



Costa Rica PR Country Landscape 2011

Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management

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Public Relations Industry

Brief History

Latin American Origins

Latin American studies about the origins of public relations in the continent establish a common denominator as to the source of the practice in the region. Costa Rica is no exception, and this common denominator plays a relatively important role in the development and establishment not only in the country, but also for Central America in particular.

According to early registries, the genesis of public relations in Latin America is closely related to the introduction of foreign companies, which were used to having public relations as part of their businesses, into the local economies (Molleda & Moreno, 2008). In particular, banana planting companies established their operations along the Central American region, and their need to communicate with the local communities, governments, and workers resulted in the creation of the first public relations offices in Latin America (Jimenez Rodriguez, 1991).

The banana planting companies encountered a multitude of problems in dealing with the workers, who constantly went on strike and protested against the unfair treatment they received from their employers. Several studies were conducted and the definitive outcome was the need to improve work conditions and public relations (Jimenez Rodriguez, 1991).

Edward Bernays was hired by the United Fruit Company in order to address the reputation issues the company was having in Latin America. As part of his tactics, he opened the Office of Information for Middle America (Mexico and Central America) based in Costa Rica. Its main objective was to provide journalists in North and Latin America with “facts and data about the company” (translated by the authors as cited in Jimenez Rodriguez, 1991).

Public Relations in Costa Rica

Even though there is no clear explanation as to how public relations came to be in Costa Rica, there are two different approaches to it. Both are equally valid, and they are not mutually exclusive; it is highly likely that the combination of factors brought about the introduction of public relations in the country.

There are those people who argue that it was the result of economic and social influences particular to the country, more specifically, foreign companies like banana producing/planting business operations such as United Fruit Company, which had an important impact on the local economy and social development. Additionally, several researchers (Salazar, 1981, 1982; May & Plaza, 1958, as cited in Jimenez Rodriguez, 1991) argued that two other factors contributed to the development and need for public relations practice. One was the transition made from a traditional agriculture model to an industrial economic model. This boosted employment level, which in turn increased the need for a more cohesive and organized communication effort at a local and national scale. Secondly, the growth and development of the country resulted in a decentralization of the government, which gave way to a series of autonomous institutions. These three factors combined, created a perfect platform to foster the need for public relations practice (Jimenez Rodriguez, 1991).

Later on, at the end of the XX century, the public relations practice in Costa Rica developed further when specific goals in different sectors required the dissemination of information and the establishment of public relations campaigns to promote key areas of the national plan of

development. For instance, Gonzalez and Akel (1996) defended the notion that both the electoral processes and the defense of the environment played key roles in the development of public relations campaigns to inform local and foreign publics. Gonzalez and Akel (1996) explained: "Inside Costa Rica, government agencies have launched educational campaigns on sustainable growth, and instituted what many consider 'the most progressive park system in the Americas'" (p. 257). The need to inform and educate about eco-tourism initiatives, along with the need to inform voters about their political options every four years, have promoted the development of the public relations industry in Costa Rica, both through local practitioners and foreign consultants (Gonzalez & Akel, 1996).

On the other side, there is a group of theorists and researchers (Incera et al., 1985; Sancho, 1974, as cited in Jimenez Rodriguez, 1991) who posited that the introduction of public relations in Costa Rica was the result of education. There is evidence that points at the decade of 1950 as the birth of public relations in Costa Rica. This was the time a group of Costa Ricans traveled to Brazil and took part in the first public relations class that was taught at the Brazilian School for Public Administration of the University of Sao Paulo (Molleda, Athaydes, & Hirsch, 2009). These same people later came back and were the ones who created the first public relations offices for the government (Jimenez Rodriguez, 1991).

The awakening of public relations in Costa Rica came in the 1960s when the Central American Institute for Public Administration (ICAP—then called ESAPAC), incorporated public relations as part of its business program. The first public relations courses taught in the Costa Rican classrooms are part of the history, but are far from being deemed as one of the reasons that amounted to the birth of public relations in Costa Rica. The interest in the theoretical development was only sparked by the necessity to refine and perfect what was already being practiced (Jimenez Rodriguez, 1991).

Evolution of Public Relations in Costa Rica

Public relations has come a long way from being a practice exclusive to international banana plantations in the country. Currently, the term public relations is widely known across the country and the practice of it has managed to position itself as more than just the marketing or press agency function. However, this has been accomplished over a long period of time, and has required the intense work of several people, academics, and practitioners that have taken upon themselves the duty of educating the public about the significance and relevance of public relations in the work place.

According to Carmen M. Fallas, president of Comunicación Corporativa Ketchum, the biggest change in public relations over the past years has been the inclusion of brand management public relations (personal communication, November 23, 2010). The service as such did not exist much before because it was exclusively dedicated to marketing departments; however, public relations has entered the field and is expanding its services to additional areas outside of the more traditional media or employee relations and crisis management.

Alongside the individual efforts has been the support provided by international public relations agencies that have opened their own offices in Costa Rica, or have partnered with local professionals to open a joint-venture operation. The ability to partner with international agencies has benefited the local companies by providing them with access to information, trends, and news in the industry that they would not have access to, otherwise. Such exchange of information benefits both parties because local agencies gain the support and experience from major, world-

class corporations, while these big agencies are also able to offer services in the region with the added advantage of having local practitioners who know their field much better than foreign offices would.

This opportunity of learning from international public relations agencies is possible due to a positive environment towards open markets and foreign direct investment, and to the style of economic development in the country, which are factors that explain the relative level of sophistication of public relations practices in Costa Rica, compared to other countries in Latin America. According to Montenegro (2001, 2004), “some Latin American countries are more hierarchical than others and, to a great extent, that also translates to their economic development. Countries such as Chile, Argentina, and Costa Rica are more structurally developed, with open-market economies where the government fulfills a basic administrative function and the press is more open and diverse. In these countries public relations are more attuned to U.S. public relations practice” (2001, p. 113).

Current Public Relations Status

Professional Associations

The practice of public relations in Costa Rica is relatively new, and therefore has little to no regulation. Currently, professionals can opt to join one or more of the different associations that shelter practitioners in an attempt to formalize the industry of public relations. However, membership is not mandatory by the state and therefore anyone can practice public relations without having to be licensed or even a member of any of the different associations.

For a long time, journalists and public relations professionals experienced a constant tension and rivalry. The controversy was such that the law that created the Colegio de Periodistas (Guild of Journalists) prohibited, until approximately 20 years ago, public relations specialists from joining (Jimenez Rodríguez, 1991). Even now, there is still some tension because the name of the association continues to make references, first to journalists and then to all communication specialists (Colegio de Periodistas y Profesionales en Comunicación –Guild of Journalists and Professionals in Communication, now covers journalists, public relations specialists, advertising professionals, and graphic designers).

