Webwatch

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Published online: 9 December 2012
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Friends of Nature

<http://www.nfi.at/>

The “Friends of Nature” is a non-profit organization, which origin can be traced to the Austrian organization “NaturFreunde” founded in 1895. The original idea was to support the initial development of tourism and making nature accessible to people, either by providing resources and facilities or by educating them. The organization was revived in 1945, and since then it has grown considerably, with currently more than 600,000 members and 3,500 groups worldwide, even if its activities are mostly focused in Europe. The “Naturefriends International” (NI) is the umbrella organization that groups together all the international groups, sharing the same website of “Friends for Nature”, and currently based in Vienna, Austria.

Although the promotion of a nature-based tourism remains at the core of NI, with time its activities have evolved to nature protection and the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, promotion of international friendship and understanding. Currently NI is committed to sustainable development, especially in those aspects related with the development and implementation of a sustainable sound tourism and mobility. Examples of activities include campaigns aimed to the general public on specific subjects, for example preserving the pristine rivers of Europe, and

national or trans-boundary projects with various stakeholders. Also relevant to the NI activities are the nature-friends’ houses that provide its members a change of engaging in some environmental sound leisure-time and tourism.

The NI website tries as much as possible to present its core values, activities, and other information to the people interested in tourism with a minimal impact on the environment. A description of the mission, history, goals, structure, and other organizational details of NI can be found in the “Who we are” section. The key areas of activity of NI can be accessed directly from the menu on the top of each page, or from the “Key topics” list on the left menu, that are available in each page of the website. There it is possible to find some of the ongoing or past activities in each of the main areas of NI. Other sections present current of past campaigns, with a description and presentation of results. In the “Dates” section, a calendar of activities held or sponsored by NI can be found. The “Publications” section has reports, pictures, videos, and other multimedia material. Most of that material is aimed to the general public, and to present the NI positions and activities on a variety of topics, in particular those within each key area of activity’s scope. A newsletter is also available, which can be subscribed for free at the site, and there is information on how to become a member.

NI activities are focused on its members and on the general public. Thus, for many specialists on its main areas of activity the material available is somewhat limited. Moreover, some is only written in German language, which limits its readability. Yet, as a renowned institution and to people interested in know how to enjoy the natural heritage and caring for the environment the site is a very relevant stop.

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Global Ecolabelling Network

<http://www.globalecolabelling.net>

The Global Ecolabelling Network (GEN) is an international not for profit group composed of more than 30 national and international organizations, representing the most relevant world economies. GEN was founded in 1994, and currently is based on Ottawa, Canada.

The main goals of GEN are the improvement, promotion and development of eco-labeling of products and services. GEN activities are mostly focused in type 1 eco-labeling, as defined by the ISO 14024 standard. Although this type of eco-labeling is currently voluntary, many companies and institutions are trying to obtain it to prove that products and service are designed and produced taking into account their environmental impact across their life cycle. One of the GEN main aims is to define uniform standards and requirements for the various eco-labels issued by the member organizations, reinforcing its international recognition, and facilitating for example the comparison between products with the same function but with different eco-labels. Other relevant areas of activity include to provide information and other technical assistance to member organizations for the implementation and development of their certification programs, participate and/or collaborate with international organizations, and to disseminate information about eco-labeling among all relevant stakeholders.

The website serves mainly to present GEN and what are its main activities. Thus, a full description of its main goals, organization structure, activity reports, and other institutional information can be found in the "About GEN" section. A full list of members can be found in the membership section, with links to the respective websites where more specific information can be obtained. To the stakeholders aiming to be introduced to the subject the section "What is Ecolabelling" has an introduction to the subject. More specific information on the subject and other GEN activities can be found in the "Categories & Criteria" section, including the products and services that can be certified, and in the "GEN documents" on how to get a label through one of the member organizations. News about certification, events, and other information can be found in the "GENews".

The site is simple and easy to navigate, and there is a search facility to help people found more rapidly what they want. Although the information available is relevant, it is limited in scope, and in many cases it has to be complemented with information obtained at the member websites. A free newsletter can be subscribed at the site, helping people keep updated on GEN activities.

Greenpeace

<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/>

Greenpeace is a nongovernmental organization presented in more than 40 countries, whose activities are currently coordinated from a central office in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. It was founded in 1971, in Vancouver, Canada, to take action on the many issues affecting the environment. Nowadays this organization has over 3 million members, who combined with independent foundation grants are the sole sources of funding of the Greenpeace activities. Greenpeace is currently a consultative member of several international organizations, including the UN.

