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Sibley, Jonathan ORCID logoORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5560-7158>, Musgrave, James and Woodward, Simon (2021) Meeting planners : the differing views of 'Corporate Social Responsibility' practices and motivations across two continents. *Events Management*, 25 (6). pp. 601-618. ISSN 1525-9951

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**Version:** Published Version

**Publisher:** Cognizant Communication Corporation

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.3727/152599521X16106577964667>

Please cite the published version

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## MEETING PLANNERS: VIEWS OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PRACTICES AND MOTIVATIONS ACROSS TWO CONTINENTS

JAMES MUSGRAVE,\* JONATHAN SIBLEY,† AND SIMON WOODWARD\*

\*School of Events, Tourism and Hospitality Management, Leeds Beckett University, Leeds, UK

†Business School, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK

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Interpretation of, and commitment to, corporate social responsibility (CSR) differs from country to country, resulting in variances in implementation. It is theorized that these variances originate from organizational and cultural context. There is limited research dedicated to contextual variances of CSR in the meetings industry. As such, the objective of this article is twofold: first, to understand whether meeting planners in America and Western Europe differ in their current and future motives for engaging with CSR. Second, to establish whether the differences in motivation are influenced by their conceptual understanding of CSR or the wider socioeconomic and political environment. The authors analyzed over 1,000 self-reporting questionnaires from meeting planners across the two continents. Results were analyzed using unrelated *t* tests in order to establish if the two groups differ in their underlying motives to engage with CSR. An exploratory factor analysis was used to determine how meeting planners conceptualized CSR across the two continents. Results suggests similar strategic motives to engage in CSR. European meeting planners identify egoistic motives to engage in CSR. In contrast to America, CSR practice in Europe will change in the future as value-driven motives become prevalent. The article provides evidence of context as a defining factor in CSR, where ubiquitous constructs of CSR cannot be easily applied to meeting planners. The findings demonstrate the incongruent nature of CSR practice. The results advance the application of CSR to meeting planner's practice in both America and Western Europe, reigniting the definitional debate of CSR within the meetings industry.

**Key words: Corporate social responsibility (CSR); Meeting planners; Motivations; Events management and context**

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### Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) can be seen as an amorphous term used to describe corporate citizenship, social performance, and

sustainability. Freeman and Hasnaoui (2011) demonstrated that CSR is regarded as a subset of ethics, a tool to achieve sustainable development goals, or as extension of the function of business. Aguinis and Glavas (2012) suggested that the reason for

Address correspondence to James Musgrave, School of Events, Tourism and Hospitality Management, Leeds Beckett University, Macaulay Hall, Headingley Campus, Leeds LS6 3QW, UK. E-mail: [j.musgrave@leedsbeckett.ac.uk](mailto:j.musgrave@leedsbeckett.ac.uk)

this fluid application of the term derives from the conceptualization of CSR through a variety of “different disciplinary and conceptual lenses” (p. 933). Authors such as Ho et al. (2012), Peng et al. (2012), Thanetsunthorn (2015), and Waldman et al. (2006) have argued that the proliferation of CSR is due to the impact of national culture on CSR practices, validating the hypothesis of Hofstede (2011) that culture is a critical factor influencing personal and corporate values and belief systems.

Notwithstanding the varied conceptualizations and influences on practice, there are those who have strived to provide a definitional framework through which an understanding of CSR can be applied including Sohn (1982), Woodward-Clyde (1999), Maignan (2001), and Schwartz and Carroll (2003). An outcome of this modeling of CSR has been the emergence of number of common themes; for example, issues such as ethical behavior by corporate executives and business in general, human and labor rights, economic development, environmental protection, community cohesion, and transparent decision making have all been placed under the overarching umbrella of CSR (Rahman, 2011).

The few studies that have looked at CSR across cultures tend to focus on broader philosophical, cultural, or political context, ignoring the sector-specific characteristics (Enderle, 1996; Lodge, 1990; Maignan & Ralston, 2002; Matten & Moon, 2008). This article focuses on the global meetings industry, a subset of business tourism and one defined by UNWTO as involving “a gathering of 10 or more participants for a minimum of 4 hours in a contracted venue. These meetings include conventions, conferences, congresses, trade shows and exhibitions, incentive events, corporate/business meetings, and other meetings that meet the aforementioned criteria” (World Tourism Organization, 2014, p. 10). Although identified as creating considerable economic benefits (Hanley, 2012; Jones & Li, 2015; Kumar & Hussain, 2014) business travel, for the purpose of meetings, can have a detrimental impact on the physical and cultural environment of destinations (Aguilera, 2014; Beaverstock et al., 2009; Cadarso et al., 2016; Musgrave & Woodward, 2016; Park & Kim, 2017; Ramgulan et al., 2012; Sox et al., 2013; Swarbrooke & Horner, 2001).

Despite the considerable economic benefits that meetings provide to host destinations, it is argued

that, from a stakeholder perspective, external pressures on organizations may influence them to adopt practices that reduce their engagement in this practice (Sarkis et al., 2010). In addition, the propensity for these decisions to be taken may become more frequent as businesses come under increasing external pressure to demonstrate their commitments CSR practices (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011).

Therefore, in order to address concerns relating to the detrimental impact of meetings on the physical and cultural environment of a destination it is essential for meeting planners to have an understanding of CSR practices so they may mitigate impacts attributed to the events, subsequently ensuring the continued economic sustainability of their organization.

Previous research offers little insight into the variances in knowledge and practice of CSR in meeting planners (Athanasopoulou & Selsky, 2015). For the purpose of this article, we are interested in the cross-cultural differences in attitudes towards CSR engagement and practices by meeting planners from America compared to those from Western Europe. Similar to Matten and Moon (2008), we use the comparison of America and Western Europe due to the similarities in the democratic and capitalist structures and welfare systems. We provide a commentary on how wider socio-economic and political contexts influence CSR practice in the meetings industry. Motivations of practitioners to engage in CSR are also considered, in order to establish whether there are differences in the underlying conceptualization of CSR across American and Western European meeting planners.