Alongside the Guild of Journalists, there are other groups and associations that have been created to cater particularly to the needs of public relations specialists. There is one other case of an association originally intended to group home advertising agencies that has now opened up its doors to welcome public relations agencies.

The Asociación de Empresas y Consultores en Comunicación Estratégica (Association of Strategic Communication Businesses and Consultants) is currently in the process of being created. Its founder, Marlene Cambroneró, also heads the communication agency Edilex. The association is estimated to be fully functioning by the end of 2011.

On the other hand, there is an equally new association called Asociación de Relacionistas Públicos (Public Relations Association), which is led by Johnny Vargas, who is also the Dean for the public relations school at the Universidad Latina de Costa Rica. This association works in partnership with the Guild of Journalists and is a member of the Inter-American Confederation of Public Relations (CONFIARP).

In 2009, ASCAP, the Asociación Costarricense de Agencias de Publicidad y Empresas de Comunicación Comercial (Costa Rican Association of Advertising Agencies and Commercial Communication Businesses) decided to open its membership to other agencies in the

communication industry, thus accepting requests from public relations and digital media agencies. This has brought some of the most prominent public relations agencies to join ASCAP, and use it as a platform to showcase their work and add credibility to it.

Models of public relations practiced in Costa Rica

In the 1990s and 2000s, some organizations in Costa Rica started adopting the relationship-building model of public relations, in terms of organizing the public relations department of the organization to serve the different publics the organization has. For instance, in some companies such as Intel, there are different areas to build relationships with different publics: employee relations, investor relations, media relations, etc. These types of multinational corporations exhibit a sophisticated development of public relations services, not only in terms of developing well-thought-out public relations campaigns, but also in terms of offering media training, audiovisual production, crisis management, branding, and the like. Nevertheless, this type of model is still an exception, not the rule, in the country.

In many other organizations, public relations departments have tended to adopt and practice either the “press agency” model, in which they focus mainly on media relations, or the public information model, in which besides the media relations, the department is in charge of developing certain communication products and managing customer service. In fact, in many of these departments, journalists are hired to play the function of the public relations practice.

In the best of cases, a few organizations in Costa Rica have reached the stage of the two-way asymmetrical model, in which research is utilized in the public relations department—through surveys and focus groups, for instance—to obtain information from the public, but not to develop a win-win situation with them. In this case, the organization exhibits a stronger level of power, as compared to the leverage of the public. The research is done in this type of model to get to know the public better in order to persuade it, not to involve it in the decision-making process.

The two-way symmetrical model is when the research is done to obtain and provide information, and to share the decision-making process. It is rare, if at all present, in the practice of public relations in Costa Rica.

Other models, such as the postmodernist/change-agent or social role model, are also practiced in the country. Molleda and Moreno (2011), in their Latin-American macro-survey of communication and public relations, studied the trends, the professionalism levels and the social roles of public relations and communication practitioners in 10 countries of the region. Of the 674 professionals who completed the survey, 67 were from Costa Rica.

The answers from the Costa Rican professionals sub-sample suggest that, more than in other countries in the region, Costa Rican public relations practitioners acquire a commitment with the wellbeing of society, and see themselves as playing social roles as part of their profession (Molleda et al., 2011).

For instance, more than in other countries in the region, Costa Rican public relations professionals see themselves as responsible for counseling their organizations about ethics and social responsibility; for alerting the organization about issues related to the well being of the employees; for developing educational campaigns that improve the quality of life of the employees; for defending policies that increase the participation of employees in projects that benefit the community; for informing management about the social changes that could affect the relationship between the organization and the surrounding community; and for raising awareness among

management about the need of promoting education, health, and well-being initiatives in the surrounding communities.

Costa Rican public relations professionals, compared to public relations professionals in the rest of the region, also seem to more frequently regard their profession as based on the market (meaning, for example, that the professionals have control over the supply and demand of services and over the cost of services and salaries), as based on the specialization of skills, as based in a body of formal knowledge, as a field that is studied in institutions of higher education, where formal organizations group professionals for their mutual benefit, and where the profession is recognized by the state through laws and regulations as a particular professional practice within the job market (Molleda et al., 2011).

Likewise, Costa Rican public relations practitioners, more than in most countries in the region, see themselves as capable of influencing the educational system about the body of knowledge required to obtain a degree in the profession; and of having access to a system of professional development where having skills and knowledge is deemed more important than nepotism (Molleda et al., 2011). In general, then, the level of professionalism and the importance ascribed to the social roles in the public relations field in Costa Rica is one of the highest in Latin America (Molleda et al., 2011).

Global government public relations: The case of the Costa Rica Tourism Board (ICT)

The Costa Rica Tourism Board or Instituto Costarricense de Turismo (ICT) was created in 1955. The ICT is a governmental organization that promotes and regulates the tourism industry in Costa Rica. The country began development of its tourism industry in 1930 with the opening of its first private hotel called “Gran Hotel Costa Rica.” A first-class hotel, the Gran Hotel Costa Rica was built with the support of the private sector and promoted by the government. The National Tourism Board was created via Law 91 on June 16, 1931. The NTB was the first regulatory authority on tourism in Costa Rica and operated until Aug. 9, 1955, when Law 1917 created the Instituto Costarricense de Turismo, the native name for the organization known today as the Costa Rican Tourism Board (Costa Rican Tourism Board, 2010).

The ICT launched the brand “No Artificial Ingredients” in 1997. In 2009, a research firm evaluated the brand, and concluded the brand is still strong and well positioned. ICT is interested in educating and attracting all demographics (i.e., families, students, eco-tourists, adventure seekers, etc.) who may find the products of Costa Rica interesting. The ICT would like to understand the communication habits of those countries, as well as other consumption habits. The ICT is also interested in developing social media and interactive online campaigns to attract the public.

The mission of the ICT is to “Promote a wholesome tourism development, with the purpose of improving Costa Ricans’ quality of life by maintaining a balance between the economic and social boundaries, environmental protection, culture, and facilities” (Costa Rican Tourism Board, 2010). The institutional vision of the ICT is “To be the leading and rector institution for the country's tourism activity” (Costa Rican Tourism Board, 2010). The ICT lists several institutional guidelines for national tourism development to govern any future actions. The guidelines list sustainability as the central axis around which all tourism efforts must be developed. Additionally, these guidelines stress the importance of fighting social degradation, contributing to the national economy, protecting the natural environment, and preserving the culture of Costa Rica. Furthermore, the guidelines emphasize the importance of developing new products across all planning units, and

mandate that any private, foreign, or national contributions to new or existing projects must be matched with equal local development. The guidelines also mandate support for small and medium-sized companies as a way to engage the communities in each sector. Lastly, the guidelines state that tourism development will be done according to programs and objectives that are planned, controlled, and evaluated (Costa Rican Tourism Board, 2010).

