



## ISO 26000: the business guide to the new standard on social responsibility

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## BOOK REVIEWS

**ISO 26000: the business guide to the new standard on social responsibility**, by Lars Moratis and Tino Cochiuș, Sheffield, Greenleaf Publishing, 2011, 206 + x pp., £29.95 €28.00/US\$55.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-906093-40-2

The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility emerged late in the 1990s and gained momentum as the key business theory of the twenty-first century. In November 2010, the International Standards Organisation released the first guidance document on corporate responsibility. This first guidance, which integrates social, environmental and governance concepts into one framework, represents significant progress in helping companies to develop policies and strategies to address these critical themes in their business operations. So what can impact assessment professionals take from corporate responsibility and the guidance document? The timely release of *ISO26000: the business guide to the new standard on social responsibility* may offer some answers.

Early references to corporate social responsibility were framed as the triple bottom line – social, environmental and financial – but this concept still only operated at the periphery of the core business model. Companies and organizations continued to view their operations as removed from a broader impact on society and the environment: Milton Friedman's famous article was their response – 'The social responsibility of business is to increase its profits' (*New York Times Magazine*, 13 September 1970). However, this view has changed considerably, and now businesses are on the path to integrating corporate responsibility into their business models.

*ISO26000: the business guide to the new standard on social responsibility* was released late in 2011. The publication is based on research that reveals that many organizations are still grappling with corporate responsibility as a concept, which limits their ability to develop policies and strategies to integrate into the business operation. The ISO 26000 SR (CSR) guidelines were several years in the making, beginning in 2005. They were released for public use in November 2010.

ISO 26000 does not use the terminology CSR (corporate social responsibility) for its guidelines but rather SR (social responsibility) 'ISO took the decision that its guidance should be appropriate for all organizations not merely for big business as the "C" in CSR implies' (p. 21).

A vast array of stakeholder groups drawn from almost 100 countries debated and produced these guidelines.

Many suggest that ISO 26000 is likely to be a very authoritative guideline for designing and implementing CSR. Among the main objectives of the guidelines are to support organizations in defining their social responsibilities and acting in accordance with these responsibilities. Another objective is to increase the credibility of companies' SR claims.

According to Lars and Tino, 'Many organizations are urgently in need of an overview, structure and roadmap on how to engage with CSR in practice ... Only an organization that is aware of its societal impacts, has true and deep concern for these impacts, and consciously acts according to these concerns both at a strategic and operational level can hope of integrating the triple bottom line (p. 163).'

The two authors highlight that every organization has its own individual organization-specific CSR profile. They stress the need for every organization to interpret CSR in a way that fits its activities, impacts, and spheres of influence. Such an approach to CSR, they point out, results in multiple benefits, including profits for the organization and profits for the community. Specifying that CSR has great societal relevance, the two authors say, 'Business, governments and NGOs have a central role in contributing to the realization of sustainable development' (p. 61).

ISO 26000 is different from the other initiatives of the ISO in that, unlike the earlier ISOs, like GRI and the AA 1000 Series, it does not provide for certification. The guideline very clearly states that it is not meant for certification or contractual use. ISO 26000 is a guidance standard, which can be used by organizations on a voluntary basis. According to the author, 'ISO 26000 wants to be useful for all types of organizations, irrespective of their size, sector, and geographic location and irrespective of their stage of SR implementation'.

Arguably the most important aspect of the SR principle within ISO 26000 is the respect for stakeholder interests. This principle 'deals with the relationships between the organization, its stakeholders, and society as a whole'. The authors discuss how organizations can identify their stakeholders and their interests with the help of several illustrations and examples. The discussion also covers the reasons for creating stakeholder engagement programmes, actions that an organization should undertake in this area, and ways to involve stakeholders in the SR policy of the organization.

*ISO26000: the business guide to the new standard on social responsibility* is one of the first books to provide a

comprehensive roadmap to the new standards. It defines the terminology of SR and advises companies how they can identify their social responsibilities and how SR can be integrated into all types of organizations. This should help impact assessment professionals to clearly articulate the value of their work and demonstrate business value for social responsibility.

