

## Encouraging positive dynamics in **local communities** through tourists' and companies' **responsible** behaviour

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**Keywords** | Responsible tourism, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Sustainability, Local communities, Reporting systems.

**Objectives** | Since the 1980's, the international community has shown an increasing concern about the negative effects produced by an uncontrolled development of tourism, and for this reason, the concept of sustainable development has also been extended to tourism.

Although sustainability should be defined according to three dimensions – environmental, socio-cultural and economic –, there is usually a strong focus on environmental impacts only. Instead, it is also important to pay attention to the socio-cultural and economic effects on the local community at large, which contribute to generate positive dynamics in terms of growth, resident's wellbeing and cultural enrichment.

All three dimensions – the triple bottom line – should be taken into consideration by tourism companies who want to adopt a responsible approach and develop sustainable tourism activities and therefore by the reporting systems that assess their responsibility.

These systems play a significant role in promoting responsible behavior in the tourism industry, since they are a link between tourists, who are looking for a respectful and conscious holiday, and companies, who want to prove their commitment. Therefore, they are required to appropriately monitor companies and to disseminate correct and comprehensive information about the responsibility in all its aspects.

Starting from these considerations, this extended abstract aims at discussing how much attention is given by reporting systems not only to the environmental dimension but also to the socio-cultural and economic impacts generated by tourism industry on the local community.

**Methodology** | The findings are the result of an in-depth study carried out by the authors on the development of responsible tourism and CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) in the European tourism industry, paying particular attention to reporting systems (see Manente, Minghetti & Mingotto, 2012). The study is mainly based on the following methodology:

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- Study of the literature about responsible tourism and CSR, in order to understand and clarify what these concepts mean and what implications they bring for tourists, tourism companies and local communities in destinations.
- Analysis and comparison (also through the application of AHP – Analytic Hierarchy Process) of 8 reporting systems developed in Europe and specifically addressed to assess and certify responsible products and companies.

**Main results and contributions** | According to the study, not all programs give the same importance to the aspects of the triple-bottom line and, in particular, to the socio-cultural and economic impacts on the community.

These dimensions are appropriately considered by those reporting systems addressed to companies specialised in responsible tourism products, concerning in particular developing or underdeveloped countries. In these destinations, tourism can have a key role by fostering economic growth, poverty reduction and social wellbeing. These reporting systems are developed by associations and organizations that are interested in promoting responsible, fair-trade and solidarity tourism: for example, the Italian association AITR, the French ATEs and ATT, the online travel-agency Responsibletravel.com.

Their reporting systems encourage businesses to apply values as fairness and ethics. They require companies to act the interest of the local community by considering social, environmental and economic issues in the destination and supporting the host community to be pro-actively involved in the planning of the tourism activity; to prefer local employees and suppliers, building long-term relationship and ensuring a fair treatment; to encourage cultural exchange between tourists and residents; to guarantee healthy and safe working conditions; to not discriminate women and minorities and to not exploit child labour; to increase tourists' awareness in responsibly behaving towards the community, by respecting local cultures and traditions and buying, if it is possible, local products. On the contrary, the impacts on the local community seem to be undervalued by those reporting programs addressed to generic tourism companies, not particularly interested in responsible tourism but however committed to take more responsibility for their actions. These systems, as those developed by organisations like QUIDAMTUR, TRAVELIFE and KATE, give more importance to the environmental dimension than to social aspects. As for the last ones, they pay deeper attention to internal corporate responsibility (towards employees and consumers), rather than the social and economic effects on the host community.

**Limitations** | The study emphasizes how much importance is given by reporting systems to corporate responsibility and to the assessment of the social and economic impacts that tourism activities generate on the host community.

Further research is needed in order to assess how responsible practices are effectively developed by tourism demand and supply and to what extent tourists and tourism companies are concerned about the impacts on the wellbeing of local communities. From this point of view, the analysis of some case-studies and the organization of direct surveys among businesses and consumers about their real behavior – and not only intentions – would be useful.

**Conclusions** | Starting from an in-depth study carried out on responsible tourism, CSR and reporting systems, this extended abstract has highlighted the importance to assess the socio-cultural and economic impacts of the tourism activities on the local community and the fact that they should be appropriately taken into consideration also by reporting systems – and then by the tourism supply and demand –, in addition to the environmental dimension.

These aspects are still partially or not accurately assessed by some reporting programs, resulting in the fact that the companies' corporate responsibility is not appropriately measured and that incomplete information are disseminated on the market.

An increase in promotion is needed, in order to raise the awareness of tourism stakeholders that responsibility goes well beyond environmental preservation and also includes socio-cultural and economic implications on the local community.

## References |

Manente, M., Minghetti, V., & Mingotto, E. (2012). Ranking assessment systems for responsible tourism products and Corporate Social Responsibility practices. *Anatolia: An International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 23(1), 75-89.