Empowering the travel industry to prevent child sex tourism. (TheCode.org)

United States
Camelia Tepelus

Join hands in protecting our children from commercial sexual exploitation in Tourism

Published on Changemakers (https://www.changemakers.com)
Home > Empowering the travel industry to prevent child sex tourism. (TheCode.org)
Concise Summary: Help us pitch this solution! Provide an explanation within 3-4 short sentences.

TheCode gives tourism industry an operational tool to prevent and combat child sex tourism and to protect children’s rights.

Innovation

What is your signature innovation, your new idea, in one sentence?

TheCode gives tourism industry an operational tool to prevent and combat child sex tourism and to protect children’s rights.

Describe your innovation. What makes your idea unique and different than others doing work in the field?

Companies signing TheCode commit themselves to implementing 6 core measures: 1) Elaborating corporate ethical policies rejecting child sex tourism. 2) Training the personnel in the country of origin and travel destinations. 3) Introducing clauses in contracts with suppliers, stating a common reputation of child sex tourism. 4) Providing information to travelers by means of catalogues, brochures, in-flight films, ticket-slips, home pages, etc. 5) Providing information to local “key persons” at the destinations (community leaders, authorities, law enforcement, customs officials, etc.). 6) Reporting annually on the implementation of the above actions. TheCode addresses the entire tourism supply chain, and engages a variety of tourism stakeholders. At corporate level, companies are required to have ethical policies, and to train their staff both in origin countries and in destinations. On the demand side – companies are asked to inform and educate the travelers. TheCode motivates companies to develop leadership skills at destination level, by working together with suppliers and community leaders, therefore building local networks of awareness and support.
Child sex tourism is a global phenomenon transcending borders and cultures. According to UNICEF, over 2 million children fall victims of trafficking, pornography and sex tourism every year. Development of the internet exacerbated these problems in recent years. TheCode asks the private sector to engage in awareness raising, training and education in cooperation with local communities. TheCode requires companies to address child sex tourism not as a separate issue, but to incorporate preventative actions within their already existing quality assurance systems, and health and safety practices.

How do you plan to grow your innovation?

Our intention is to develop TheCode organization by strengthening and standardizing the implementation procedures at global level in the 32 countries where TheCode has over 600 signatory members. Although the growth of TheCode has been rapid in the last couple of years, the operation is currently supported only by and international Secretariat (one full time staff), and the voluntary Executive and Steering Committee bodies. The vision is that consolidation of the results achieved so far, will be carried out with support provided by regional offices. A Code development strategy has been adopted by the Annual General Meeting of TheCode in 2007, and TheCode Executive Committee is currently in the process of fundraising towards the implementation of the strategy. It is intended that future fundraising would be based on institutional contributions (grants from governments), as well as contributions by private members/tourism companies.

Do you have any existing partnerships, and if so, how do you create them?

TheCode has three key partners: the ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Pornography and Trafficking) international network; the UN World Tourism Organization; and UNICEF. These key partners assist TheCode implementation and expansion, given their areas of expertise including children’s rights and sustainable tourism development. The Code would benefit from further awareness raising within the tourism industry, as well as within the academic community. Additional research would further support evaluation of the experiences developed until now including their effectiveness, challenges. As the phenomenon of child sex tourism is in continuous change, TheCode would benefit from establishing further partnerships with local NGOs in tourism destinations. TheCode would also benefit from engagement with faith groups, activists and socially responsible investors, in pooling together lobbying efforts for the protection of children and their rights. As the topic of child sex tourism is sensitive by its nature, we strongly believe in a positive approach, that reinforces a constructive role of the tourism industry, that is also beneficial for the local community.

- Impact

Provide one sentence describing your impact/intended impact.

We protect children from sexual exploitation in tourism, and to give tourism companies a practical tool in engaging to prevent this global phenomenon.

What are the main barriers to creating or achieving your impact?

Our main barriers in achieving the purpose of protecting children from sex tourism are: a) insufficient awareness within the sector regarding the extent of this phenomenon; b) difficulty in addressing a topic of a sensitive social and cultural nature, especially from the perspective of local authorities in destination countries; c) lack of specialized training of tourism professionals on the topics of child sex tourism and human trafficking; d) powerful economic interests and criminal networks behind the phenomenon of global trafficking in human beings.

How many people have you served or plan to serve?

We estimate TheCode quantitative impact from the numbers of companies becoming formal signatories, and by the number of trained staff. Over 600 companies (tour operators, travel agencies, hotels, etc.) in 32 countries are currently implementing the Code. Over 30 million tourists are using the services of one of the companies signatories of the Code. Several airlines (Air France, Lufthansa, Austrian Airlines) have supported our global campaign by developing in-flight spots and running them in long-haul flights (see attachment). Tourism authorities in Brazil and Costa Rica launched national awareness campaigns on the prevention of child sex tourism.. Training manuals including examples of good practices have been developed in English, Spanish and French. Trainings have been carried out in: Mexico, Brazil, Guatemala, Belize, Bulgaria, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, Kenya, Thailand, etc. Success of TheCode implementation until now has been recognized as successful by governments, press and the UN agencies – UN World Tourism Organization, UNICEF, OSCE and ILO.

Directly

TheCode direct impacted over 600 companies (tour operators, travel agencies, hotels, etc.) in 32 countries, which are currently implementing the 6 measures of TheCode. Over 2000 tourism staff and tourism students in Europe, North and Latin America and Asia have been trained to prevent child sex tourism.

Indirectly

Over 30 million tourists are using the services of one of the companies that are currently signatories of the Code.

Please list any other measures of the impact of your innovation?