In this article we examine the underlying concepts of CSR and apply the academic literature to meeting planners’ perspectives. Next, we ascertain the cultural differences in CSR and how they manifest themselves in practice. It is our hypotheses that cultural differences do influence meeting planners’ motivations to engage in CSR and how this then plays out in practice. Thus, we compare and contrast how meeting planners define CSR and conceptualize their practice based upon items identified by Maignan (2001), as well as how they articulate their motivation to engage in CSR following the attributions proposed by Ellen et al. (2006). By exploring cross-cultural differences in

the underlying (and accepted) concepts of CSR and motivations to engage in CSR, we will determine the extent to which normative approaches exist within the meetings industry.

Our comparative analysis of how meeting planners from North America and Europe perceive and engage with CSR makes several contributions to CSR research and practice. First, it clarifies the concept of CSR from a meeting planner's perspective and illustrates the applicability of the theoretical frameworks to the meetings industry. Second, it ascertains how meeting planners perceive their motivation to engage in CSR in different contexts, but within the same broad economic sector. Indeed, determining the underlying values and beliefs of CSR engagement can help to define sector-specific interventions for CSR and potentially enhance the way in which CSR practices are communicated to meeting planners. Third, the article furthers the need for the inclusion of social context as a factor that influences the CSR narrative, in order to determine the scope of its implementation and the factors that influence practice. In recognizing the variance in definition and motivations to engage in practice, a contextual CSR resolution may be found that overcomes the existing failures of current thinking about, and approaches to, CSR practice.

### Theoretical Perspectives

#### *The Cross-Cultural Debate of CSR*

National culture has an influence on CSR practices across a broad range of industry sectors due to the influence of institutions such as politics, finance, education, and labor (Habisch et al., 2005; Ho et al., 2012; Hofstede, 2011; Matten & Moon, 2008; Peng et al., 2012; Thanetsunthorn, 2015; Waldman et al., 2006). Cultural context is stated to be the determining factor influencing CSR practices in businesses operating in Western dominated cultures (Athanasopoulou & Selsky, 2015) and research into CSR practices between US- and EU-based companies has found remarkable differences (Matten & Moon, 2008). For instance, Hartman et al. (2007) found that US-based companies are more explicit in communicating their practices, with EU-based countries being more implicit. This is exemplified by a myriad of codes in different

sectors found within US companies (Bruyaka et al., 2013) and comparatively fewer in EU based organizations.

Although there has been investigation into cultural differences between CSR positioning and policy, there is relatively little research that explores how and why activities vary across and within differing contexts such as industrial sectors. Indeed, studies into CSR often take place within institutional and organizational contexts at an individual level, proliferating singular conceptual lenses (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). Musgrave and Woodward (2016) suggested that a lack of interdisciplinary analysis within the CSR literature is surprising given the complex nature of the issue, a view supported by Aguinis and Glavas (2012), who advocated a multilevel approach to the investigation of CSR. The focused nature of research into CSR has evoked criticism because it has reinforced a narrow view of CSR and failed to enhance the diversification the conceptualization of CSR (Athanasopoulou & Selsky 2015; Clarkson, 1995; Lindgreen & Swaen 2010). For example, Schwartz and Carroll's (2003) model assessed the motivation to engage in CSR, contemporaneously ignoring the political, economic, and legal framework that sits alongside CSR practices. Although Porter and Kramer (2006) and Henderson (2011) embraced CSR activities as a core competence in enhancing strategic value to stakeholders, they ignored the underlying moral values.

CSR research has traditionally been couched in US culture and practice (Lodge, 1990; Maignan, 2001), resulting in CSR being viewed as a form of Western imperialism (Prieto-Carron et al., 2006). Despite negative views of Western imperialism, studies into the US context demonstrate that corporations view CSR positively in relation to defining social norms; the US is stated to have a dominant individualistic CSR ideology with secondary concerns relating to legal imperatives (Enderle, 1996; Lodge, 1990). Jamali and Mirshak (2007) inferred that individualism dominates the social constructs of CSR in the US, epitomized by philanthropy. In support of this view, a study by Maignan and Ralston (2002) demonstrated that US companies favor philanthropic and volunteer programs as forms of CSR practice. Freeman and Hasnaoui (2011) used Hofstede's cultural dimensions to explain this approach towards CSR. For example,

individualism is celebrated in the US and being socially responsible is deemed the responsibility of everyone; not separated by arbitrary lines of business, governments, or individual responsibilities.

Matten and Moon (2008) furthered this by suggesting that US-style CSR is embedded in organizations explicitly, through vicarious philanthropy and/or initiatives that articulate both individual and business values, which are both strategic and voluntary and often highly visible in the community. These statements of CSR hark back to the ideas of Maignan (2001), Schwartz and Carroll (2003), and Rahman (2011), whereby community cohesion (volunteering), ethical behaviors (philanthropic action), transparent decision making (codes of conduct), and economic development (strategic) are all placed under the overarching umbrella of CSR. But do these explicit social norms of community cohesion, ethical behavior, and transparency apply to American meeting planners' perceptions of CSR?

This article provides the first opportunity to match context with the perspectives of meeting planners and to determine if there are differences in the way in which planners define CSR and what motivates them to engage in CSR. Within Western Europe CSR can be broadly characterized as implicit; where practice is normalized through codes, regulation, and law (predominantly environmental, employment, health and safety, and human rights law). Therefore, society explicitly sets the CSR agenda rather than corporations themselves. This view is supported by Maignan and Ralston (2002), who analyzed 100 top performing companies in Europe and the US and who demonstrated that European businesses see CSR from a performance-related and stakeholder-driven perspective, fueled by expectation rather than strategic advantage. This Western European viewpoint of corporate responsibility is furthered by Steurer et al. (2012). They argued that Western European culture expects modesty associated with "good deeds," rather than individual celebration, putting forward that corporate responsibility extends to compliance within the legal and regulatory environment of the given country. Thus, social responsibility is seen primarily as the role of government. Once more, this can be explained by Freeman and Hasnaoui (2011), who suggested that the overarching trend across continental Europe (to a lesser extent in the

UK) is that governments have responsibility for alleviating societal issues (albeit covertly through legislation), thus relieving the broader population of responsibility. This idea is developed by Crane et al. (2012), who argued that in Europe social issues have tended to be addressed through collective action via governmental policies, and that US–Europe differences in this aspect of CSR are likely to persist. Although the dichotomy of individualism versus collectivism is evident in policy-driven research, the application to specific sectors such as the meetings industry is limited, thus reinforcing the need for this research.

