



Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is an acknowledged sub-set of sustainability. Sustainability was established by the United Nations Brundtland Commission, which defined the central principle of sustainability being actions that meet present needs without compromising the needs of future generations.

CSR presents a framework for organisations to conduct their affairs responsible. Essentially there are four levels of organisational responsibility:

- a. The lowest level is to be financially responsible to the organisation and its constituent stakeholders/members.
- b. The next level is to conduct the affairs of the organisation with due respect its regulatory context; that is, to be legally responsible.
- c. The third level is to be ethically responsible.
- d. The highest level is to contribute to society in ways other than required by contract or law; that is, to be philanthropically responsible.

Most organisations normally abide by the two lowest levels by being both financially and legally responsible. IFLA Europe requires that its Landscape Professionals be ethically responsible. Yet, it is now widely acknowledged and accepted that addressing all four levels of responsibility, including philanthropically responsibility, brings great benefits to organisations.

Organisations that institutionalize all four responsibilities into their governance and actions become better able to attract and retain high quality human resources (the foundation of the landscape profession), gain competitive advantage with respect other organisations (essential in the modern era of competitive professions and associations) and maximize the return on the investment of their resources (addressing stakeholder concerns of efficiency and productivity).

IFLA EUROPE and its constituent Landscape Professionals operate in an increasingly competitive global context, which presents new challenges. IFLA Europe has to address these challenges to remain relevant for its members and other stakeholders as well as to continue as the peak landscape professional association for Europe. This will require IFLA Europe to adopt CSR as an integral element of its mission and for its Landscape Professionals.

Professional Responsibility

To be philanthropically responsible essentially requires giving back to the society within which the profession operates. This entails the managed contribution of resources – expertise, time, funds – for the betterment of the community and the natural environment. Philanthropy is grounded with the three other integral components of responsibility: financial, legal and ethical.

Normally organisations design their CSR programmes for societal engagement that target specific projects of community and environmental benefit. Positive impacts are integral to project objectives. To achieve this, these programmes require competent planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting for effective returns on resource expenditure in terms of programme outcomes.



Simple donation of resources by landscape architectural organisations carries risks of developing a donation-dependency mentality with recipients and an emphasis on resource cost minimization by donors rather than the CSR programme itself and the benefits it produces. Focussed CSR programmes maximize the value of the outcomes in terms of the targeted beneficiaries as well as for the initiating organisation itself. This highlights the positive duality of external and internal benefits for initiating organisations.

Effective CSR programmes will enhance the overall standing of the landscape architectural profession, elevate individual organisations' brands, enhance organisations' expertise and build reciprocal community support. IFLA Europe, given its professional focus, has the responsibility of leadership to be the landscape architectural role model for CSR.

Institutional Considerations

IFLA Europe would be the lead organisation for landscape architectural CSR. The role of IFLA EUROPE with respect to CSR would be policy formulation with periodic review, regulation, coordination for training and member coordination. These aforementioned functions of IFLA EUROPE create a framework for the implementation of CSR that provides focus and consistency across IFLA EUROPE members. Members of IFLA EU, under the direction of the federation, would primarily drive the development and implementation of CSR programmes. The intent of these institutional arrangements for direction and oversight of CSR programmes by IFLA EUROPE is maximization of outcomes with enhancement of societal impact.

Some flexibility for implementation of IFLA Europe CSR policy will be necessary, at least in the short term. Members have varying institutional resources and capabilities. Also, constituents of member organisations span diverse institutional contexts, such as private professional landscape architectural offices, government organisations, non-government organisations and educational-research institutes. Nevertheless, the private professional landscape architectural offices normally shape the societal perception of the landscape profession. For this reason, CSR policy and related matters needs to primarily address the implementation of CSR by these private landscape firms, which are the constituents of IFLA EUROPE members. Other avenues for CSR programmes are indeed possible but these would likely be secondary.

Programmatic Considerations

The overriding consideration is the CSR policy that would be drafted for endorsement and inclusion in the IFLA EUROPE statutes. The responsibility/CSR statute would be the peak policy instrument. This would establish the objectives, procedures and responsibilities for members. Operationalization of the statute would involve several essential but distinct integral strands.

CSR programmes must have measurable, and therefore quantifiable, targets with an associated timeline for achieving these. Such outcomes would need to be realistically achievable by IFLA EUROPE members and their constituents.

It follows that there would need to be reportage of the nature, targets and achievement levels by the IFLA EUROPE members. At the same time, it needs to be acknowledged that the constituents of members would undertake most CSR programmes. Thus, IFLA EUROPE members would have a pivotal managerial role and also be responsible for aggregation of CSR programme outcomes undertaken by their constituents. Members would then report to IFLA EUROPE, which in turn would aggregate the reports for presentation to the IFLA EUROPE GA.



A fundamental principle for CSR is the need for unassailable credibility. Programmes, targets, achievement and reportage are all necessary, but none would be believable unless there is authoritative audit / accreditation in the form of third-party certification. Reportage without third-party certification outcomes encourages benefit inflation with attendant public disdain.

Establishment and operation of a CSR programme by IFLA EUROPE would not be a simple undertaking. For this reason, staged implementation of operationalization would be necessary, incorporating incremental intensification. A timeline for implementation would need to allow members some initial flexibility as they would likely progress at different rates, depending on their resources.

Development and implementation of responsibility / CSR programmes would be led by IFLA EU. Upon endorsement by IFLA EUROPE Exco and GA, staged implementation would follow on a set and agreed timeline.

Training Considerations

Responsibility concepts and related CSR programmes are not necessarily readily comprehended. When combined with the necessity for programme design, target setting, reportage and accreditation, it becomes clear that training will be an essential component for success. Such training would be integral to normal professional development and implemented by IFLA EUROPE members. This would be conducted under the unambiguous direction of IFLA EU.

IFLA EUROPE would design the training template for implementation by members and would also review the training. The curriculum would cover topics such as the philosophy of CSR, its contemporary concepts and professional relevance, practical case studies, programme design, implementation and monitoring, evaluation, reportage and accreditation. Training would be funded on a trainee-pays basis, thus providing a potential minor revenue stream for both IFLA EUROPE and its members.