Tourism destinations are often centers of economic development and social growth, especially in poor countries. We have noticed that while introducing TheCode implementation, local staff and community also become more aware on the importance of preserving intact the social values and the cultural integrity of destinations. Furthermore we noticed that tourism’s staff is often empowered to address other labor rights and fair working conditions, once they received training on a topic as sensitive as child sex tourism.

Is there a policy intervention element to your innovation?

In the process of promoting TheCode as a tool for corporate social responsibility in tourism, we are often faced with the need to lobby politicians, particularly local authorities and officials from Ministries of Tourism. As a result of raising awareness on this topic, in several countries in Central America (Guatemala, Mexico, etc.) there were important legislative improvements that resulted in better policies for the protection of children’s rights. We have also been active at regional level within the European Union, lobbying the Council of Europe to support adoption of voluntary good practices by the tourism private sector. Our policy interventions and technical assistance for governments and local authorities resulted in large awareness raising public campaigns for the protection of children’s rights in Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Mexico, Brazil, etc.
Exactly who are the beneficiaries of your innovation?

The final beneficiaries of our program are children in tourism destinations. Local communities are indirect beneficiaries of our program, through the support and assistance they receive in developing responsible tourism.

Sustainability

How is your initiative financed (or how do you expect your initiative will be financed)?

TheCode is not yet financially self-reliant, and a strategy has been adopted to advance and strengthen the sustainability of the organization. It is envisaged that TheCode will pursue in the future both private sector and institutional funding to achieve further organizational growth. TheCode has so far been funded from institutional grants from the European Commission (2004-2004) and Japan Committee for UNICEF (from 2004 – ongoing).

If known, provide information on your finances and organization

The current budget is $110,000/year. The organization has one full-time staff (Secretariat Coordinator), 5 Executive Committee members (decision-making body) working on a voluntary basis and meeting 3-4 times a year, and 13 Steering Committee members (advisory body) meeting bi-annually. In-kind support is provided by a large network of partners including ECPAT groups, UNICEF offices, UNWTO and tourism companies. TheCode is registered as a non-profit organization in Sweden. The Secretariat is housed at ECPAT USA offices in New York.

What is the potential demand for your innovation?

The current demand for TheCode implementation is higher than our abilities to respond to all requests for assistance. Due to the fact that tourism develops on a massive scale especially in poor countries in Africa and Asia, we expect that the demand for training and assistance in implementation of TheCode will continue to increase rapidly. This is also due to the fact that child sex tourism is associated to the wider phenomenon of global trafficking which exploded in the last couple of years.

What are the main barriers to financial sustainability?

Child sex tourism is often the last issue a tourism company wants to learn about. Companies are afraid of negative connotations that the public may associate with their brands, and initially they refuse any dialogue. In the US there is the further threat of potential legal liability, if a company would take a public stand against child sex tourism. Due to these reasons, approaching the private sector to provide financial support for TheCode operation has been very difficult.

The Story

What is the origin of this innovation? Tell us your story.

The Code was initiated in April 1998 as a project of ECPAT Sweden in cooperation with Scandinavian tour operators and the World Tourism Organization (WTO). During 1999-2003, TheCode expanded in six European tourism sending countries. In April 2004, TheCode has been launched in North America with the support of UNICEF. In the presence of HM Queen Silvia of Sweden, the first major US company to sign TheCode was Carlson Companies, Inc. TheCode became an independent international non-profit organization in May 2004, registering in Sweden and operating globally with the support of ECPAT, UNICEF and UNWTO. A Quarterly Newsletter was launched in September 2004. In March 2005, The Code was launched in Japan with the support of Japan Committee for UNICEF, and top Japanese companies including JTB and JATA. The Code currently operates in the following countries:

- tourism sending: Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Spain, Sweden, the UK, Austria, the Netherlands, France, US, Canada;
- tourism receiving – Latin America (Costa Rica, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Belize, Guatemala); Eastern Europe (Romania, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Albania, Russia); Asia (Thailand, Sri Lanka, Laos, Mongolia, Pakistan, Syria); Africa (SubSaharan countries, South Africa), etc.

While securing financial sustainability of the organization remains a challenge, in recent years significant progress has been made in raising awareness within the tourism industry to the problem of child sex tourism. TheCode is recognized as the top corporate social responsibility tool to prevent trafficking and child sex tourism by UNICEF, UNWTO, ECPAT International, OSCE and ILO.

Please provide a personal bio. Note this may be used in Changemakers marketing material

TheCode Chair is since 2008 Mrs. Fausta Borsani of Kuoni Holding, representing also the Tour Operators’ Initiative for Sustainable Tourism. Ms. Borsani spent her career working in the often contradictory context of economy, efficiency and ethical compliance. TheCode Secretariat is since 2001 Camelia Tepelus, a sustainable tourism expert and researcher on corporate social responsibility, environment and human rights in tourism. Ms Tepelus was instrumental in TheCode development from 42 companies in 2004, to the current membership of over 600 companies in 32 countries.

Emphasis of Work

The two main areas of emphasis of TheCode approach are Prevention and Protection. Our work with tourism professionals has a strong preventative character, empowering them to address a real problem in a professional manner. As a result of responsible actions of the tourism private sector, we aim to protect children from sexual exploitation. A collateral-effect of TheCode, is that, faced with a real-life scenario, a trained tourism staff (reception desk, maid, human resources manager, etc.) would know the procedures to follow in alerting authorities, consequently supporting the prosecution element required in curbing child sex tourism.

Source URL: https://www.changemakers.com/competition/freedom/entries/empowering-travel-industry-prevent-child-sex-tourism#comment-0