

Article

# CSR Strategy in Tourism during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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**Abstract:** Travel and tourism is one of the most affected sectors due to the COVID-19 pandemic, impacting economies, enterprises, and livelihoods worldwide. The pandemic has heavily damaged businesses across the tourism industry, including airlines, transportation, hotels, cruises, and others. Numerous tourism companies went bankrupt or had been struggling to survive, yet other ones have adapted their strategy and seized the crisis to transform their business for the post-pandemic future. This study aims at investigating the TUI Group's CSR strategic adaptability during the COVID-19 pandemic. The case study is based on a documentary analysis including such documents as annual reports, sustainability strategy, sustainability reports, and financial statements. The findings show that the pandemic crisis moved forward the company's transformation into a digital platform and its sustainability transformation. Moreover, the CSR strategy has been constantly adapted to the evolving COVID-19 environment. The company's efforts aimed at maintaining sustainable value have been primarily focused on supporting and engaging employees, ensuring safe holiday packages for customers, and supporting local communities and partners. Several implications are provided based on the study results.

**Keywords:** CSR; sustainability; strategic adaptability; travel and tourism; pandemic; crisis; TUI Group



**Citation:** Johann, M. CSR Strategy in Tourism during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Sustainability* **2022**, *14*, 3773. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14073773>

Academic Editor: Dimitrios Buhalis

Received: 14 February 2022

Accepted: 18 March 2022

Published: 23 March 2022

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## 1. Introduction

Travel and tourism (T&T) is one of the most important sectors of the world economy. This is evidenced by a 10.4% share in global GDP and a similar share in global employment [1]. However, since March 2020, the T&T sector has suffered huge losses due to the imposed restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, the T&T sector contribution to global GDP dropped to 5.5%, and 62 million people lost their jobs [1]. Despite the global tourism crisis caused by the pandemic, T&T is likely to be a key sector driving the global economic recovery following the end of the COVID-19 pandemic [2]. T&T has an extensive economic, social and environmental impact in the modern world; thus, the development of this sector is linked to all dimensions of sustainability [3]. T&T contributes to sustainable development, reducing poverty, supporting women and young people, which in turn ensures greater diversity of employment, reduces inequalities and promotes innovation [4,5].

Sustainable tourism stimulates managing resources to meet economic, social, and environmental needs through socio-cultural and ecological integrity, essential ecological processes, protection of biodiversity and cultural diversity, and social and economic equity [6]. Sustainable tourism development is an important goal of the global tourism policy and is among the main tourism policy directions involving the public and private sector and NGOs [7–11]. In the European Union, the competitiveness of the tourism industry is closely linked to sustainable development, which requires competitiveness and sustainability policies, financial support, and involvement of all tourism sector stakeholders [11]. However, existing policies, programs, and numerous initiatives undertaken by public and private sector entities aimed at the sustainable development of tourism in Europe and globally have not produced favorable results on a large scale.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR), which is defined as “a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis” [12], is linked to sustainable development. Therefore, CSR has been strongly promoted and supported in the EU [12]. Moreover, it is evident that CSR strategy brings many benefits and is crucial for the company’s competitiveness [13] and long-term growth [14]. However, CSR is perceived as less developed in the tourism industry than in other sectors of the economy [15]. CSR strategy is carried out mainly in corporations, while socially responsible activities are of lower importance in small and medium-sized tourism companies [16].

During the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism companies needed to adapt their strategy to the ongoing crisis and evolving market environment. According to Khan [17], enterprises that are more flexible and proactively initiate innovations adapt better to unpredictable scenarios. Moreover, companies with a CSR strategy tend to cope better with the crisis. It can also be added that the pandemic could be seen as an opportunity for companies to transition to more authentic CSR and contribute to tackling global social and environmental challenges [18]. Nevertheless, it is noticed that CSR improves travelers’ attitudes and behavioral intentions during the pandemic [19], which enhances the importance of CSR strategy.

In a time of crisis, the ability to maintain economic, social, and environmental sustainability is particularly important. It is evident that the implementation of a CSR strategy brings numerous benefits and is crucial for sustainable development. The previous results have shown the significance of CSR in the tourism market mostly in terms of its benefits, barriers, strategy, managerial tools, and performed activities. However, there is not much evidence on the adaptation of CSR strategy to the current pandemic circumstances in the tourism market, especially in the tour operator industry.