Today, the most important function of the ICT is to propose and execute a series of new processes ultimately aiming to make Costa Rican tourism more competitive and help retain its share of the international tourism market. Currently, the ICT is working on attracting and assessing investors, further developing its marketing communication strategies, generating more information to aid in decision making, and improving administrative functions (Costa Rican Tourism Board, 2010).

Corporate Social Responsibility

The corporate contribution to society is a trademark of public relations practice in the Latin American context. Molleda (2001) established that the ultimate purpose of the profession (in Latin America) is to promote people's progress and well being, to protect human rights, and to meet people's essential needs. Costa Rica is no exception.

As stated previously, more than in other countries in the region, Costa Rican public relations professionals see themselves as responsible for counseling their organizations about ethics and social responsibility; for alerting the organization about issues related to the well being of the employees; for developing educational campaigns that improve the quality of life of the employees; for defending policies that increase the participation of employees in projects that benefit the community; for informing management about the social changes that could affect the relationship between the organization and the surrounding community; and for raising awareness among management about the need of promoting education, health, and well being initiatives in the surrounding communities (Molleda & Moreno, 2011).

Over the last years, the public and private sectors have united to create a strong front that organizes the corporate social responsibility efforts in order to impact society effectively. Several organizations have spearheaded the movement and are constantly opening training and collaboration opportunities for both public and private companies.

Asociación Empresarial para el Desarrollo (AED; Business Association for Development) has led the movement in corporate social responsibility practices. It has over 50 organizations from different industries and its mission statement is to "promote a new culture of Corporate Social Responsibility that, through an active participation, volunteer work, alliances and the strengthening of nonprofit organizations, allows the promotion of sustainable human development in the country" (AED, 2010).

Aliarse para el desarrollo (Allying for development) "is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting public-private partnerships for sustainable development in Costa Rica. The objective of Aliarse is to act as a catalyst in this development, and to promote a national culture committed social responsibility and equitable development" (Aliarse, 2010). Aliarse stresses the importance of public-private partnerships in order to further the impact that organizations have with their corporate social responsibility practices. It is important to note that Aliarse has some of the most important state-owned utilities (Instituto Costarricense de Electricidad, RECOPE, and Acueductos y Alcantarillados) as part of their founding members; this speaks to the commitment on behalf of

the state with this subject, as well as promotes corporate social responsibility as a core value for other public institutions.

Finally the Consejo Consultivo Nacional de Responsabilidad Social (CCNRS- National Consulting Council for Social Responsibility) is an alliance of public and private organizations that supports and informs in matters of social responsibility. Its main objective is to become a platform of permanent and sustainable integration for the definition, validation, positioning, implementation, and follow up of a national social responsibility agenda in Costa Rica (CCNRS, 2010). The CCNRS aims to influence public policy, which is a pioneering work in the Costa Rican setting as far as introducing social responsibility into the national agenda in order to demand accountability from the companies and organizations in the country.

Corporate social responsibility as a service offered by public relations agencies is common in Costa Rica. All of the main companies mentioned earlier provide consulting in the creation and implementation of strategies in this area. Moreover, it has become increasingly popular that companies include corporate social responsibility as part of the communication manager or CCO's job description.

Levels of Professionalism

Demographics

Currently, public relations practitioners are growing following the global tendency to evolve from an empirical profession to a professionalization of the practice. More and more, the incoming number of freshmen increases in the universities that offer public relations as a major. Even more so, older generations of journalists, business majors and even public relations professionals are returning to school to earn bachelor's, licenciatura, and master's degrees.

As research by Molleda et al. (2011) showed, Costa Rican public relations professionals, compared to public relations professionals in the rest of Latin America, seem to more frequently regard their profession as one based on the market and as one based on specialization. In the case of considering the public relations practice as based on the market, this means that the profession evolves in a market environment where public relations professionals have control over the supply and demand of services and over the cost of services and salaries, where they have the capacity to influence the educational system, and where skills and knowledge are more important than personal influence (nepotism) to advance in their careers.

The Costa Rican public relations professionals' perception of practicing a field based on specialization means, according to Molleda et al. (2011), that public relations is recognized as a specialized field, where particular skills are needed, where a body of formal knowledge has developed, where licensing or accreditation is important, where the profession is studied in institutions of higher education, where formal organizations group professionals for their mutual benefit, and where the profession is recognized by the state through laws and regulations as a particular professional practice within the job market (Molleda et al., 2011).

Education and professional training of the public relations practitioners in Costa Rica

The Universidad de Costa Rica (University of Costa Rica, UCR) has graduated 189 students with bachelor's degrees and 53 students with licenciatura degrees in public relations between 1968 and 2009. The licenciatura is a graduate degree that requires one additional year of coursework than a bachelor's degree and it also requires writing a thesis, but it is less than a master's degree (which

takes two years of additional coursework). The licenciatura degree, an inheritance from the educational system in Spain, is still a respected and pursued degree, although master's degrees are becoming more and more popular with time, and some students skip the licenciatura all along to jump from the bachelor's directly to the master's.

Colegio de Periodistas (Guild of Journalists) holds a record of 377 active members that declare their majors to be public relations or mass communication with an emphasis in public relations. They also have 21 public relations agencies registered offering communication services in the country; however, this list does not include some of the major agencies in the country.

Some decades ago, people practicing public relations in Costa Rica had no formal academic training, as there were no public relations departments or journalism schools formally established in the country. This panorama started to change in the 1960s when the first courses of public relations began being offered in business schools, but it definitely shifted in the 1970s when UCR opened the first School of Mass Communication (Escuela de Ciencias de la Comunicación Colectiva) in the country.

The School of Mass Communication was founded in 1968, but it started fully working in 1973, after the Guild of Journalists and members of UCR had an evaluation seminar where several recommendations to reform the School's programs and functions were developed (Fonseca, 1976). In 1974, new degree plans were enforced to focus on the practice of mass communication as a social science grounded on theory, research, a scientific orientation, practical techniques, and social and humanistic training (Fonseca, 1976). That year, for the first time, the School of Mass Communication at UCR included a course of "principles of public relations" in the third professional year of the degree plan. In addition, there was also a second course of public relations in the fourth year of the degree plan.

In the 1980s, the School of Mass Communication at UCR started offering different specializations: journalism, advertising, telecommunication, public relations, and broadcasting (radio and television). By the 1990s, it was possible to obtain a bachelor's degree in mass communication and, later on, a licenciatura degree in either journalism, public relations, or advertising.

In the mid 1980s and early 1990s, private universities blossomed in Costa Rica, from the very professional ones to the higher-education institutions that people contemptuously called "garage-universities" for their small size, lack of resources, and scarce professionalism. At present time, most of these private universities have improved their quality. Although some are considered more professional than others, there are a few reaching close to the good standards of state universities in Costa Rica.