The underlying sense of collectivism in European approaches to CSR has influenced the agenda. Typically, European organizations see CSR as implicit compliance to legislation that makes good business sense, which can be upheld under the scrutiny of stakeholders. For example, across Europe CSR is tied to environmental programs, exemplified by a plethora of environmental standards, codes of practice, and legislation to support the achievement of CSR goals (Crane et al., 2012; Forte, 2013; Matten & Moon, 2008; Steurer et al., 2012). Indeed, the presence of regulatory CSR in Europe has resulted in the term "performance"-related CSR (Freeman & Hasnaoui, 2011).

Thus, in America, philanthropic and volunteer programs are the favored forms of CSR initiative, while in Europe performance is rated through adherence to legislation or codes of conduct. Notwithstanding the varied contextual influences on practice, this commentary supports the framework through which an understanding of CSR can be applied (Maignan, 2001; Rahman, 2011; Schwartz & Carroll, 2003), yet these broad terms offer little application to meeting planners or provide a reflection on their clarity of concept.

#### *What Drives the Meetings Industry to Engage With CSR?*

The meetings industry can be a particularly large consumer of resources as conventionally large numbers of event delegates will meet in a destination over a number of days, generally blending business with pleasure (Pechlaner et al., 2007; Rogers & Davidson, 2015; Tretyakevich & Maggi, 2012). Addressing the environmental and social



impacts of these events is of commercial self-interest to destinations seeking to attract international meetings and conferences, and also to the meeting planners themselves as they seek to garner business from environmentally and socially aware clients (Musgrave et al., 2012). For instance, the Global Business Travel Foundation launched “Project Icarus” in 2006 to promote best practice in sustainable practices in business travel while MPI, the largest membership organization for the global meetings industry, has been actively promoting the benefits of engagement with corporate social responsibility to its members since 2011 (MeetingsToday.com, 2011).

Banerjee (2008), Ellen et al. (2006), Montiel (2008), Rees (2002), and Stubbs and Cocklin (2008) all argued that there are differing drivers that motivate corporations to engage in CSR. Broadly speaking these relate to reputation, personal ethics, regulation, and competition. Similarly, Málóvics et al. (2008) concluded that CSR practices align with drivers and can be split into four levels: commercial self-interest; expanded self-interest with immediate benefit; expanded self-interest with long-term benefit; and promotion of the common good. But can these drivers be transposed to the meetings industry? Wu et al. (2008) proposed that CSR practice in the meetings sector concentrates on reputation, differentiation, employee and consumer values, and regulatory adherence while Keyser (2008) argued that CSR in events is the pursuit of strategies that align consumer and employee values rather than just achieve regulatory adherence. From a strategic perspective, the meetings industry is positioned between destination attractiveness, economic performance (Jones & Li, 2015), and urban/cultural renewal (Bradley et al., 2002). Capriello and Fraquelli (2008) conceptualized this as the triangular equilibrium, involving the balancing of interests of local people, visitors, and the event. According to Quinn (2006), it is these characteristics that drive meeting planners towards certain CSR practices; as being responsible is a requirement of meeting the value proposition expected by the market (Musgrave et al., 2012).

There is little evidence to support whether meeting planners in America and Western Europe differ in their current and future motives for engaging with CSR. For example, Sox et al. (2013) analyzed

levels of concern for sustainable issues in the management of conference and willingness to pay more for sustainable events, without exploring the motives or conceptualization of CSR from a meeting planner’s perspective.

Moreover, Park and Kim’s (2017) study focused on developing sustainable guidelines and identified a number of elements for practice rather than exploring conceptual clarity. Henderson (2011) provided a very broad conceptual commentary on the events industry and considers how sustainable practices can generate competitiveness through a strategic lens of cost-based, differentiation-based, and focused-based competitive advantage, offering a suite of practically-based ideas but without empirical evidence. However, authors such as Laing and Frost (2010) do offer empirical insights, suggesting that for events to succeed in a sustainable manner, consumers must attach personal values to the social and environmental initiatives presented. Yet, at best, this commentary oversimplifies the work of others such as Quinn (2006) and Capriello and Fraquelli (2008), underlining that from an event organizer’s perspective the drivers to engage in CSR are influenced simply by economic considerations rather than broader concerns for society.

#### *What Drives Meeting Planners to Engage With CSR?*

In order to analyze what drives meeting planners to engage with CSR we have adopted the proposition of Ellen et al. (2006), who stated that there are four areas that drive CSR engagement: (1) Strategic attribute, primarily related to getting and keeping customers; (2) Values-driven attributes, which relate to underlying beliefs and a sense of caring; (3) Stakeholder-driven attributes, which suggest a concern for those that have a vested interest in the business, from employees to investors; (4) Egoistic attributes, which are characterized by more self-centered outcomes of engagement such as taking advantage of the cause or generating and promoting a positive image.

Within the context of the meetings sector, many corporations strategically utilize events as vehicles for displaying their own socially responsible behavior (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). For example, Neale et al. (2007) found

that favorable responses to a sponsored sport event can also transfer to the event's sponsors, demonstrating that CSR contributes to enhancing corporate image via favorable attitudes. This strategic use of events to demonstrate engagement in CSR practices is interesting as meetings and incentives trips can be regarded as being excessive and/or a nonessential business practice (Keenan, 2010). Yet doing the "right thing" in an environment where corporations are increasingly criticized for unethical activity may enhance image and reputation and underline core and competitive values (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006).

