

INTRODUCTION TO RESPONSIBLE TOURISM REPORTING

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TRANSPARENT VERIFIABLE REPORTING SYSTEM SUITABLE FOR SMALL TO MEDIUM SIZED ENTERPRISES TO MONITOR THEIR RESPONSIBLE TOURISM GOOD PRACTICES

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The growth of responsible tourism and the increase in consumer demand for it has led to the industry developing certification, labelling, and awards schemes to grade businesses. This has resulted in literally scores of different schemes each with its own *one size fits all* approach. Whilst some of the schemes out there are useful in helping to undermine the industry's greenwashers, they do little to highlight the achievements of those who are really making progress and setting the pace. None of the certification schemes transparently reports what has and has not been achieved, nor do they prioritise the criteria to reflect different business types and different operating areas.

Responsible Tourism Reporting is a new initiative offering a flexible and 100% customisable independent verification scheme. It encourages small businesses to measure themselves against their own goals and publicly report their annual achievements. The scheme gives each business the opportunity to explain and justify their choices, setting the standards and the priorities for what is important for their business and the communities where they operate.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the primary source of foreign exchange earnings in 46 of the 50 Least Developed Countries (LDCs) (UNWTO, 2007), and it provides a valuable source of income for many rural local economies in developed countries. In locations where there is tourism potential the trade also offers opportunities for small-to-medium sized enterprises (SMEs), particularly because market access is comparatively uncomplicated relative to other industries. The general forecasts for travel and tourism point to continued growth, with 1.6 billion people set to undertake foreign travel each year by 2020, and substantial growth in domestic tourism anticipated in many newly-developed countries (UNWTO, 2011). In addition, the market for meaningful, experience-rich holidays involving contact with local people continues to expand, and SMEs across a wide range of business types are potentially well-placed to meet this growing demand.

When managed responsibly, tourism can help alleviate poverty as well as diminish threats to local environments; it can also run directly counter to the goals of sustainable development when conducted without due care to the environment and basic human rights. There are many and various cases of the latter, but a typical situation might involve lavish water-intensive tourism facilities being maintained next to villages where water supplies and sanitation are inadequate. Not only do unsustainable tourism practices threaten to jeopardise the health of the environment and the well-being of local communities, they can also diminish the quality and viability of tourism to the areas affected. Yet such is the situation in numerous holiday locations the world over.

The resonance of sustainable and responsible tourism within the industry has intensified. This has led some businesses to adopt the language merely in an attempt to boost sales, playing on consumers' preferences for ethical travel without making any real changes to the way they operate. Such "greenwashing" is often either due to ignorance, sloppiness or over-eager communications campaigns bolted on to operations that lack any social and environmental rigour. A SMART¹ approach to evaluation and monitoring can enable businesses to tackle these shortfalls, clarifying both the positive and negative impacts of their operations, and focusing on how the positives can be maximised and the negatives minimised. It is on this basis that the rationale for Responsible Tourism Reporting has formed.

2 MONITORING THE INDUSTRY

A wide range of systems exist to usher tourism businesses towards sustainability goals. In fact, in some countries and regions a veritable market of accreditation programs, environmental management systems and sustainable tourism toolkit exists, each competing to assure customers and industry that established minimum standards are being met by participating businesses. Despite this range and abundance, the use of such schemes is not widespread and, as yet, is not based on any agreed international standards. Few extend beyond monitoring the environmental impact of the accommodation sector. It seems surprising that an industry with such a profound impact on fragile destinations and that affects almost all the world's population could lag so far behind other industries in terms of corporate responsibility.

2.1 Certification

One of the methods used to provide assurance for customers and the industry that a business has met established minimum standards is through certification. Since the 1990s, numerous schemes offering such certification have been developed but while their prevalence in the tourism industry has been steadily increasing, as yet they have not enabled SMEs any greater access to market opportunities nor have they been able to advance the tourism industry towards sustainability (Dodds & Joppe, 2005). Certification is usually recognised through a logo or receipt of an award that can be used to immediately inform consumers

¹ Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time (SMART)

the level of criteria achieved. However, what the business actually achieved and the process they used are all hidden behind the face of the certificate.

2.2 Benchmarking

Benchmarking is an important part of a business, particularly when a business is implementing change within its operations. A business must know where it is starting from to be able to predict where the next steps are. It allows a business to be accurate in claiming when a goal has been reached and also assists in helping to identify potential weaknesses. By comparing the achievements of one business to another in the same area, a series of benchmarks are created to help identify the industry's best practices (Wöber, 2002). This helps create an aggregate of current standards and so allows businesses to compare themselves with others within their sector thus fuelling desire to continually improve. In this respect, benchmarking can also contribute to improving the use of resources in the industry. It is not only beneficial for the end product but is also appealing for certification schemes, industry awards, tour operators, travel agents, associations and destinations. These schemes/organisations can use benchmarking to authenticate any claims made by their members and subsequently use this information to identify target consumption limits and new criteria for the revision of their own processes.