In a search done in November of 2010, it was possible to identify two private universities where people can obtain a bachelor's degree in public relations (besides UCR, where the person can obtain a licenciatura in public relations). Some more private universities offer degrees in journalism, advertising, communications, or marketing, which are degrees that some people obtain to also work, at some point, in public relations. Nevertheless, at present time, besides the licenciatura degree in public relations at UCR, a student can obtain a bachelor's degree specifically in public relations at the Universidad Autónoma de Centroamérica (UACA) or at the Universidad Latina (either at its San Pedro campus or at its Heredia campus, which used to be the privately-owned Universidad Interamericana until they merged in 2010 and kept the Universidad Latina name).

There are three universities and four different degree plans to obtain a degree in public relations (UCR, UACA, ULatina-San Pedro, or ULatina-Heredi—because even though the universities merged, the degree plans keep are still different at the time of writing this document). Each of them uses a different degree plan, but all of them include courses such as “theories of public relations,” “principles of public relations,” and courses dealing with the ROPES model (research, objectives, planning, evaluation, and stewardship).

The University of Costa Rica’s School of Mass Communication’s website shows its degree plan in public relations. In the case of UACA, the website contains information about the bachelor’s degree in public relations. Universidad Latina has information on its website as well. Its San Pedro’s campus offers a degree in public relations that is available, while its Heredia’s campus offers a separate degree in public relations, with a different degree plan.

At the master’s level, both UCR and the Universidad San Judas Tadeo (private) offer master’s degrees in Mass Communication. There were no Ph.D. programs in mass communication at the time of writing.

Although to this day there are still public relations practitioners with no academic training working in the field, in the majority of public organizations and private companies, having a degree in public relations (or at least in journalism or marketing) is necessary to be hired to work in public relations. This is especially true in the government, where not only is it necessary to have the higher education degree, but also to be a member of the Guild of Journalists as it will be described in the next section about laws and regulations of the profession.

Direct or indirect regulations (laws, acts and decrees) that impact the general or specific public relations practices in Costa Rica

There are laws, rules, and codes that regulate or impact the public relations practice in Costa Rica, from the ruling Political Constitution of 1948—which establishes the Freedom of Expression and the Freedom of the Press as basic freedoms in the Republic of Costa Rica—to the Code of Ethics of the Guild of Journalists. There are also laws dealing with commercial issues, tax rules, and even censorship rules that indirectly affect the practice of the profession. The scope is broad. Below, then, we list some of the most important laws and regulations, although the list is not exhaustive.

We cover, to the best of our knowledge, some of the regulations established by the Guild of Journalists, plus some of the requirements of the Ley de Imprenta (Law of the Press), the Ley de Radio (Law of the Radio) and the Ley de Telecomunicaciones (Telecommunications Law). [Press Reference](#) provides a more detailed account of the legislation that rules Costa Rican media.

Colegio de Periodistas

Public Relations practitioners have the choice to become members of the Colegio de Periodistas (Guild of Journalists) as part of the Guild’s ASONAREPU (Association of Public Relations Practitioners of Costa Rica), which started in 1995. To work in public relations, the membership at the Guild is not mandatory. Nevertheless, many private companies and all branches of the Government require the practitioner to be a member of the Guild as a prerequisite to be hired.

According to the [Colegio de Periodistas](#), to become a member one has to present an original and notarized copy of the academic degree in mass communication, journalism, public relations, advertising, audiovisual production (broadcasting), or multimedia production. There is a general membership code for the Guild of Journalists (developed in 1983 and updated in 2005), and a specific list of statutes for the members of ASONAREPU. You can view [the general membership code](#) for the Guild, and the [ASONAREPU's list of statutes](#) online.

Although public relations practitioners have their space at the Guild of Journalists, this society started functioning in 1983 to group primarily journalists. After reading the materials posted in the Guild's website, most people can quickly realize that the society still has a strong focus on journalism rather than on the other disciplines. In fact, its [Code of Ethics](#) (developed in 2003) is devoted to the ethical principles that should rule the practice of journalism, not the other professions.

There is a project to reform this Code of Ethics in order to include ethical standards for public relations practitioners, advertisers, audiovisual producers, and other professionals of the communications field. This [new Code of Ethics](#) is already written and ready to go, with specific dispositions for public relations practitioners, but at the time of writing it has not been approved yet. In this new version, articles 21 to 26 spell out ethical standards expected from public relations practitioners, such as persuading with loyalty and honesty toward the different publics, or such as disclosing publicly on behalf of which client the public relations practitioner is working for.

The Guild of Journalists offers several annual prizes to its members, one of which is the annual award in public relations, Norma Loaiza Gutiérrez (one of the pioneers in public relations in the country). To compete for this award, there are [specified rules](#). Essentially, the award provides recognition for practitioners who develop public relations campaigns or programs that obtain a "social benefit for the organizations and the environment surrounding them." These campaigns or programs can be developed in several areas: environmental issues, science and technology, communication, finances or economics, education and culture, voting and elections, politics, health, and social issues. The three-member committee evaluates the campaigns or programs based on the following criteria: relevance, benefit, opportunity, impact, innovation, creativity, and theoretical support. In addition, the judges also ask to see the evaluation criteria developed by the public relations practitioners and the results obtained.

[Ley de Imprenta \(Printing Press Law\)](#)

The Ley de Imprenta (Printing Press Law) regulates the function of the press in Costa Rica. This law was originally enacted in 1902. Nevertheless, in 2010, the law was reformed in order to stop one rule considered archaic by many. In the past, Article 7 of the Ley de Imprenta allowed providing up to 120 days of jail time to journalists who committed offenses against the honor, such as slander, libel, and defamation.

Since November 2009 (in a decision by the Supreme Court that was made public in February of 2010), this is not the case anymore, as Article 7 was abolished (CPJ, 2010; Zueras, 2009; IFEX, 2010). Nevertheless, under the Costa Rican penal code, journalists can still be fined for slander, libel, or defamation.

Currently, there is another project to amend other dispositions of the Ley de Imprenta. This project has detractors (for instance, eight ex-presidents of the Guild of Journalists oppose the amendment) and defenders (such as the current board of the Guild of Journalists), (Zueras, 2009). The project, known as legislative file 15.974, has been presented to the Costa Rican Congress since 2001, but

it has not been possible to approve it or reject it yet, as it seems that the project does not have enough political support (Zueras, 2009).

This project calls for the journalist to have the right to keep the confidentiality of the sources, and it also defends the right of the average citizen to have access to public information (Zueras, 2009). The amendment additionally includes reforms and partial abolition of articles or subsections of the Código Penal (penal code) and the Código Procesal Penal, and one addition to the Law of Radio and Television; however, the future of the project is still at risk.

