

Sustainably Caring for People, Planet and Profit by Encouraging Ethical Social, Ecological and Economic Responsibilities: The International Travel and Tourism Industry's Triple Bottom Line in Theory and Practice

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to reveal the conceptual framework, practical application and professional usefulness of the triple bottom line approach for the purposes of reflecting, framing, assessing and reporting on the three-pronged issues of economic, ecological and social sustainability. The paper describes these three sustainability issues as areas of core concern and responsibility especially for the worldwide travel and tourism industry in the new millennium.

It starts doing so by briefly outlining the historical and conceptual development, documentation and differentiation of the sustainability argument and of the triple bottom line approach along the two decades that frame the turn of the millennium, and across a series of global political key events together with their official reports, declarations and guidelines, which have recently culminated in the United Nations Climate Change Conference 2015.

Secondly, the paper analyzes how the general practice of global tourism has operationalized the triple bottom line both as an internal managerial planning and decision-making tool as well as an external assessment and reporting framework. The focus will be on how the triple bottom line, within the tourism industry, performs its tripe task to consider and balance a company's economic, social and environmental performances and impacts via a range of key indicators.

Empirically, the paper then shows, and gives examples of how these key indicators are documented and displayed in a specific form on so-called business report cards. The categories and examples are synthesized both from the literature as well as from real-life tourism companies. The compact yet comprehensive manner of their display considerably exceeds the current business practices of even the most circumspect and transparent individual tourism organizations.

The paper prepares its final recommendation by summarizing supporting and critical opinions of the triple bottom line. It concludes with recommending the triple bottom line, as it is conceived and used by the worldwide travel and tourism industry, to substantiate its care and concern for economic, ecological and social sustainability in the new millennium. It further hopes to inspire discussion and research about how this industry could develop those goals even further.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Triple Bottom Line, Ecological Economics, Environmental Impact, Environmental Accounting.

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