Campiranon (2005) suggested that social values of events can be embedded within the event planning process, and by engaging in CSR throughout pre-, live, and postevent planning an organization can demonstrate principles of reliability, credibility, trustworthiness, and a sense of caring (see also Ellen et al., 2006). This is important as consumers will attach their values to the value of the company that serves their business. Similarly, Musgrave et al. (2012) argued that millennials seek a close attachment between the organizational values of a prospective employer and their own personal values. This view is supported by Renwick et al. (2013), where high-achieving graduates judge the environmental performance and reputation of a company as a criterion for decision making when applying for jobs.

This blurring of lines between professional and personal values reinforces the work of Musgrave and Woodward (2016), who stated that meeting planners see engagement in CSR as a way to increase their own professionalism and as a way for the meeting industry to retain highly motivated and qualified individuals. Similarly to Ellen et al. (2006), Campiranon (2005) stated that stakeholders are a driver of CSR engagement. In relation to meeting planners, stakeholders include local government, venue support services, local suppliers, and residents, as well as employees and volunteers. Maintaining a close and cooperative relationship with stakeholders engenders an image of responsibility beyond the oft-quoted environmental paradigm.

Fombrun and van Riel's (2003) research showed that reputation can be enhanced through engagement in CSR initiatives, as participation can influence external perceptions of a company's actions.

Engagement in CSR initiatives represents a self-centered (egoistic) approach that has a value-orientated outcome. In applying this concept to events Masucci and Raviola (2005) stated that events can have a public relations function. For example, by opening up part of an event program to the local community, the event planner can show his/her commitment to good citizenship. The notion of good citizenship is furthered by Hixson (2014), who argued that participation by individuals and groups at events facilitates opportunities for social exchange. There is evidence that shows the existence of these driving forces in the meetings sector. However, the broad nature of research and lack of empirical data further reinforced the need to analyze in detail the CSR practices of meeting planners. Our research now brings components together; exploring the geographical and cultural context of the meetings industry through the examination of practices and motivations to engage in CSR.

### Methodology

To explore the cross-cultural nature of CSR it was critical to identify meeting planners from each region (US and Europe). For this reason, a database of participants was used with permission from a global association with over 20,000 meeting planner members. E-mails were sent to all contacts explain the purpose of the research and providing a link to the online questionnaire. The survey was available for a 2-week period, with two reminders sent to nonrespondents during that period. Once the survey was closed, data were cleaned and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Similar to Matten and Moon (2008), we use the comparison of North America and Western Europe due to the similarities in the democratic and capitalist structures and welfare systems. By Western Europe we refer to Germany, Switzerland, Austria, France, Italy, the UK, and Ireland. It is obvious that these seven countries do not represent the entirety of the EU, which is noted in the limitations. Yet comparisons between CSR in North America and Western Europe are most notable in studies by Hartman et al. (2007) and Freeman and Hasnaoui (2011). For example, Freeman and Hasnaoui (2011) argued that the application of CSR should be different based

upon the psychology of the nations, the legal and economic systems that impose upon business practices. Evidently there is of academic interest and of equal importance is how these differences are transposed to business practices.

### Measures

To understand whether meeting planners in North America and Western Europe differ in their current and future motives for engaging with CSR a questionnaire was developed using items adapted from Ellen et al.'s (2006) CSR constructs: (1) Values driven; (2) Stakeholder driven; (3) Egoistic; and (4) Strategic. A 5-point Likert scale was employed (*strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*) across 16 items where meeting planners had to rate items across the four motives to engage in CSR such as "We feel obliged to make a positive contribution to society" (values orientated). In addition, specific demographic and sector-specific items such as principal business activity, number of employees, and country where registered were collected. A team of experts in CSR were then asked to comment on the questionnaire and suggest areas of improvement. A pilot study was also performed to assess for quality and reliability in the items and items were updated accordingly. Descriptive analysis was employed to test mean differences. In addition, we performed an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to establish if meeting planners distinguished between the four types of motives outlined by Ellen et al. (2006). Assumptions of component analysis were met and Cronbach Alpha was calculated across each factor to demonstrate internal reliability. Factors with eigenvalue lower than 1.00 were excluded from the analysis. All factors were checked for reliability ( $\alpha = >0.70$ ). An independent sample *t* test was also performed against the North American and European sample to establish if the two groups differed with regards to motives and engagement in CSR in the future.

To establish whether the differences in motivation are influenced by conceptual understanding of CSR or the wider socioeconomic and political contexts within which meeting planners operate we adapted Maignan's (2001) constructs of CSR: (1) economic; (2) legal; (3) ethical; and (4) philanthropic. Using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly agree* to 5 = *strongly disagree*) meeting planners had to rate the

14 items that reflected their general views regarding corporate social responsibility. For example, "we allocate some of our resources to charitable and/or philanthropic activities." Once again, we performed an EFA to establish if meeting planners distinguished between the four types of motives outlined by Ellen et al. (2006). Assumptions of component analysis were met and Cronbach Alpha was calculated across each factor to demonstrate internal reliability. Factors with eigenvalue lower than 1.00 were excluded from the analysis. All factors were checked for reliability ( $\alpha = >0.70$ ).

### Findings

For the purpose of this article we have focused our analysis on questions that explored current and future motives of meeting planners to engage in CSR, the current CSR practices undertaken by meeting planners, and the current CSR responsibilities of meeting planners. The items that explored CSR practice and responsibilities were consistently reliable ( $\alpha = >0.70$ ) and items that explored motivation were also reliable ( $\alpha = >0.70$ ).