The main change this project advocates is to reform articles 145, 146, and 147 of the penal code, which typify and establish fines for the offenses of slander, libel and defamation. Also, the project wants to force the plaintiff to prove the “real malice” of the journalist, meaning the disregard for the truth or the fact that the journalist was acting while knowing that what he or she was publishing was false (Zueras, 2009). The project also wants to reform article 149 of the penal code, which establishes the burden of proof in the journalist to prove that what he or she published or disseminated was true (Zueras, 2009). Think tanks such as CEJIL consider that matters concerning the freedom of expression should not be ruled or governed by the penal code, but simply by civil laws.

Ley de Radio y Televisión

The Ley de Radio No 1758 (Radio Law) regulates both the radio and television stations in Costa Rica. It was enacted in 1954, but has been modified several times over the years. One of the main implications of the law deals with who can own radio and television stations in the country. In the past, only Costa Rican citizens or companies in which the majority of capital was Costa Rican (at least 65 percent of the capital) could own television and radio stations (Fonseca, 1977). This was modified in the mid 1990s, and, since then, the participation of foreign capital in media ownership in Costa Rica has increased significantly, especially with REPRETEL (Mexican owned), controlling four out of the eight national public channels in the country.

The Ley de Radio also establishes responsibilities and punishments for television and radio stations in case of criminal offenses, similar to those established by the Ley de Imprenta for the printing press.

Ley de Telecomunicaciones

Another law that has implications for the practice of public relations in Costa Rica is the Ley de Telecomunicaciones (Telecommunications law), which in 2008 opened Internet services and mobile phone services to the private sector. Before, telecommunications were a monopoly of the state, but this changed after Costa Rica signed CAFTA (the Central American Free Trade Agreement with the United States). Once again, [Press Reference](#) provides a more detailed account of the legislation that rules Costa Rican media.

Annotated Web links to national and international public relations agencies

This is a sample list of some of the major public relations agencies in the country. By no means is this an exhaustive list nor does it mean that other agencies could become leaders in the future.

Comunicación Corporativa Ketchum de Centroamérica

With over 20 years of experience, this agency owns offices in and services the entire Central American region and the Dominican Republic. A pioneer to the practice of public relations in Costa Rica, it is the official and exclusive Ketchum representative in the region, an alliance that started back in 1996. This is one of the biggest and most important agencies in the country.

Próxima Comunicación y Relaciones Públicas

In spite of being a fairly new agency with only five years in the market, Próxima has positioned itself as one of the main agencies in Costa Rica—catering to important clients such as Bridgestone Firestone, Johnson & Johnson, Sony, HBO, and others.

Porter Novelli

Also a pioneer in public relations in Costa Rica, Porter Novelli was founded in 1982 and was the first public relations agency in the region. Since 1994 they partnered with Porter Novelli International. This agency constitutes, along with Comunicación Corporativa, the two main agencies in the country.

Interamericana de Comunicación

With offices in Costa Rica, Guatemala and Nicaragua, this agency stands out from other smaller agencies in Costa Rica. In a short period of time it has managed to create a reputation for itself and secure clients like Abbott Laboratories and the Costa Rican Office of Foreign Commerce.

Eureka Comunicación

Founded in 1995, this agency is lead by a journalist/attorney and a Ph.D. in economy which proves the “eclectic-ness” of the industry. This agency is also a founding member of the Eureka Red, which houses agencies in the Central American Region and the Caribbean (Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Dominican Republic)

News Media Landscape

Monitoring the news online by searching key words or topics of Costa Rica will reveal coverage of Costa Rica by subjects of adventure, rainforest, people traveling to the country, politics (especially now that they have their first female president, Laura Chinchilla Miranda) and soccer. According to Evelyn Obando, International Public Relations Executive for the Costa Rica Tourism Board (ICT), Costa Rica also sees coverage of celebrities, such as actors and models who frequently visit the country to vacation in one of its many beautiful tourist spots (Personal communication, Obando, 2010).

Main media outlets and media ownership

Costa Rica has six national newspapers, six television channels (one of them state-owned), and dozens of radio stations.

Newspapers

In terms of the printing press, Grupo Nación is the most powerful organization in Costa Rica, as it owns four newspapers, including *La Nación*, the most important daily in the country, along with several magazines and radio stations. Visit Grupo Nación's [media kit](#) online.

- Newspaper *La Nación*, founded in 1946, reaches a daily audience of 550,000 readers (IPSOS Media CR, 2010). Because it is estimated that each newspaper is read by about five different persons, the estimated daily circulation of the newspaper is approximately 105,000 to 130,000 copies, depending on the day of the week (Urban & Associates, 2001). Its website is the most popular news site of Costa Rica. *La Nación* is the elite newspaper of Costa Rica, the most influential in the political and economical lives of the country.
- Grupo Nación also owns daily *Al Día*, daily *La Teja* and the financial weekly *El Financiero*. Daily *Al Día* was founded in 1992 to compete against tabloid-styled daily *Extra*, one of the most popular newspapers in the country (Bravo, 2003). In 2010, *Al Día* had a total daily reach of 486,000 readers (IPSOS Media CR, 2010), for an estimated daily circulation of 97,000 copies.
- *La Teja* was founded in September of 2006 as the most tabloid-styled newspaper of Grupo Nación, given that *Al Día*, over the years, built a more popular, less elitist style than *La Nación*, but not “tabloid” or “yellow” enough to be at the same level as its competitor *Extra*. *La Teja*, in terms of circulation, has been a huge, fast success for Grupo Nación, as in 2010 it reported a daily average reach of 670,000 readers, for an average daily circulation of 129,000 copies.
- Finally, financial weekly *El Financiero* is published every Monday. It reaches an average of 26,600 people per week (IPSOS Media CR, 2010). Besides the newspapers owned by Grupo Nación, there are other important dailies in the Costa Rican national life: *Extra*, *La Prensa Libre*, *La República*, *Semanario Universidad* and *Tico Times*.
- *Extra*, a tabloid-like daily, famous for practicing “yellow” or sensationalistic journalism, had a circulation of about 85,000 copies a day in 1996, for an estimated reach of 425,000 people daily (Urban & Associates, 1997), and an estimated circulation of 100,000 copies in 2000 (Rfasdf & Janus, 2000). Contrary to Grupo Nación's newspapers, *Extra* is not prone to openly sharing circulation figures. Nevertheless, its managers claim to currently have a higher daily circulation than *La Nación*, but they provide no open access to circulation data to prove that claim. For that reason, statistics from 1996 and 2000 are used, as those are the most recent and official data available for this report. This newspaper was founded in 1978.
- *La Prensa Libre*, a daily newspaper owned since year 2000 by *Extra*, had a circulation of about 20,000 copies in 1996 (Urban & Associates, 1997). *La Prensa Libre* is the oldest newspaper in Costa Rica, founded in 1889.