2.3 Reporting

Reporting is a mechanism that enables an organisation to manage its impacts on the economy, environment and social conditions by allowing them to measure, track, and improve their performance. It promotes transparency and accountability due to being published in the public domain and hence organisations are more likely to effectively manage these issues. Of course, organisations also have the ability to make a negative impact; often they are unaware of the detrimental effect their impacts are having, maybe through naivety or misinformation. On the contrary, some are fully aware of the negative impacts but they believe that they can 'pull the wool' over the stakeholders eyes – Responsible Tourism Reporting can highlight this void between what people say and what people do.

3 EVALUATION OF CURRENT INITIATIVES

Doubts remain as to whether any of the schemes currently available are appropriate for many SMEs in the tourism industry, or whether they can advance a great many businesses towards real sustainability. They suffer a range of shortfalls. Many accreditation schemes are opaque – the consumer and indeed other stakeholders are not privy to the precise requirements and processes involved – they do little to leverage change in consumer attitudes or purchasing behaviour. And while the cost and know-how required can deter smaller tourism enterprises from participating in accreditation programs, there is also little evidence to suggest they gain market opportunities from doing so. Furthermore, many programs do not extend beyond monitoring the environmental impact of the accommodation sector, and fail to consider aspects of social responsibility – philanthropy, livelihood opportunities, community outreach, cultural integrity, health and wellbeing, training and education. Another major shortfall of such systems is that they tend to cut across differences in environment/geography, culture, facilities, entrepreneurial capacities, enterprise-type, and local tourism market. Consequently, some accreditation criteria can be rendered irrelevant or impracticable on application to an individual tourism enterprise, or they can result in negligible benefit for the environment or local community – so much depends on local and enterprise-specific circumstances.

3.1 Transparency

Certification schemes and labelling are useful to some extent in the process of undermining the industry's greenwashers, although they do little to highlight the achievements of those who are really making progress. Back in 2002 Toth emphasised the need for transparency within the tourism certification industry but there is still an opaqueness that allows false claims to be made by unethical businesses. Much like certification,

award schemes judge a business' achievements against the schemes own criteria without disclosing the actual achievements, successes and failures of the entrants. There is no prerequisite that businesses must make the results of their sustainable development programmes or certification processes public even though some, such as Travelife, require internal annual progress reports. Transparency would allow stakeholders to assess the credentials of the organisations making claims on sustainability and in the process highlight any businesses claiming false credentials. Calder (2008) believed a good report should aim to achieve "a balanced and reasonable representation of the sustainability performance of a reporting organisation – including both positive and negative contributions". This lack of publically available information within the industry allows false claims to be made by unethical businesses and for these claims to go unquestioned. In publicising shortcomings alongside successes, transparent reporting could become a useful source of information for interested businesses wishing to learn from others, identify emerging issues and encourage year on year improvement.

The Global Reporting Initiative has been encouraging transparent reporting since it was established in 1997. The initiative aims to "raise the level of sustainability reporting to that of financial reporting" and in recent years the guidelines set out by GRI have been widely accepted in their use for large and multi-national companies providing comprehensive sets of indicators for all aspects of sustainability (Corporate Sustainability Reporting, 2011). Global Compact is a similar initiative set up by the United Nations to encourage all businesses, regardless of type, to establish sustainable and responsible policies and submit an annual Communication on Progress (COP) detailing the advancements of the business. The initiative does not provide or insist on independent assessment of a business' performance and instead works to provide a public platform that allows stakeholders to make informed decisions about a company (Global Compact, 2011).

Reporting is not the perfect solution: it has its own transparency issues. It makes the assumption that the stakeholder is able to make an informed decision and it is also unable to offer an instant conclusion, unlike the simple grading certification provides.

3.2 Process versus Performance

The majority of certification schemes place the focus on the process of the operations of a business as opposed to the actual performance. Travelife, a process-based scheme, believes the industry is not yet ready for performance-based monitoring and by only monitoring processes the scheme allows access to less sustainable operations, thus encouraging an overall improvement of the industry. This practice is limited since attention is paid to the company's level of awareness of their impacts and not what they have actually achieved. Without doubt, process-based schemes are more accessible to a greater range of businesses but in order for any type of mechanism to support the move towards sustainable tourism it needs to combine a management system with specifically defined performance criteria such as water consumption per guest per night. With this combined approach, a business can establish management systems to respond to sustainability issues in the operations of their business specific to their destination and demonstrate that they are delivering.