The main concern of this study is the CSR strategic adaptability during the COVID-19 pandemic in the tourism industry. The study aims to address this issue by investigating the TUI Group CSR strategy in respect of the strategic adaptability during the COVID-19 pandemic. TUI Group has been selected for the case study due to its consistently implemented CSR strategy focused on sustainable development, which has brought numerous positive results over the years. Moreover, TUI has been listed on the sustainable development indices such as the FTSE4Good Index and Ethibel Sustainability Index and received many awards and distinctions for its environmental activities [20]. Several managerial implications are provided based on the study results.

## 2. Theoretical Background

The concept of corporate social responsibility has been widely studied by theorists and practitioners due to its importance for the company’s competitiveness, long-term growth, and sustainable development. In the early 1950s, Bowen [21] emphasized the obligation of enterprises to implement activities reflecting social expectations. In the following decades, the concept was more precisely defined by Frederick [22], McGuire [23], Walton [24], and Carroll [25]. Freeman [26] proposed a stakeholder theory that focused on the responsibility of corporations to meet all stakeholders’ interests and build and develop relationships with them. In the 1990s, Carroll [27] presented the pyramid model of corporate social responsibility, including the company’s economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities.

The CSR concept is also linked to macroeconomic theories such as sustainable development [28], which postulates that economic, social, and environmental considerations need to be balanced to improve quality of life. The UN 2030 Agenda [29] included 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) as guidelines for all countries. Sustainable development has also been a priority in the EU’s internal and external policies, and corporate social responsibility has been strongly promoted and supported [12]. The EC [30] has introduced an action plan aimed at the transition towards a circular economy to increase the EU competitiveness and sustainability.

The CSR strategy's significance lies in its positive impact on the natural environment as a result of implemented practices, *inter alia*, pollution reduction, energy consumption reduction, biodiversity protection, and the local communities development through employment, raising professional qualifications, and selling local products [31]. Furthermore, in view of the linkage between corporate social responsibility and competitive advantage [13] as well as other CSR benefits, the implementation of a CSR strategy is crucial for long-term business growth [14]. CSR is observed to have a positive impact, *inter alia*, on corporate reputation [32,33], brand image [34–36], stakeholder involvement [37,38], organizational identification [39], organizational commitment [40–42], job performance [43], job satisfaction [39,41,42], customer satisfaction [33–35,44], and customer loyalty [33,35,36,44].

The recent advancements regarding CSR focus on the adaptation of the sustainable development goals to the implemented strategy. Porter and Kramer [45] proposed the concept of shared value which links CSR with the company's strategy and financial results. Creating shared value can lead to innovation, long-term growth, and bring societal benefits [45,46]. Chandler [14] suggests that the ability to develop sustainable value involving all stakeholders is critical to the company's long-term growth. However, Visser [47] notices that present CSR activities are insufficient for the natural environment protection and postulates strategy reorientation towards transformative CSR. According to Visser [48], companies move through the stages of CSR such as defensive, charitable, promotional, strategic, and transformative. The first four stages (CSR 1.0) are deficient, yet transformative CSR (CSR 2.0) based on innovative business models could only bring about a change [47]. The latest results regarding CSR involve works related to uncertainty [49,50] and the COVID-19 pandemic [18,19,51–53].

CSR is particularly important in the tourism industry as natural and cultural resources are basic components of tourism products; therefore, their preservation is indispensable. However, corporate social responsibility seems to be less developed in tourism than in other sectors of the economy [15]. CSR strategy is mostly carried out by corporations, while CSR activities are limited in small and medium-sized businesses. Moreover, international tour operators focus mostly on philanthropy with less attention put on supply chain management which is crucial for sustainability [16]. SMEs, predominating in the tourism market, face various barriers primarily related to limited resources [54]. They also prioritize economic and commercial objectives [55]. However, research results show that entrepreneurs are aware of the significance of socially responsible activities and introduce practices focused on supporting local communities and improving working conditions [56].