- *La República*, a daily newspaper with a circulation of about 60,000 copies a day in 1996 (Urban & Associates, 1997), was founded in 1950 as a general interest newspaper, but switched its focus in 2002 from publishing general interest news to having an emphasis on economic news (Bravo, 2003). Between 1994 and 2007, *La República* was owned by Canadian holding Hollinger Group, but was sold in 2007 to Costa Rican investors.
- *Semanario Universidad* (or, roughly translated, University Weekly) is published by the Universidad de Costa Rica, the largest and most important state university in the country since 1970. In 2003, this publication had a weekly circulation of about 4,000 copies (Bravo, 2003).
- *Tico Times* is a weekly publication in English whose target audience is formed by the tourists and the English-speaking foreigners living in Costa Rica. It was founded in 1956 and, in 2001, it had an average weekly circulation of 15,000 copies (Bravo, 2003), although this number has likely increased since then. To understand *Tico Times*' importance, it is appropriate to point out that, in 2009, Costa Rica—a country of less than 5 million people in population—was visited by more than 2 million tourists, most of them coming from the United States. In year 2000, there were also about 9,000 legal residents from the U.S. and Canada living in the country (Bravo, 2003). For this reason, capturing the foreign readers was a wise move, as there was a specific niche available to capture for readership.

To have a sense of the mass media structure in Costa Rica, it is important to point out that there are also regional and local newspapers (the ones that exist tend to be neighborhood or town publications), but they, in general, have a small, “niche” circulation.

Broadcasting and online regulation website

Telecommunications and Regulation

Television and radio

Several companies offer cable television in Costa Rica, but there are only eight national channels of public access, of which only one, channel 13, is state owned. The rest are privately owned, and they are channels 2 (owned by the Sotela Blen family), 4 (owned by Repretel), 6 (owned by Repretel), Teletica Canal 7 (owned by Televisora de Costa Rica), 9 (owned by Repretel), 11 (owned by Repretel) and 42 (Extra TV, owned by newspaper Extra).

Of these channels, channel 2 and channel 7 are owned by Costa Rican families. They maintain the traditional family-owned structure of a company. In the case of Teletica Canal 7, the owner is the Picado Cozza family. Repretel, on the other hand, is a local company owned by Mexican investors, among them Angel González, the “media baron” of Mexico. Teletica Canal 7 and Repretel, in that order, obtain the majority of the advertising revenue.

In terms of the radio stations, there are several dozen in Costa Rica. In general, there are no big national radio networks, just small chains or private ownerships of one medium (Bravo, 2003). Grupo Nación, for instance, has investments in three radio stations in Costa Rica (Las 40 Principales, Bésame and ADN). There are also several chains of radio broadcasting, each one with some three to six radio stations. Some of the most important radio stations in Costa Rica, at the

moment, are Radio Monumental, Radio Reloj, Radio Columbia and Radio Omega (Rockwell & Janus, 2003).

Magazines

Grupo Nación is the main owner of magazines in Costa Rica (GN Comercial, 2010). It owns Perfil (the most successful magazine in Costa Rica which is geared mainly toward women, with a biweekly reach of 211,000 persons), Sabores (a recipes` magazine, also very successful, with a monthly reach of 257,000 persons), Soho (a combination of good-quality readings and sexy pictures geared toward men, with a monthly reach of 90,000 persons), Hablemos de Niños (geared toward parents with children 0 to 12 years of age, with a bimonthly reach of 100,000 persons), Su Casa (decoration, with a bimonthly circulation of 53,000 persons), Bienestar (health and wellness, with a bimonthly circulation of 57,000 persons), Agenda para Mamá (motherhood, with a once-a-year circulation), Novias (weddings, with a once-a-year circulation), and Dietas (nutrition and diets, with a once-a-year circulation).

In addition, independent companies publish other magazines with different rates of success. This is not an exhaustive list, but some other well-recognized magazines in Costa Rica are [Actualidad Económica](#) (a financial magazine published by the Trejos family), [EKA](#) (a magazine for entrepreneurs and business people), [Summa](#) (a business magazine), and PH (Para Hombres, or For Men, a magazine geared toward men, full of sexy pictures. This magazine, at the time of writing, did not have a website, but did have a Facebook page).

Economy

Before the global economic crisis beginning in 2007, Costa Rica had stable economic growth. Although it still has a large agricultural sector, Costa Rica has expanded its economy to include strong technology and tourism industries. The traditional agricultural exports of bananas, coffee, sugar, and beef are still the main products of export trade, but an assortment of industrial and specialized agricultural products have also recently expanded export trade. Additionally, high-value added goods and services have also helped exports (U.S. Department of State, 2010).

Due to Costa Rica's rich biodiversity, the country is a perfect destination for ecotourism, enabling tourism to bring in foreign exchange. Costa Rica has attracted one of the highest levels of foreign direct investment per capita in Latin America; however, poverty has remained around 20 percent for nearly 20 years (U.S. Department of State, 2010).

Immigration from Nicaragua has increasingly become a concern for the government. There are approximately 300,000-500,000 legal and illegal Nicaraguans in Costa Rica who are an important source of labor, but also a burden on the social welfare system. While Oscar Arias was president, the government made progress reducing internal and external debt when Costa Rica had its first budget surplus in 50 years during 2007. The U.S.-Central American-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) began on Jan. 1, 2009. After a period of steady growth, the Costa Rican economy shrank in 2009 as a result of the global economic crisis. The country's services sector, which accounts for approximately 68 percent of GDP (World Factbook, 2010), was most impacted. Tourism, Costa Rica's key economic activity, dropped by eight percent. Other major divisions of the country's economy include agriculture (approximately seven percent of the GDP), and industry (approximately 26 percent of the GDP), (U.S. Department of State, 2010).

Regardless of the recent national economic crisis, Costa Ricans still enjoy the highest standard of living in the region with a low unemployment rate at 5.6 percent (World Factbook, 2010). Main economic resources include fertile land and ample rainfall, a well-educated population, and a geographic location for trading with North and South America, Europe and Asia.

Government

Costa Rica is a democratic republic with executive, legislative and judicial branches of government. The three branches impose a powerful system of checks and balances on each other similar to that of the U.S. (World Factbook, 2010). Some of the most important factors leading to the development of the Costa Rican political system are the enlightenment of leadership, a middle class supported by educational opportunities, and national relative wealth (U.S. Department of State, 2010).

In the 1970s and 1980s, northern Costa Rica served as a base for armed Nicaraguan Sandinistas and then for anti-Sandinistas. Now, the abolition of its military has helped Costa Rica to avoid military involvement in political issues—affirming its permanent neutrality in 1993. In Costa Rica, presidents typically appoint cabinet ministers and several other central government officials and employees. Legislative deputies combine support through providing budget allotments in their districts (U.S. Department of State, 2010).

Costa Rican residents are passionate about party loyalties, which often run in families. For instance, The National Liberation Party (PLN) was social democratic, but accepted free-market policies in the 1980s. The Social Christian Unity Party (PUSC) began in social Christian reformism, but became more conservative than the PLN. Meanwhile, left parties declined and regionalist parties sometimes elected legislative deputies or local officials. Some of Costa Rica's security forces include the Civil Guard, Rural Guard, Judicial Police and many smaller intelligence units (U.S. Department of State, 2010).

