incoming tourism products together with local community members** having a positive effect towards local hospitality and sustainability;
- **Support networking efforts among locals in general**; more specifically initiatives strengthening relations between accommodations & local producers;
- **Influence and support local government** (when possible, together with other stakeholders) concerning sustainability, destination planning and management, use of natural resources and socio-cultural issues;
- **Be aware of and anticipate legally based spatial planning, protected areas and heritage regulations**, also with destination management strategies of local, regional and national authorities;
- **Establish destination management assessment systems** allowing measurement of the overall sustainability progress of a travel destination, and evaluation of positive or negative structural effects of specific action;
- **Support destinations in establishing an integrated marketing strategy** by participative vision making, strategic marketing & creative project development;
- **Develop and realise communication and media projects** being an essential part of successful (internal/ external) destination marketing;
- **Identify threats and activities with negative structural effects on a local community**, especially on its sensitive nature & culture (material, immaterial) values, properties and sites, and find locally grounded alternatives;
- **NOT promote souvenirs which contain threatened flora and fauna species** as indicated in the CITES treaty and the IUCN 'Red List'; or historic and archaeological artefacts (except as permitted by law);

7. Afterword

Following confidently a **social responsibility strategy (CSR)** or "sustainability strategy", a company inevitably is acting politically, in the best sense of the word, because it actively takes care of societal issues beyond business making. It sees **entrepreneurial freedom** as an opportunity of specific social circumstances, as a social practice which must not weigh on the general public's interest, but is responsible for it. It is not about "profit at all costs", but on the contrary about socially and environmentally compatible business practices increasing the „overall benefit“.

In contrast to a pure marketing strategy, which focuses on effectiveness and efficiency criteria to improve the quantitative operating result (sales/ profit), the CSR strategy takes into account an **extended target horizon** for the orientation and evaluation of the entrepreneurial activity. Marketing is thus more farsighted, and we see this also being in our own favour.

At least three arguments support our decision to follow this CSR strategy also from a business perspective:

- according to our perception (in Western Europe earlier than in Albania) a change of consciousness has already started in many areas of society, and **market niches** have emerged which reward or even presuppose a CSR strategy;
- the **personal conviction** that we must not bypass sustainable forms of economic activity in the interests of everyone, and that for this reason alone it is worth setting a good example in order to motivate other actors from business, politics and civil society;
- currently, there could be a further boost to CSR as a result of the Corona crisis: if there is a **political rethinking** at the state and international level, which puts the economy more at the service of the environment and society than the other way round.

Admittedly, from an entrepreneurial point of view, a CSR strategy only makes sense, if the extended target horizon actually receives the broader recognition it deserves in business and society, at least in the medium term. For example, through prices that better reflect the social costs or benefits; through the promotion of politically desirable, responsible behavior; or through a broader, sensitive group of buyers who are ready to accept moderately higher prices for the additional commitment.

For any questions & remarks please contact our sustainability coordinator:

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Tirana, 01.08.2020