Meeting planners were invited to complete the questionnaire via an international membership platform that has over 20,000 meeting planners worldwide. North American ( $n = 842$ ) and European ( $n = 142$ ) meeting planners responded to the invitation to participate. The majority of the participants in both samples classed themselves as freelance event planners (31%). A further 23% classed themselves as meeting planners within venues. Predominantly the participants had titles such as Event Director, Account Executive, or Operations Director. Although the demographics were noted, the intention of this study was to explore the difference between the two samples and not to explore the frequency of events in each company and size of their company. Although our study does not intend to generalize, there must be an acknowledgement that this approach has its limitations, which are explored later in the article.

### *The Motives of Meeting Planners to Engage in CSR*

The purpose of this section was to establish what meeting planners thought were the underlying



motives to get involved in CSR. A total of 16 items were adapted from work by Ellen et al. (2006) and based on the four constructs of motives: (1) Values driven; (2) Stakeholder driven; (3) Egoistic; and (4) Strategic.

Table 1 demonstrates that there are differences in the motivations towards CSR between meeting planners in North America and Western Europe. Meeting planners in North America demonstrate stronger motives in relation to the strategic, stakeholder, and value-based motivations. However, meeting planners in both geographic locations identify strategy as the most significant motivation.

Research undertaken by Laing and Frost (2010) and by Henderson (2011) suggested that the dominance of this strategic motivation within the meetings sector is driven by an economic imperative rather than a broader, strategic outlook. Similarly, the presence of an underlying economic motivation for the development of CSR strategies is also evidenced by the presence of egoistic/strategic motivations within European meeting planners, where CSR strategies are developed in response to the desire to achieve self-centered outcomes, such as readdressing corporate reputation. Thus, the findings indicate a relationship between an

Table 1  
Meeting Planner Motives Towards CSR Involvement

We are active in the field of CSR because. . .	Factor Loadings <sup>b</sup>						
	North America			Europe			
	STRAT	VAL	STAK	STRAT	EGO/STRAT	STAK	VAL
We feel obliged to make a positive contribution to society—VAL		0.655					0.558
Our employees believe in CSR—VAL		0.802					0.731
We want to promote CSR to our customers—VAL		0.587					0.687
We are trying to give something back to our communities—VAL		0.730					
Our customers expect it—STAK			0.728				
Society in general expects it—STAK			0.709			0.855	
Our shareholders/stockholders expect it—STAK			0.658			0.674	
Our employees expect it—STAK			0.594			0.604	
It allows us to gain advantage from working with partners such as charities and nonprofit organizations—EGO					0.604		
It allows us to promote ourselves as a responsible business—EGO					0.714		
It strengthens our reputation within our community—EGO					0.676		
It allows us to get additional publicity for our business—STRAT	0.578				0.650		
It increases the amount of business we are able to secure—STRAT	0.839			0.824			
It makes sure we retain existing customers—STRAT	0.803			0.789			
It allows us to increase our profitability—STRAT	0.770			0.768			
It allows us to present ourselves as industry leaders—STRAT							
Eigenvalue	7.8	1.8	1.3	7	2	1.5	1.2
Cronbach alpha	0.85	0.83	0.86	0.91	0.82	0.83	0.76
Variance	21%	16%	15.5%	18%	16%	14.5%	13.5%

Note. <sup>a</sup>VAL = values driven, STAK = stakeholder driven, EGO = egoistic, STRAT = strategic.

<sup>b</sup>A varimax rotation was employed; values less than 0.5 were omitted from the table.

organization's investment in CSR and its anticipated financial performance.

This notion may also explain the dominance of the stakeholder motivations within the US, where motives to engage in CSR practice are driven by a desire to meet the expectations of stakeholders in order to achieve more favorable consumer attitudes and enhance corporate reputation in an attempt to increase revenue (see for instance Borghesi et al., 2014; Campiranon, 2005; Neale et al., 2007). The presence of both value and stakeholder motivations within the US meetings sector is related to the desire to match organizational values with the values of customers, especially where the matching of values with consumers results in judgements being made in relation to the reputation of the company (Musgrave et al., 2012; Renwick et al., 2013). Thus, emphasizing the interdependent and pluralistic nature of CSR constructs that influence practitioner adoption.

#### *The Motives of Meeting Planners to Engage in CSR in the Future*

This section of analysis focuses upon CSR engagement in the future. Once again, a total of 16 items were adapted from work by Ellen et al. (2006). These items differed slightly from earlier items in this study as they focused upon future trends in CSR, which were identified in literature.

An independent sample *t* test was performed against the North American and European sample

to establish if the two groups differed with regards to engagement in CSR in the future. Out of the 16 items, Table 2 shows four items that were significant between the two groups. European meeting planners say they are more inclined to engage with CSR in the future because of a value-driven reason: "we feel obliged to make a positive contribution to society" ( $M = 1.76$ ) and "we are trying to give something back to their communities" ( $M = 1.82$ ).

However, the effect size tempers the significance here. Nonetheless, what is interesting is that the underlying motives for future practice of CSR appear to move away from European meeting planners' current stance, which is couched in strategic and egoistic items, towards more value-driven items, which may be explained by cultural changes within the meetings sector (Habisch et al., 2005; Ho et al., 2012; Peng et al., 2012; Thanetsunthorn, 2015; Waldman et al., 2006).

North American meeting planners anticipate becoming more involved in CSR in the future due to issues of legislation and trends in the business environment: "Government legislation is forcing us to engage more with legislation" ( $M = 2.70$ ) and "We need to respond to broader changes in the environment" ( $M = 1.91$ ). But once again, the significance of these differences should be considered alongside the effect size. However, the presence of these stakeholder and strategic drivers suggests a concern and awareness of externalities that surround their businesses and maintains their concern to meeting their legal obligations.