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**Landscapes, identities and development**, edited by Zoran Roca, Paul Claval and John Agnew, Farnham, Ashgate, 508 pp., £75.00 (hardback) 978-1-4094-0554-2,

The book is a remarkable collection of contributions on the issue of landscape in relation to place-based cultures and the connected processes of identity formation and change. It is the outcome of the 23rd Session of the *Permanent European Conference for the Study of the Rural Landscape*, held in Portugal in 2008. In all, 54 authors from 22 different countries were involved in the development of four main themes: landscape and identity between imagery and reality; landscape history, heritage and social change; landscape assets, resources and services; and landscape research and development planning.

The book takes advantage of the energy of such a large network of researchers of diverse disciplines working – for many years – on human landscapes and adopting different theoretical and operational instruments. An introduction by Zoran Roca and John Agnew delineates the topics addressed, while a concluding contribution by Paul Claval connects the contents of the papers with the wider debate. He recalls, in particular, the evolution of the concepts of landscape and stresses the epistemological turn that in recent decades has taken place in many disciplines, contributing to the human-centred definition of landscape by the European Landscape Convention.

Landscapes are the result of nature, human work and the imagery that societies project onto places as the products of fears, expectations and wishes. The dialectic thus generated between the physical contents of a place and its social images is the core of the concept of landscape, which refers at the same time to reality and to its representations, and which comprises both a physical and a perceptive meaning.

Because landscape is a social product, it is a common good that must be preserved and renovated over time. This implies that the ‘the gap between a pro-identity/development rhetoric and the anti-identity/development reality’ (Roca and Agnew, p. 2) should be addressed. Sustainability is the perspective, but landscape defence can be oriented to different goals, in particular to protecting a space or its representation, freezing reality or developing it appropriately, protecting it against people or for people (Printsmann *et al.*).

The book is organized into four parts. The first topic concerns the relationships between landscape and identity

or, in other words, between reality and imagery. This is an issue that must be analyzed at different levels involving the person, the diverse social groups and the role of landscape in the formation of the national culture. In this regard, some landscapes extensively described by different forms of art (such as those of Italy and England) clearly play a pivotal role in the national identity, whereas others, which are not distinctively characterized, require additional narrative efforts so that their potential in sustaining aesthetic experiences can be discovered, or so that they become a recognized identity basis. This framework needs anyway to be reconsidered because sensibilities change and stereotypical images are consumed, and because of the mobility of people, which implies that new cultures (the ‘outsiders’) are in close contact with landscapes formed over the centuries by local societies. The sense of belonging to places and landscapes is also challenged by the identity crisis affecting modern societies. This is connected with rapid socio-economic change, people’s mobility (producing ‘multiterritoriality’) and cultural hybridism, and it is reflected in the change – which often means disruption – of landscapes. More dramatic issues are raised by the mega-projects that not only change landscapes but literally create new spaces (‘terraforming’), and this entails not only gigantism, but also complex relationships between humankind and the environment, as far as both material aspects and ideological representations are concerned, and power relations as well.

The second topic, more traditional for the scholarly environment that gave origin to the book, but still warranting close attention, concerns the history of landscape. This means considering the dynamics intrinsic to natural and human-made spaces and the comparison of historical configurations with the recent – and often rapid – change produced by a variety of causes: political events (the redefinition of national boundaries), economic dynamics and even European policies (the agricultural one in particular). New light is cast on these dynamics by the essays in this section, which make use of approaches such as the ‘landscape biography’, which pays attention to the actors’ role in the production of landscape and connects the historical perspective with the identity issue.

Another section of the book addresses the problems of abandonment, change and degradation that usually form the bulk of discourses on landscape. The comprehension of landscape values and the appropriate use of resources require the usual approaches and methods to be updated. In short, landscapes must be seen in their multifunctionality, because ecosystem services involve material externalities (i.e. agricultural products) and immaterial ones (beauty, sense of belonging, identity, amenity), often supporting economic effects. Tourism, in particular, is an activity strongly dependent on the image of places, and therefore involved in the production of representations of destinations (which are commodities). A more general concern regards the crisis of many rural landscapes reflecting deep socio-economic – but also cultural – problems consisting of the abandonment of agricultural land, the loss of traditional methods of territorial organization, and rapid