Greenpeace focus its activities on campaigns about specific issues of global or local interest, such as global warming, commercial whaling, anti-nuclear issues, among others. To fulfill its goals it uses several methods, including direct action, lobbying, and research. In fact, it is through its direct action activities on a broad matter of issues that Greenpeace has brought many environmental issues to the public attention, and has obtained most of its results. Yet, many of the criticisms and even legal actions aimed to Greenpeace activists are also the result of those activities. Other actions may involve for example the creation and publication of consumption guides, among others.

Thus, as an organization that relies essentially on volunteers and activists to accomplish their goals, the website is one of the cornerstones of its activities. There it is possible to find, directly from the main page, news and information about ongoing campaigns and other activities, in various multimedia formats. In the "About us" button, people can obtain more information on the history of Greenpeace, some results of its campaigns, values and goals, where is Greenpeace in the world, among other stuff. Of particular interest are the FAQ that answers some of the more relevant questions about Greenpeace, and a description of the main areas of interest, currently energy, the oceans, forests, disarmament and peace, work for a future free of toxics, and campaign for a sustainable agriculture. Ongoing and past actions in those areas can be found in the "What we do" section, each featuring a description of current problems, news, and specific actions. The multimedia sections include videos, photos, reference to events directly linked or related to Greenpeace. An interesting part of the site is the games sub-section, where people can learn and practice many things about the environment. News and discussions forums and blogs about various subjects can be found in the "News" section.

Regional and/or national websites are associated with a central site, in which information and/or campaigns designed to be conducted at a national or regional levels are described. In an overall view the site does a good job of presenting the activities of Greenpeace, and how to become

involved. However, the focus in some areas can make it difficult to find valuable information. Some of them involve research by Greenpeace members and partners, and can be of interest to people and even practitioners interested in the field.

Climate Action Programme

<http://www.climateactionprogramme.org>

The Climate Action Programme (CAP) is a multimedia international platform, launched in Bali during the COP12 2007 conference. It includes a website, a periodic newsletter and an annual publication, and it is produced by Green Media Ltd. (<http://www.greenmedia.com>), a private company, in partnership with the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP). It is based on another initiative, created in 1998, called Sustainable Development International (SDI) that worked also with UNEP.

The main goals of CAP is to encourage and help business and other organizations, on a global scale, reduce their carbon footprint and potential impact in global warming and climate change. Besides those aims the CAP has also the goal of showing to investors and companies that climate change represents a business opportunity, and profits can be made from it while taking into account the environment and its current problems.

The website tries as much as possible to fulfill some of the previous goals. From the main webpage it is possible to find a “Green business guide” section, which provides news, white papers and other pieces of information valuable for this area. In the section “Industry opportunities” one can find for example a directory of companies working in the area, and networking and presentation events, most of them organized simultaneously with the COP conferences. Also available is a list of jobs in various green economy areas.

In fact, the site is focused on the COP meetings, in particular the previous and future editions, and on the sustainable cities and sustainable innovation expo events. The last two are organized or sponsored by Climate Action Network and Green Media Ltd., and are held either at the COP meetings or independently at various cities of the world, each one with a specific section or even independent website. CAP covers these events, with a business focus, with for example video and white papers presentations, and information for registering is available in the site.

Also available is the newsletter and the annual publication of CAP, entitled climate action, launched at each of the annual COP conferences. The volumes since COP13 can be either ordered or read directly through the website, and each one contains articles, interviews with specialists, and other information directly related with climate change, and how businesses can adapt to it and even create business opportunities and profit from it. The newsletter can be subscribed for free at the site, but the previous editions cannot be found.

The site is focused in presenting the activities of the CAP, in particular those directly related with business. Thus, there is not a lot of information available at the site, and most of it is recent. Yet, for people interested in finding or even developing their business ideas related to climate change, and in developing his contacts network on a global scale, the site can be a good starting point.

Final words

We will return on the next issue with a fresh selection of sites. If you know of sites that are worthy of being presented, send us all relevant information to the following E-Mail address: amartins@fe.up.pt. Any suggestions will be considered with great attention for possible publication. In that case the contributors names will be acknowledge in this column. Surf well.