Table 2  
Comparison of North America and Europe CSR Engagement in the Future

Variable: We will become more involved in CSR because. . .	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
<b>We feel obliged to make a positive contribution to society</b>					
North America	1.56 (0.644)	-4.22	587	0.001	0.17
Europe	1.76 (0.790)				
<b>We are trying to give something back to our communities</b>					
North America	1.48 (0.540)	-5.36	586	0.001	0.53
Europe	1.82 (0.734)				
<b>Government legislation is forcing us to engage more with legislation</b>					
North America	2.70 (1.03)	2.79	582	0.005	0.30
Europe	2.39 (1.05)				
<b>We need to respond to broader changes in the environment</b>					
North America	1.91 (0.704)	0.279	581	0.021	0.01
Europe	1.89 (0.713)				

*Conceptual Understanding of CSR:  
Current Practices*

To ascertain the different CSR practices between North America and Western Europe, meeting planners were asked to explain their current CSR practice (Table 3).

North American meeting planners identify their business as being more active in terms of engagement with CSR compared to Western European meeting planners, a finding that may be expected as previous research has highlighted that, historically, CSR is more highly valued in US companies than in European organizations. Interestingly, it can also be seen that the vast majority of companies in both locations describe themselves as being very or somewhat active in terms of CSR, even though fewer than half of US and European respondents had formal CSR policies. This finding suggests that, in both locations, there is a limited relationship between the existence of a formal CSR policy and the level of CSR practice within an organization, calling into question the validity of a formal CSR policy as a measure of legitimacy. It may also go some way to explaining the low levels of engagement in the meetings sector around formal CSR reporting. The majority (53%) of North American respondents also indicated that they did not know whether their organization uses a recognized sustainable management standard to help manage their activities, compared to just over one quarter of European businesses. Significantly more European meeting planners use a sustainable management standard than those from North America. This

is in contrast to the responses relating to CSR policy, which show parity between the locations. This finding suggests that voluntary compliance is more significant in influencing practice than CSR policy in Europe and also demonstrates greater awareness amongst Western European meeting planners of what their organizations are doing in terms of using formal CSR management tools.

*The Conceptual Understanding of CSR:  
Meeting Planners' Views*

We now explore the general views on the responsibilities of meeting planners as defined by Maignan (2001) and Podnar and Golob (2007), considering the influence of economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic factors. In examining the findings, the means these variables show economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities average 1.5 on the 5-point Likert-type scale. However, it is clear from the data in Table 4 that philanthropic items are less important. This finding is congruent with the findings of Clarkson (1995), Lindgreen and Swaen (2010), and Athanasopoulou (2012), who all purported that an understanding of CSR must be influenced by a diverse conceptualization that acknowledges contextual rather than the dominant, narrow view of CSR as being couched in individualism and philanthropy.

The results from Tables 4 and 5 suggest that there are some differences in both practice and the conceptual understanding of CSR. The following section establishes whether there is a statistical

Table 3  
Meeting Planners' Current Practices

Current Meeting Planner Practices	North America	Europe
<b>How active is your business in terms of corporate social responsibility?</b>		
Very active	39.5%	31.5%
Somewhat active	51.5%	57.5%
Not at all active	9.0%	11.0%
<b>Do you have a CSR Policy?</b>		
Yes	37.5%	46.0%
No	62.5%	54.0%
<b>Do you use a recognized sustainable management standard to help manage your activities?</b>		
Yes	9.0%	26.0%
No	38.0%	45.5%
Don't know	53.0%	28.5%

Table 4  
Relative Importance of Factors Influencing Engagement With CSR Practices

Factors Influencing Engagement With CSR Practices	North America [Mean (SD)]	Europe [Mean (SD)]
Economic CSR	1.4 (0.44)	1.6 (0.52)
Legal CSR	1.4 (0.44)	1.5 (0.54)
Ethical CSR	1.5 (0.45)	1.7 (0.57)
Philanthropic CSR	1.8 (0.62)	2.1 (0.75)

Note. Based on a scale of 1 = *strongly agree* to 5 = *strongly disagree*.

difference in how meeting planners distinguished between the four types of CSR: (1) economic; (2) legal; (3) ethical; and (4) philanthropic as described by Maignan (2001) and Podnor and Golob (2007). All factors were checked for reliability ( $\alpha > 0.70$ ).

The EFA (Table 5) shows that a three-factor rather than a four-factor solution is more stable for North American meeting planners and accounted for just over 51% of combined variance. The first factor merged ethical and legal items. The data also

Table 5  
Scale Items and Exploratory Factor Analysis of Corporate Social Responsibility

I Believe That it is Important for my Business to <sup>a</sup> . . .	Factor Loadings <sup>b</sup>						
	North America			Europe			
	Legeth	EthPhi	Eco	EthPhi	Legeth	Leg	Eco
Maximize profits—ECO			0.605				0.815
Strictly control our production costs—ECO			0.543				0.635
Plan for our long-term success—ECO			0.605				
Always strive to improve our economic performance—ECO			0.786				
Ensure that our employees act within the law at all times—LEG						0.654	
Always respect our contractual obligations, even when to do so disadvantages the business in financial terms—LEG	0.569					0.744	
Refrain from “bending” the law, even if this helps us improve our performance—LEG	0.768				0.785		
Always adhere to the principles defined in regulatory systems—LEG	0.745				0.770		
Be committed to well-defined ethics principles—ETH	0.681				0.606		
Avoid compromising ethical standards to achieve business goals—ETH	0.736				0.504		
Help solve social problems in my geographic area—ETH		0.756		0.735			
Participate in the management of public affairs—PHI		0.687		0.654			
Allocate some of our resources to charitable and/or philanthropic activities—PHI		0.707		0.831			
Play a role in society that goes beyond the mere generation of profits—PHI		0.746		0.661			
Eigenvalue	5.07	1.81	1.65	4.89	2.62	1.39	1.01
Cronbach alpha	0.84	0.83	0.73	0.82	0.85	0.80	0.70
Variance	21%	16.5%	14%	17%	16.5%	15.5%	10%

Note. <sup>a</sup>ECO = Economic, LEG = Legal, ETH = Ethical, PHIL = Philanthropic.