Within a group of SMEs, some companies undertake 'active CSR' (systematized activities), while others 'proactive CSR' (activities initiated by managers) and 'reactive CSR' (ad hoc actions) [56]. Moreover, in SMEs, price and quality are more important than social and environmental factors in decision-making [57]. Strasdas [58] examined tour operators' approach towards CSR by investigating information on the companies' websites regarding management systems, strategy, reporting, certificates, communication, and philanthropic activities. Firms were grouped into four categories as 'unconcerned', 'philanthropists', 'somehow committed' and 'strategists' depending on the maturity of their CSR implementation. 'Strategists', the companies which implemented CSR strategy and used various CSR management tools, constitute only 11% of the sample; 'somehow committed' represent 36% of the sample; 'philanthropists'—22% while 'unconcerned'—32% [58]. Thus, previous research results show that CSR strategy is not of the highest importance in the tourism industry.

### 3. Materials and Methods

The TUI Group's CSR strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic is the subject of the study. The case study is based on a documentary analysis aimed at providing information on the TUI Group CSR strategy with respect to CSR orientation, management system, sustainability strategy, reporting, communication, philanthropic activities, and certification, as well as its adaptations during the COVID-19 pandemic. The TUI Group CSR

strategy adaptations are considered in terms of strategic, structural, process-oriented, and people-centered changes. The documentary analysis is based on reports, strategy, and other documents, including: TUI Group Annual Report 2021, 8 December 2021 [59]; TUI Group, Annual Report 2020, 10 December 2020 [60]; TUI Group, Better Holidays, Better World, Sustainability Strategy 2015–2020 [61]; TUI Group, Sustainability Report 2019 [62]; TUI Group, AG Financial Statements 2021, 8 December 2021 [63]. These documents are the basis for the analysis of the TUI Group’s CSR strategy and its adaptation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Other sources of data for this study include information provided on the TUI Group website: <https://www.tuigroup.com> (accessed on 14 January 2022) [64], the TUI Care Foundation website: <https://www.tuicarefoundation.com> (accessed on 20 January 2022) [65], and <https://www.tui.co.uk/press> (accessed on 14 January 2022) [66]. Information about programs implemented during the pandemic, such as COVID-19 Relief Programme for Tourism, Tourism Recovery Programme, 100 Helping Hands, Food Security, has been acquired from the TUI Care Foundation website, information about TUI ‘Live Happy’ Europe-wide campaign introduced in 2021 has been obtained from the TUI UK Newsroom website, and general information about the company has been gained from the TUI Group website.

#### 4. Results

TUI Group is the largest tourism concern in the world, with a revenue of EUR 4731.6 million in the financial year 2021 [59] (p. 5). TUI Group revenue dropped by 40.4% in the financial year 2021 [59] (p. 5) and by 58% in the financial year 2020 [60] (p. 5). The global travel restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic had a strong negative effect on the TUI Group’s earnings and liquidity development—evidenced from the end of March 2020 and throughout the financial year 2021 [63] (p. 46); [59] (p. 47). However, according to Friedrich Jousen, Chief Executive Officer of TUI AG, “Tourism is and will remain a strong growth market—the pandemic has merely hit a pause button.” [59] (p. 2). As stated by UNWTO, the global travel market is expected to recover, returning to pre-crisis levels by 2024 or later [67].

TUI operates 414 hotels, 137 aircraft, 16 cruise ships, and a portfolio of over 215,000 offers [59] (p. 25). The concern has been involved in tourism for over 40 years and owes its current position to a consistently implemented development strategy, which has been associated with the acquisitions of many companies operating in the tourism industry such as: Hapag-Lloyd, Thomson, Fritidsresor, Nouvelles Frontières, and the purchase of shares in the hotel groups RIU and Magic Life TUI AG, as well as the establishment of tourism enterprises in many markets. Further development was possible thanks to the merger of TUI AG with the British company First Choice Holidays PLC in 2007, which resulted in the establishment of TUI Travel PLC, and following the close cooperation between TUI AG and TUI Travel PLC, the TUI Group was set up in 2014 [68].

TUI Group has implemented a new business model based on providing an integrated experience for customers, which replaced a traditional tour operator model. This approach required the development of the complex product offer, including all tourist services. The integrated business model built upon digital management of customer relationships enabled product individualization and business operations optimization. Moreover, global responsibility for sustainable development has become a key feature of the corporate culture [69]. The TUI Group’s CSR strategy involves CSR vision and strategic objectives, management system, sustainability strategy, reporting, communication, certification, and philanthropic activities (Table 1). The TUI Group’s sustainability strategy (TUI Group, Better Holidays, Better World, Sustainability Strategy 2015–2020) [61] is based on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals [29].