Banks

[Major Banks in Costa Rica](#), an online resource, lists the Banks and Financial Institutions which are licensed to operate in Costa Rica as shown below. This list is not exhaustive.

Banca Promérica S.A.

Banco BAC San José S.A.

Banco BCT S.A.

Banco Cathay de Costa Rica S.A.

Banco Crédito Agrícola de Cartago

Banco Cuscatlán de Costa Rica S.A.

Banco de Costa Rica

Banco HSBC S.A.

Banco Hipotecario de la Vivienda

Banco Improsa S.A.

Banco Lafise S.A.

Banco Nacional de Costa Rica

Banco Popular y de Desarrollo Comunal

Banco Uno S.A.

Citibank (Costa Rica) S.A.

Scotiabank de Costa Rica S.A.

Finance Companies

Corporación Financiera Miravalles S.A.

Corporación Interamericana para el Financiamiento de Infraestructura (CIFI) S.A.

Financiera Acobo S.A.

Financiera Cafsa S.A.

Financiera Comeca S.A.

Financiera Desyfin S.A.

Financiera Multivalores S.A.

Consolidated Financial Groups

Grupo Financiero Acobo

Grupo Financiero Alianza

Grupo Financiero BAC San José

Grupo Financiero BCT

Grupo Financiero BNS de Costa Rica

Grupo Financiero Cafsa

Grupo Financiero Cathay

Grupo Financiero Citibank

Grupo Financiero Cooicque

Grupo Financiero Cuscatlán

Grupo Financiero HSBC

Grupo Financiero Improsa

Grupo Financiero Lafise

Grupo Financiero Promérica

Grupo Financiero Uno

Grupo Mutual Alajuela - La Vivienda de Ahorro y Préstamo

La Unión Financiera Aduanera S.A.

Mutual Cartago de Ahorro y Préstamo

This is a list of the websites for some of the above mentioned banks:

Banco de Costa Rica: <http://www.bancobcr.com/>

Banco Nacional de Costa Rica: <http://www.bncr.fi.cr>

Scotiabank de Costa Rica: <http://www.scotiabankcr.com/>

HSBC Costa Rica: <http://www.hsbc.fi.cr/>

Banco BAC San Jose: <https://www.bac.net/bacsanjose/esp/banco/index.html>

Banco BCT: <http://www.bancobct.com/>

Citibank Costa Rica: www.latinamerica.citibank.com/costarica/index.html

Banco Lafise Costa Rica: <http://www.lafise.fi.cr/>

Banco Popular de Costa Rica: <https://www.popularenlinea.fi.cr/bpop>

Think Tanks

The following is a short list of think tanks based in Costa Rica, somewhat related to the fields of communication, business administration or the freedom of expression.

[IPLEX](#)

The Instituto de Prensa y Libertad de Expresión (Institute of the Press and the Freedom of Expression, IPLEX) promotes freedom of expression and free access to public information. It also promotes ethical values, responsibility and independence in the practice of journalism, and it defends the independence and pluralism of the mass media in Costa Rica.

[Centro por la Justicia y el Derecho Internacional \(CEJIL\)](#)

The Centro por la Justicia y el Derecho Internacional (Center for Justice and International Law, CEJIL) is an organization devoted to the defense and promotion of human rights in the American continent, and to bringing lawsuits to the discussed in the Comisión and the Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos (the Committee and the Interamerican Court of Human Rights).

[FLACSO](#)

The Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (Central American Faculty of Social Sciences, FLACSO) is an international organization based in Costa Rica. It has regional and autonomous character, and it is formed by the countries of Latin American and the Caribbean. It was founded in 1957, sponsored by UNESCO, to promote education, research and cooperation in the fields of the social sciences in the entire subcontinent. The General Secretary of FLACSO is located in Costa Rica, but it also has academic units in 10 different countries.

[IICA](#)

According to its website, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) is a specialized agency of the Inter-American System. Its purposes are to encourage and support the efforts of its Member States to achieve agricultural development and well-being for rural populations. The Institute has its headquarters in Costa Rica, and offices in 34 countries of the Americas, an office in Miami—which is responsible for the Inter-American Program for the Promotion of Agricultural Trade, Agribusiness and Food Safety, as well as an office in Europe—located in Madrid, Spain. The Directorate for Strategic Partnerships works out of the IICA Office in Washington, D.C.

[ALFORJA](#)

The Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones Alforja (Center of Studies and Publications Alforja) is a non-profit civil Costa Rican association founded in 1980, which works in popular education to contribute to the social actions, political actions and educational actions at the local, national and regional level, to build a new culture and political practice with a better distribution of power.

[Fundación Arias para la Paz y el Progreso Humano](#)

The Fundación Arias para la Paz y el Progreso Humano (Arias Foundation for Peace and Human Progress) is a not-for-profit NGO, based in Costa Rica. It was created in 1988 with the financial support of the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to its founder and then president of Costa Rica, Dr. Oscar Arias Sánchez, as a recognition for his efforts to achieve a “firm and permanent peace” in Central America. The Foundation was created to advocate for a culture of peace, promoting democracy, gender equality, disarmament processes and demilitarization processes.

[ANFE](#)

The National Association of Economic Foment (ANFE, by its acronym in Spanish), was founded in San Jose, Costa Rica, in 1958 and calls itself a “defender of liberty as an indivisible whole.” ANFE advocates economic freedom.

[ICAP](#)

The Central American Institute of Public Administration (ICAP, by its acronym in Spanish), is an international organization based in Costa Rica, which services the Central American public administrations. ICAP supports the development of human resources; the modernization, innovation and permanent betterment of the public sectors of the region; the training of the human resources; the development and systematization of knowledge; and it favors the processes of globalization, integration and sustainable development.

Country Profile

Official name: Republic of Costa Rica, Republica de Costa Rica

Independence Day: Sept. 15, 1821

Area total: 51,100 square kilometers

Borders: Costa Rica is located in Central America, bordering both the Caribbean Sea and the North Pacific Ocean, between Nicaragua and Panama.

Capital City: San Jose

Climate: Tropical and subtropical; dry season (December to April); rainy season (May to November); cooler in highlands.

Population: approximately 4,253,877 people (as of December 2010).

Religious Affiliation: Roman Catholic 76.3%, Evangelical 13.7%, Jehovah's Witnesses 1.3%, Protestant 0.7%, other 4.8%, none 3.2%.

Languages: Spanish is the official language, but English is spoken as well.

Government: Democratic Republic

Brief History

Although Costa Rica was explored by the Spanish in the early 16th century, the first efforts at colonization were unsuccessful due to a combination of factors. These factors included disease from mosquitoes, terrible heat, resistance by natives and raids by pirates. Christopher Columbus discovered Costa Rica on his final voyage to the New World in 1502. Later, Spaniards began settling in 1522, and Spain governed the land for roughly the next 300 years. The area remained a colony for more than two centuries (Freitag, 2010).