<sup>b</sup>A varimax rotation was employed; values less than 0.5 were omitted from the table.

show that Western European meeting planners did not distinguish between the four types of CSR as noted by Maignan (2001). Once again, there was a blend of the types of CSR responsibility. Ethical and philanthropic items merged within the first factor and showed the most variance. Legal and ethical items converged to demonstrate the second factor, with legal and then economic items separate as the final two factors.

The disparities in these findings are reflective of the diverse opinions as to what motivates the engagement of corporations in CSR more generally (see for instance Banarjee, 2008; Ellen et al., 2006; Málovics et al., 2008; Montiel, 2008; Rees, 2002; Stubbs & Cocklin, 2008). Indeed, these results support the contextual adherence to CSR drivers that have previously been associated with the meetings sector (Wu, 2008), where economic imperatives are related to notions of reputation and differentiation, ethics, and philanthropy, sharing connotations with employee and consumer values and legal frameworks involving aspects of regulatory adherence.

### Discussion

The purpose of this article was to determine if there are differences in the way in which meeting planners in North America and Western Europe define CSR, and in what motivates them to engage in CSR practices.

The proposition of Ellen et al. (2006), which stated that there are four areas that drive CSR engagement; (1) values; (2) stakeholders; (3) egoistic; and (4) strategic does not clearly reflect drivers for engagement with CSR practices of meeting planners in North America and Western Europe. European meeting planners did distinguish between all the stated motives, including egoistic motives, and there were examples of interdependency in these motives from European meeting planners. For instance, the item “It allows us to get additional publicity for our business” also merged with egoistic items; reinforcing the egoistic connotation of taking advantage of CSR practices for strategic advantage and economic gain. Interdependency was also present in North American meeting planners. Ethical and legal items informed their views of CSR and their CSR practices—highlighting an

individualism and affirmation towards personal ethics and a concern for legal compliance.

Similar to Western Europe meeting planners, items associated with economics are represented as a single factor, which not only suggests a strong economic justification towards CSR practices but also affirms the underlying business context to meeting planners’ corporate social responsibilities and their role in the long-term economic success of their organization. It is stated that the identification of factors that relate to long-term economic success of an organization are congruent with the observed adherence strategic and stakeholder motives as proposed by Ellen et al. (2006).

Interestingly, egoistic motives are not seen as prevalent variables in the factor structure for North American meeting planners. It is argued that the attachment towards a self-centered egoistic approach to CSR may not fit within this sample. Ellen et al. (2006) suggested that egoistic connotations may not be widely accepted. However, the responses may also be affected by social/cultural norms, which suggest that meeting planners in North America are influenced by an individualistic ideology that leads to a philanthropic basis for CSR that is opposed to a self-centered egoistic approach. In support of this view, it is seen that for North American meeting planners’ value driven motives showed more variance, emphasizing the importance of values as a precursor to engagement. Further exemplifying that within this location, the merging of personal and business values within an organization influences CSR activities.

In relation to the future of CSR in Western Europe, the underlying motives appear to move away from the current status quo, which is couched in strategic and egoistic items, towards more value-driven items. This switch indicates that voluntary compliance will become more significant than policy in influencing CSR practice in European meeting planners. Conversely, North American meeting planners will become more involved in CSR in the future due to concerns over legislative compliance and trends in the business environment.

It is surprising to observe the distinct change in the direction of motivations, within the two locations given the diverse socioeconomic and political context within which the meeting planners are working. In establishing whether the differences



in motivation are influenced by their conceptual understanding of CSR the lack of a relationship between the existence of a formal policy and the level of practice questions the validity of a formal CSR policy as a measure of legitimacy and explains the weak relationship between adherence to CSR policy observed both locations. This limited correlation between the existence of a formal CSR policy and the level of CSR practice within an organization indicates that the presence of this documentation does not drive the practice of meeting planners. Similarly, in North America, the correlation between the utilization of voluntary standards and CSR practice is weak and it was found that that meeting planners' conceptual understanding of CSR is not driven by externally created standards (e.g., ISO 20121) or by organizational policies in this location. In relation to the practice of American meeting planners, these findings resonate with those of several authors who state that businesses in the USA become involved in CSR for reasons of betterment of society rather than in response to legal or regulatory responsibility (Athanasopoulou & Selsky, 2015; Clarkson, 1995; Lindgreen & Swaen 2010; Pinkston & Carroll, 1994). European meeting planners did not distinguish between the four types of CSR as noted by Maignan (2001) and there was a blend of the types of CSR responsibility. Ethical and philanthropic items merged within the first factor and showed the most variance. Legal and ethical items converged to demonstrate the second factor, with legal and then economic items separate as the final two factors. The presence of legal as a separate driver is to be expected within this context as it has been stated that CSR practices in Europe are normalized through regulation and law (Maignan & Ralston, 2002).

In contributing to theoretical debate this article shows that the general views on the responsibilities of businesses as suggested Maignan (2001) cannot be applied to meeting planners in North America or Europe. Indeed, the merging of the ethical and philanthropic items and legal and ethical items (Maignan, 2001) and egoistic and strategic drivers (Ellen et al., 2006) represents the view of various authors that CSR is interdependent and difficult to categorize and simplify into distinct groups. It could also be argued that these findings reflect the definitional debate that underlines the scope of CSR

as it is understood and implemented around the world. Indeed, this has continued to be a barrier to practitioner adoption and underlines the difficulty in distinguishing between the four types of CSR. In addition, research undertaken by Spitzer (2009) suggested the reason for the variation in views and practices between the US and Europe is a result of CSR meaning, translation, and implementation differing between continents because of differences in cultural understanding and socially accepted definitions of CSR.

This research has identified differences in relation to practice and motives to engage in CSR that are the result of the different cultural context of meeting planners. Although some variations were observed a dominant theme across the different geographical locations related to strategic/competitive advantage that engagement in CSR provides and the resultant financial benefit that this advantage provides.