**Table 1.** The framework of the TUI Group’s CSR strategy.

CSR Strategy	Description
CSR vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Highlighting the importance of engaging in sustainable cooperation with destination countries.</li> </ul>
Strategic objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Incorporating the principles of sustainable development into business practices, promoting sustainable development in the industry, showing understanding and respect for all stakeholder groups, complying with the law and applying best business practices, providing benefits to shareholders through actions for sustainable development.</li> </ul>
Management system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sustainability management, implementation of sustainability practices into the company’s operations, e.g., product design, transport, supply chain management, human resources management, practices applied in offices.</li> </ul>
Strategy areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sustainability strategy covers four areas: reducing the negative environmental impact of business operations, engaging stakeholders in sustainable tourism, pioneering sustainable development in the tourism industry, building the best place to work for engaged employees.</li> </ul>
Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Publication of sustainability reports and annual reports including information on implementation of the sustainability strategy for the TUI Group and companies belonging to the concern, e.g., RIU hotels, TUI Cruises.</li> </ul>
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Internal and external sustainability communication, materials posted on the company’s website, including: sustainability strategy, annual reports, sustainability reports, information about the TUI Care Foundation and programs, code of conduct, code of conduct for suppliers, certificates, awards and distinctions.</li> </ul>
Certification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Numerous TUI companies are certified with ISO 14001 standard, some hotels have certificates recognized by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), as well as other sustainability certificates.</li> </ul>
Other forms of recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Listings on the sustainable development indices: FTSE4Good Index and Ethibel Sustainability Index, member of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, awards and distinctions for the socially responsible activities of the international and national importance.</li> </ul>
Philanthropic activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The TUI Care Foundation implements projects aimed at creating positive impact for local communities and protecting nature and environment.</li> </ul>

Scheme 8 December 2021, Annual Report 2021 [59]; TUI Group, 10 December 2020; Annual Report 2020 [60]; TUI Group, Better Holidays, Better World, Sustainability Strategy 2015–2020 [61], TUI Care Foundation [65].

The TUI Group vision—“to make travel experiences special whilst minimizing environmental impact, respecting culture and people and bringing economic benefits to communities”—expresses the company’s commitment to sustainability [70]. The Integrity Passport, the TUI Code of Contact, based on the United Nations Global Compact, reflects TUI’s engagement to respect the law and act with integrity. Sustainability in the supply chain is an important part of the company’s CSR strategy. The TUI Code of Conduct for Suppliers is a summary of ethical standards and practices expected from business partners [71]. The sustainability strategy is aligned with business strategy, and sustainability practices have been implemented in all organizational levels, operations, and business processes [59] (p. 76).

The TUI Group sustainability strategy is outlined in the document untitled Better Holidays Better World, Sustainability Strategy 2015–2020 [61]. The basic assumption of the sustainability strategy is ‘to create holiday packages contributing to favorable changes by increasing the positive impact and reducing the negative impact on the environment during all stages of the customer journey’. The strategy is based on four key pillars. ‘Step lightly’ is concerned with limiting the negative impact of business operations on the environment. ‘Make a difference’ refers to introducing positive changes for people and local communities. ‘Lead the way’ relates to promoting sustainable tourism around the world. ‘Care more’ is about creating the best workplace where people are passionate about carrying out their tasks. For each of these areas, targets have been set, and commitments made [61].

The TUI Care Foundation, set up in 2016, is supporting projects and initiating partnerships with local and international organizations aimed at improving the living conditions of a younger generation, supporting education and creating new opportunities, and protecting nature and the environment [59] (p. 81). The company has been listed on the sustainable indices, including the FTSE4Good Index and Ethibel Sustainability Index, and received many awards and distinctions for socially responsible practices. Numerous companies belonging to the concern have been certified by international standard ISO 14001 and other sustainability certificates [62] (pp. 6–7).

Sustainability reporting is an important part of the TUI Group CSR strategy. Sustainability reports and annual reports contain information on the achievement of the goals set in the sustainability strategy [61], such as: reducing the environmental impact of business operations (e.g., CO<sub>2</sub>, energy) across aviation, cruise, hotels, offices, retail shops, and ground transport; implementing sustainable business practices; protecting natural environment; developing programs supporting local communities and partners; improving working conditions and carrying out other activities aimed at employee engagement; encouraging customers to choose more sustainable travel options [59,60,62].