In 1821, Costa Rica became one of several Central American provinces to proclaim its independence from Spain and form a federation with many other countries. In 1823, the country became a part of the United Provinces of Central America; however, this federation fell apart fifteen years later and Costa Rica declared its sovereignty and independence (Freitag, 2010).

In 1899, the country started a period of peaceful democracy with its first elections. Federico Tinoco overthrew the elected president, Alfredo Gonzalez, in 1917; however, the majority of Costa Ricans opposed Tinoco's overthrow, and he was taken out in 1919 (Freitag, 2010).

In the presidential election of 1948, Rafael Calderon deceitfully won the votes over Otilio Ulate. This argument against a controversial election led to civil war with more than 2,000 casualties over a 44-day span. The civil war resulted in a new constitution which abolished the military and permitted free elections with universal suffrage (Freitag, 2010).

Costa Rica has a high literacy rate, a large middle class and a stable government that has functioned efficiently without an army for more than 50 years now (U.S. Department of State, 2010).

Culture

Costa Rica constitutes itself as a strong advocate of human rights, environmental protection and peaceful solutions. The country is a safe and welcoming tourist destination for visitors of all ages and backgrounds, promoting its variety of hotels, restaurants and tours to support the advancing tourism sector. Its culture name is Costa Rican, while its alternative names include names such as “Ticos” (Obando, 2010).

Costa Rica has beautiful and exotic nature everywhere. It is home to more than 1,000 species of orchids and 850 species of birds, making it a travel hotspot for wildlife enthusiasts. Additionally, more than a quarter of the land is protected by law, including 28 national parks, eight biological reserves, nine forest reserves, and nine wildlife reserves. Naturally, Costa Rica also tops the list for tourists who are interested in biology, forestry, wildlife, parks and many other aspects of the environment (Obando, 2010).

Costa Rica is an emerging ecotourism spot that is focused on preserving its natural resources. There are at least six different habitats in Costa Rica: tropical rain forest, dry tropical forest, cloud forest, mountainous paramo, montane oak forest, mangrove and other wetlands (Fed, 2009).

Costa Rica’s main products include adventure sports, ecotourism, nature observation, health and wellness, diving, and fishing (Obando, 2010). Combined, these recreational activities give the country great appeal to campers, hikers and generally all types of outdoor enthusiasts. Moreover, Costa Rica’s beautiful beaches are enough reason alone to attract millions of tourists each year.

An article about Costa Rica discusses “happiness”, and how Costa Rica has been named as the happiest nation, known for its lush rain forests and pristine beaches: “Costa Rica is the happiest place in the world, according to an independent research group in Britain with the goal of building a new economy, ‘centered on people and the environment’,” the article stated (Fed, 2009).

Since the national army was abolished in 1948, Costa Rica has enjoyed democracy for more than a century. Costa Rica has enjoyed free elections and universal suffrage for more than 50 years. In 2009, the World Bank ranked Costa Rica highest on the Political Stability and Absence of Violence index in Latin America. Costa Rica ranked highest in the world on the Happy Planet Index, a measure of human well being and environmental impact (Fed, 2009).

In addition to beautiful nature and happiness, the index by the New Economics Foundation considers the ecological footprint and life expectancy of the country to be very high: “Costa Ricans report the highest life satisfaction in the world and have the second-highest average life expectancy of the new world (second to Canada),” the organization said in a statement (Fed,

2009). They “also have ecological footprints that mean that the country only narrowly fails to achieve the goal of consuming its fair share of the Earth's natural resources.”

Costa Rica has one of the highest life expectancy rates on the planet, and has achieved this because it has universal healthcare, meaning all citizens of the country (and visitors) have access to healthcare; it does not matter if you have a job or not, or if you are rich or poor—everyone gets the treatment. Costa Rica also has somewhat easy access to national parks, and nature in general. Locals pay one dollar when they visit a national park. Also, the economy is strong, unemployment rate is low and they enjoy a lot benefits from the government, only adding to the country's growth (Fed, 2009).

The Arts

Artistic activities began to grow in Costa Rica in the early 20th century. In the late 1920s a group of painters called the Group of New Sensibility created the country's first individual style, known as the landscape movement. Costa Rica's most famous sculptor, Francisco Zuniga, made large statues of the females from the 1930s and on. As the 20th century advanced various distinct styles followed these early examples. Today, more modern artists produce work across the visual arts board (Countries and Their Cultures, 2010).

Santa Ana and neighboring Escazú, southwest of San José, have always been hotspots for artists. Escazú in particular is home to many contemporary artists: Christina Fournier; the brothers Jorge, Manuel, Javier, and Carlos Mena—as well as Dinorah Bolandi, who was awarded the nation's top cultural prize (Countries and Their Cultures, 2010).

The International Arts Festival (FIA) is very popular. This year **the FIA program includes 115 presentations** of 53 foreign artists and groups. **63 Costa Rican artists** will also take part in this event, including the **National Dancing Company, Son de Tikizia and the National Symphony Orchestra (Countries and Their Cultures, 2010)**.

Furthermore, music is a fundamental part of the Costa Rican culture. Costa Ricans enjoy Latin, American and British contemporary rock, and have a special affinity for tunes from the 1970s and 1980s. However, when it comes to dancing, most Costa Ricans like the traditional Latin rhythms of salsa, merengue, cumbia, lambada and soca. Mariachi bands, an ensemble that generally consists of violins, trumpets, guitars and sometimes a harp, typically play in Costa Rica restaurants, exciting the tourists. Costa Rica is home to a diverse musical scene and music can be found everywhere (Costa Rican Music, 2010).

Sport

Aside from its adventure sports, soccer is the most popular sport in Costa Rica. Kids play soccer whenever and wherever they can, while all fans watch the national soccer team play at the Estadio Nacional (National Stadium) in La Sabana Park or at the Estadio Ricardo Saprissa in Tibas—both in San Juan (Costa Rica Tourism, 2010).

The Costa Rica national futbol (soccer) team, nicknamed “La Sele” by its fans, is controlled by the Federación Costarricense de Fútbol. Costa Rica is the third most successful team in CONCACAF after Mexico and the U.S., and the most successful team in Central America, having qualified for three World Cups. Costa Rica has been CONCACAF champions three times (in 1963, 1969 and 1989) and has won the UNCAF Nations Cup six times. The nation has also participated in three Copa América tournaments, advancing to the quarterfinals on their last two visits (Costa Rica Tourism, 2010).

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The Global Alliance is always interested in cooperating with local institutions and associations to provide profiles of the social, economic and media context of member countries, along with details on the local public relations industry, its main activities and tips on successful local practice.

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