It is argued that the prevalence of this theme is evidence of a Western capitalist culture that underpins business practice in both locations, placing further emphasis on the need for future research in additional Eastern countries in order to determine the extent to which context or economics motivates CSR practice.

## Conclusion

The results obtained indicate that meeting planners' motivations for engagement in CSR activities differ significantly based upon where they are located. These differences in views and practice are explained by differences in national culture influencing CSR motivations. For example, a contextual explanation for the differences in approach to CSR is exemplified in North America through the dominance of an individualistic ideology which creates a philanthropic basis for CSR practice. This is in contrast to the more implicit notion of CSR within Europe, where practices are normalized through codes, regulations, and laws.

Despite these divergent motivations across the different context, there is commonality in both locations; for example, individual benefit is the most significant driver for engagement in CSR practice, rather than policy. This finding has implications for any organization seeking to implement

a CSR program as the emphasis must start with an exploration of individual motivations to engage, rather than with the instigation of a policy designed to direct action. In addition, the weak relationship between adherence to CSR policy and the levels of practice suggest that organizations should consider adapting their documentation in order to ensure that it facilitates best practice in CSR or consider whether the existence of a policy is of value for their business. In addition, there are some similarities within the factor structures described by meeting planners in the US and Europe. For example, legal/ethical and ethical/philanthropic factors show a high degree of variance in both locations. It is suggested that this finding may be expected as it presents an instrumentalist view of CSR practice, where rules and regulations are justified from an ethical base and where ethical aspects of CSR are seen as a precursor to legal factors explaining the merging of the two factors. The second factor converged ethical and philanthropic items, thus reducing the factors extracted to economic, legal-ethical, and ethical-philanthropic. The presence of "ethical" factors shares underlying constructs with "values" driven motives to engage with CSR. Therefore, the merging of CSR types may be due to similar cultural values and an ethnocentric/Western conceptualization of CSR within European and American society, supporting the contention that social norms shared between similar societies impact upon motivations and ultimately practices. Therefore, it is our contention that social norms, created by institutions, impact upon motivations and practices within industries, which then informs practice.

The findings suggest that future practice and engagement will be motivated by different factors to those identified as influencing current practice. For example, it is anticipated that North American meeting planners will become more involved in CSR due to issues of legislation and trends in the business environment. In contrast, European meeting planners will adopt a more values-driven approach in the future.

These future reasons for engagement are diametrically opposed to those stated to influence current practice, which were stated to be related to individualistic/philanthropic ideologies in North America and codes, regulations, and laws in Western Europe.

These differences may be expected as they are explained by the dynamic nature of the factors that influence the narrative of CSR such as politics, culture, the economy, education, and the labor market and more broadly, the influence of national culture on personal and corporate values and belief systems. It remains to be seen whether more recent changes in the political context within both locations will have a significant impact upon CSR practice. For example, whether actions by the Trump administration in the US to lighten the legislative burden on business will affect motivations related to legal compliance or whether the impact of Brexit will consolidate the feeling of European values or divide the current sense of collectivism in meeting planners.

Changes in the contexts and locations within which meeting planners operate indicate different motivations to engage in CSR practice; however, the presence of economics as a separate item within the findings demonstrates the dominance of salient Western business cultures and the pervasion of economic justifications of CSR within the meetings sector. In both North America and Europe, motives to engage in CSR practice are driven by a desire to meet the expectations of stakeholders in order to achieve more favorable consumer attitudes and enhanced corporate reputation, which then results in competitive advantage and increased revenue. The prevalence of this motivation to engage in CSR practice demonstrates that for meeting planners the drivers to engage in CSR are predominantly influenced by economic considerations rather than broader concerns for society. This relationship between Western imperialism and capitalist business practices results in organizations seeking to financially justify the adoption of CSR practices and meeting planners adopting drivers to engage in CSR that are influenced by economic considerations rather than broader concerns for society.

### Recommendations

The findings of this research demonstrated a lack of adherence to the constructs of CSR as proposed by Maignan (2001) and Ellen et al. (2006), both in relation to current and future practice within North America and Europe. Therefore, in seeking to develop CSR practice in the meetings industry

within these locations, practitioners and policy makers must ensure that actions reflect the merging of the observed factors and motives in order to ensure that guidance and training reflects the specific categorization of CSR within these specific contexts. In addition, further research is recommended in order to determine the relative impact of the proposed constructs of CSR within a variety of different locations, as this would provide a more in-depth understanding of contextual CSR, enabling more specific recommendations in relation to the future practice within the global meetings industry.

A specific focus for further research into contextual CSR should be an examination of the effectiveness of CSR policy in influencing practice, as it was observed that voluntary adherence is more significant in influencing practice than the existence of company level documentation in both North America and Europe. If this was found to be the case in other geographic locations, these findings would have implications of policy makers and practitioners within the industry.

#### Limitations

There are a number of assumptions in this article that generate a number of limitations. First, the data represent a limited sample of meeting planners in North America and Europe. Thus, national and regional differences cannot be disaggregated. As such, the discussion tended to generalize cultural representation, albeit theoretically justified. Any future studies could be disaggregated in order to compare and contrast regional differences.

A confirmatory factor analysis could be used to confirm or reject the constructs outlined in these findings, yet data limitations did not allow for this. Second, the cross-sectional nature of the data limits the currency. Similar to all social constructs, CSR practice, understanding, and consideration is influenced by many variables. Since this survey was undertaken there have been major international political changes that may have had an impact upon CSR practices. It would be interesting to return to the sample and test the findings once more. Finally, contextualizing Maignan's (2001) and Ellen et al.'s (2006) original items did present a number of challenges. Moreover, there were challenges in using a questionnaire to explore motivation and engagement

in CSR practice across continents. Any future studies should consider alternatives such as a Delphi technique to narrow down regional differences in CSR engagement and practice. Moreover, it would be useful to replicate this research elsewhere in the world, to explore attitudes towards CSR of meeting planners from Asia, Africa, and the Pacific Region.

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