Communication is focused on highlighting sustainability strategy and involves all stakeholders. Documents, such as sustainability strategy, annual reports, sustainability reports, code of conduct, code of conduct for suppliers, are published on the company's website. Moreover, information about the TUI Care Foundation and other activities focused on sustainability is provided, along with information regarding certificates, awards, and distinctions received for the socially responsible practices [64].

Economic, environmental, and social sustainability is the essence of TUI's strategy, having a continuous impact on the value of the company and its long-term growth. However, the COVID-19 pandemic crisis required an adaptive business strategy. In 2020–2021, the main focus of TUI Group's strategy had been on overcoming the challenges related to the pandemic and on seizing opportunities in the changing market environment. The operational standstill was used to move forward the transformation into a digital platform company. In the future, it is planned to build up flexible workplaces through 'desk sharing' to increase the company's attractiveness to employees, flexibility, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness [59] (p. 12). In reflection of the pandemic circumstances, the TUI Way of Working was launched in August 2021, providing a framework for all the challenges and the future working world [59] (p. 85).

Sustainability transformation has also been prioritized during the pandemic. As sustainability management is among the main TUI Group's priorities, sustainability managers have been working closely with division and senior managers to ensure that sustainability strategy is aligned well with business strategy. The emphasis has been put on implementing more sustainable practices within the company and along its supply chain. During the pandemic, the sustainability team concentrated on developing the Sustainability Agenda, which outlines new strategic directions towards sustainability transformation. Several initiatives have been launched, e.g., to reduce TUI's carbon footprint and promote a circular economy. Moreover, TUI Sustainability Academy was set up, which is an online platform for training employees on sustainability and TUI strategy [59] (p. 76).

Reducing the environmental impact of business operations is one of the key pillars of the TUI sustainability strategy, and carbon and resource efficiencies have been improved over the years [61,62]. In the financial year 2021, TUI Group total emissions dropped by 43% year-on-year in absolute terms as a result of the pandemic impact on the business operations. However, relative carbon emissions have increased by 15% in airlines due to the necessity of grounding the fleet because of the standstill in the tourism market caused by the pandemic. Moreover, relative carbon emissions increased by 83.8% in cruises as a consequence of the reduction of load factors. The number of hotels with sustainability certificates decreased by 41.1% due to insufficient time to regain certification because of travel restrictions [59] (pp. 77–80).

TUI attaches great importance to its employees, and ‘building the best place to work’ is among the main sustainability strategy directions [61]. However, during the crisis, staff costs needed to be reduced. The measures such as salary cuts, unpaid leave, and others have been introduced [59] (p. 84). During the pandemic, most of the employees have been working from home [59] (p. 12). It is also important to note that various forms of training and counseling have been offered to the employees to support their mental health [59] (p. 82). During the time of the crisis, TUI Group companies, as well as employees, benefited from various state-supported programs available in Germany and other countries. As travel restrictions were gradually lifted and business operations restarted in spring and summer 2021, many employees could return to work. The employees received a ‘toolbox’ supporting their return to their teams [59] (p. 84). In several countries, a survey was conducted among the employees to gain knowledge on their work from home experience. Moreover, during the pandemic, various online training sessions and online tools engaging employees have been provided, and the digital measurement and selection process has been implemented [59] (pp. 86–87).

The TUI customer-centric strategy is focused on quality, innovation, and sustainability. During the pandemic, the main concern was to safely return to operations, provide safe holiday packages and ensure that all safety and health precautions were met. Thus, a new Safety and Risk Team was set up responsible for in-destination safety management, and a new reporting system has been introduced to analyze all health and safety incidents which have occurred. Health and safety protocols have been introduced in the TUI Group businesses, and safety assessments have been conducted. The security operations have also been centralized to increase the efficiency of security-related risk management. The crisis management system software is being introduced to monitor and manage the crisis better. Moreover, all protocols and travel restrictions imposed in various markets have been reviewed and updated to restart operations, facilitate travel, and increase sales volume [59] (pp. 81–82).

TUI Group’s brand strategy is built around the ‘World of TUI’ concept developed in 2001. The main message is focused on making customers aware that TUI accompanies them in all stages of the customer journey—from contacting the office and choosing an offer, through airport check-in and flight, to the hotel stay and care in the holiday resort—creating a holistic and memorable experience [72]. During the pandemic, a new brand concept was developed. In October 2021, a Europe-wide campaign and platform entitled ‘Live Happy’ was launched to create a new and fresh TUI brand identity for the post-pandemic future. The platform is designed to be a long-term campaign running for years to reposition TUI as a modern travel company offering guests sustainable and personally significant holiday experiences [66].

The TUI Care Foundation is supporting projects aimed at improving the lives of local communities and protecting nature and the environment [59] (p. 81). In the face of the pandemic, the Corona Relief Fund was set up, and the ‘Empowering Entrepreneurship Initiative’ has been initiated to launch tourism support programs to help enterprises in the tourism sector in emerging and developing countries [65]. ‘COVID-19 Relief Program for Tourism’ was aimed at supporting tourism companies from Mexico, Kenya, Indonesia, and Jordan [73]. ‘Tourism Recovery Program’ was focused on tourism businesses in Egypt, Mexico, South Africa, and Kenya [74]. The main idea of the introduced programs was to develop capacity related to sustainability, innovation, and digital transformation through mentoring, training, and financial support [59] (p. 81) [73,74]. Moreover, some initiatives have been launched to support local communities in the time of the pandemic. The ‘100 Helping Hands’ initiative has been initiated to support local social organizations in holiday destinations affected by the crisis through financial aid for emergency packages distribution, childcare, community health care, and others [75]. The ‘Food Security’ initiative has been set up to provide food and hygiene packages for local people impacted by the crisis in holiday destinations such as the Cape Verde Islands, Mexico, Egypt, Morocco, Jamaica, and Spain [76].

## 5. Discussion

CSR strategy importance lies in the positive impact on the natural environment and local communities development [31]. Furthermore, in view of the linkage between corporate social responsibility and competitive advantage [13], the implementation of the CSR strategy is crucial for long-term business growth [14]. Numerous CSR strategy benefits have been identified, which also have relevance to the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, businesses needed to rethink their CSR thinking [51] and have engaged in a wide range of philanthropic activities [52]. However, in a time of crisis, it is crucial to overcome challenges and seize occasions in the evolving environment. Strategic adaptability is critical to the company's survival, and CSR adaptations are necessary.

The TUI Group strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic has been centered around further digital transformation and greater sustainability. The main effort has been put into moving forward the transformation into a digital platform company. Moreover, new strategic directions towards sustainability transformation have been outlined, and initiatives promoting a circular economy have been taken. Thus, it can be stated that TUI enhanced the sustainability strategy, which is in line with He and Harris [18], who claim that the COVID-19 pandemic has offered opportunities for companies to implement more sustainable business practices to address the global social and environmental challenges. Moreover, research results show that flexibility and a proactive approach towards innovations enable companies to adapt better to the uncertain and evolving environment [17]. The pandemic speeded up the company's digital transition, and building up flexible workplaces to increase the company's attractiveness to employees, flexibility, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness has become the company's priority for the post-pandemic future. The TUI strategic approach confirms Visser's [47] opinion that only the strategy reorientation towards sustainability and innovative business models could bring about a change.

During the pandemic crisis, it was crucial for TUI to adapt the strategy to the evolving COVID-19 environment. As a consequence of the operational standstill, staff costs needed to be reduced; however, the strategy adaptations aimed at supporting employees, including various online training sessions, engaging online tools, training, and counseling to support employees' mental health, have been implemented. Furthermore, an online platform for training employees on sustainability and TUI strategy has been set up. There is not much evidence on CSR influence on employees during the pandemic; however, it is claimed that internal CSR practices have a positive impact on employees' organizational commitment [53]. It is also suggested that an employer's commitment to a healthcare support system is especially important during the pandemic and leads to wellbeing, satisfaction, and loyalty [77]. Additionally, a relationship between CSR and job satisfaction has been confirmed in several previous studies [39,41,42], as well as the impact of CSR on job performance [43]. Thus, it is evident that efforts towards supporting and engaging employees during pandemic circumstances are necessary and beneficial for both sides.

The strategy adjustments also included the implementation of the health and safety protocols in TUI Group businesses to provide safe holiday packages. Moreover, the security operations have been centralized, the safety assessments have been conducted, and reporting system has been introduced to analyze all health and safety incidents. Travel restrictions imposed in various markets have been reviewed and updated to provide travelers with up-to-date information. It is already evident that CSR improves travelers' attitudes and behavioral intentions during the pandemic [19]; thus, the strategy adjustments regarding safety and security increase customers' trust and their willingness to travel. Additionally, a communication campaign aimed at refreshing the company's brand image as a tour operator offering sustainable and personalized holiday experiences has been launched to stimulate travel interest. The company's concern about customers, which results in their trust, is in line with findings regarding the relationship between CSR and customer satisfaction [33–35,44].

The projects supported by the TUI Care Foundation focused on sustainable development in tourist destinations are conducted in cooperation with local partners. Due to



the pandemic crisis, it was crucial to launch new programs to meet the needs of local populations. The implemented programs have been adjusted to the changing environment and focused on the support for tourism companies to develop competencies regarding sustainability, innovation, and digital transformation. Other programs have been offered to support local communities through delivering food and hygiene packages and other forms of aid. The local organizations were actively engaged in the programs. This confirms Iazzi's [38] observation that stakeholders' involvement is related to CSR. Moreover, it is evident that creating shared value brings societal benefits [45,46].

The CSR strategic adaptability during the pandemic has been evidenced in this study. Based on the results, it is suggested that tour operators should maintain relationships with their stakeholders and continue creating sustainable value during the crisis. Moreover, they must take responsibility and act proactively by offering support to their partners. The support needs to be adjusted to the stakeholders' specific needs and evolving environment. Examples of such activities include: providing up-to-date information regarding the crisis situation (e.g., information on travel restrictions and requirements), imposing safety and security protocols, organizing online training sessions and counseling for employees, providing financial aid and online training sessions for local partners as well as needed help for local communities (e.g., food and hygiene packages). Providing safe holiday packages needs to be prioritized during the crisis as the perceived travel risk is higher. It is also important to focus on communication with customers by giving them detailed and updated information regarding traveling (e.g., travel conditions, tests, and quarantine; safety procedures at airports, in hotels, and during coach tours; travel insurances).

Furthermore, this study has important implications for T&T managers and policy-makers. It is crucial to reconsider current strategies and focus more on sustainability and digitalization. Natural, historical, and cultural resources are basic components of tourism products; therefore, sustainability needs to be a leading strategy in the tourism market. Sustainable tourism needs to be prioritized in the tourism policy directions. Developing relationships with stakeholders and involving them in creating sustainable value enables greater adaptability to the evolving market environment. Moreover, digitalization is essential for speeding up all organizational processes and needs to be perceived as a core competence along with sustainability. In line with the study results, it is also suggested to put more effort into minimizing perceived travel risks. Thus, it is crucial to maintain the best safety and security conditions and impose required measurement and control procedures. In addition, it is advised to provide detailed and up-to-date information regarding travel conditions. In the long run, it seems that tourism companies that concentrate on providing sustainable and safe tourism products would benefit and gain a competitive advantage.

This study provides information on the CSR strategic adaptability during the COVID-19 pandemic; however, it is limited to the analysis of the selected tour operator's corporate social responsibility strategy and its adaptations during the pandemic. Moreover, the data sources used in the study comprise documents published by the company. However, the data sources have been selected carefully and include such documents as a sustainability strategy, sustainability report, annual reports, and financial statements. Future research could be carried out to investigate more case studies demonstrating tourism companies' CSR strategy adaptations during the pandemic. Moreover, quantitative research could be carried out among tourism companies to determine the various activities undertaken to adapt the CSR strategy to the evolving COVID-19 environment.

## 6. Conclusions

TUI Group CSR strategy is aligned with business strategy. The ability to develop sustainable value involving all stakeholders has been critical to the company's long-term growth. The TUI Group sustainability strategy is focused on reducing the negative environmental impact of business operations and local community developments, promoting sustainable tourism around the world and creating the best workplace for engaged employees. The COVID-19 pandemic crisis moved forward the company's digital and

sustainability transformation. The CSR strategy adaptations involved strategic, structural, process-oriented, and people-centered changes. The structural changes and safety and security procedures have been implemented to manage the crisis better across TUI Group and along its supply chain. Much emphasis has been put on supporting employees, local partners, and communities. Providing safe holiday packages has become one of the main company's priorities during the pandemic.

**Statement:** The author is not related anyhow to TUI Group and remains fully objective.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

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