3.3 Accessibility

Small businesses account for approximately 97% of the travel and tourism industry making them the driving force of the industry (Synergy, 2000); however, many certification and reporting schemes find it difficult to attract small businesses thus creating a distinct issue if either scheme is to become a standard within the industry in its current format. Reasons for this hesitancy may include the unnecessary complexity of the schemes and are, therefore, daunting for smaller businesses in addition to the fact that they are often costly and time consuming.

3.3.1 Money

Membership fees that are standard practice in certification and reporting schemes are often a restraining factor. These are usually relative to company/operation size and region. Regional pricing is not always significantly different and businesses operating in a developing country are expected to pay similar to businesses operating in the world's wealthiest economies. This clearly presents a stumbling block for the less financially-able. Green Globe's pricing structure gives the perfect example since Europe has its own price band starting at US\$925 including the less affluent countries in the east whereas in the US and Canada membership fees start at the lower rate of US\$750 (Green Globe, 2011).

3.3.2 Time & Complexity

Time is a precious commodity for SMEs struggling to turn a profit and many of the available schemes require a substantial dedication of time. As an example, GRI is a time-consuming process, even for the larger corporations and the guidelines have proven inaccessible to SMEs without specific internal departments dedicated to collecting the necessary data required. The GRI has developed sector-specific indicators to help SMEs create CSR reporting standards, however, these guidelines have rarely been used (KATE, 2007). The Global Compact offers a more basic-level of entry where participants receive additional support and assistance. This ease of membership is often argued as a strength of the initiative but critics state that it is too easy to become a member and companies sometimes join without undertaking any preparations. As a result approximately 15% of all members, to date, have been delisted for failure to submit an annual COP (Knudsen, 2011).

3.4 One Size Doesn't Fit All

Using set lists of criteria, like many schemes available, there is no room for a business to have its say in what is important, and relevant, to its business, sector or destination. A business cannot properly demonstrate its priorities; for instance, water conservation is a lot more important in a desert than a rainforest and porter protection is important for a trekking company yet irrelevant for an accommodation provider. Many programs do not extend beyond monitoring the environmental impact of the accommodation sector, and fail to consider aspects of social responsibility. The hundreds of certification schemes on the market each offering its own individual criteria has inevitably led to confusion for a business to choose which scheme will suit best. While the interest in certification may be there, this lack of standardised, appropriate criteria and confusion has resulted in a significant lack of action within the industry with less than 1% joining certification schemes (Synergy, 2000).

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) was set up in 2002 with the aim to develop a minimum standard that all other certifications should base their criteria on and to establish themselves as an international accreditation agency. In GSTC's own words their aim is to *"foster sustainable tourism through the adoption of universal sustainable tourism principles; compiling, adapting and creating tools and training to engage in sustainable tourism practices; and increasing the demand for sustainable tourism products and services"* (GSTC, 2011). The GSTC's main complaint was that the existing certification schemes failed to address the specific needs of the industry (Tsipidis, 2009) and in response they created an extensive list of criteria for sustainable practices which, while illuminating the incredible variety of issues of local concerns, essentially failed to identify the issues which matter in any specific geographic region. With hundreds of certification schemes to choose from there is no doubt that the industry needs monitoring. VisitEngland were the first tourist board to recognise this and as such all certification programmes they endorse are independently validated by the International Centre for Responsible Tourism (ICRT) to ensure they are fit for purpose, and that claims of sustainability and environmental friendliness are genuine (VisitEngland, 2011). This approach of regional certification accreditation allows the certification schemes to tailor their criteria to the region of operation, avoiding the need for a global set of criteria.

3.4.1 Social and Economic Issues

Social issues have only recently been acknowledged, partly due to the introduction of the Global Compact by Kofi Annans' 10-point Millennium Challenge, which included fair trade, poverty reduction, and local and community economic development (Global Compact, 2011). Despite many European eco-labels continuing to focus on environmental criteria, developing countries such as South Africa and Costa Rica have included social and cultural impacts as major aspects in sustainable operations. Whilst this is promising, there are very few programmes operating in these developing countries with two thirds of certification schemes being based in Europe (Font, 2003). Though easy to argue that these country specific social-cultural impacts are not as relevant to European businesses, if schemes are to aspire to a more global presence it is essential that these factors are considered. In this sense, regional certificates, such as Costa Rica's Certification of Sustainable Tourism (CST), can prove more successful due to their ability to provide social monitoring tailored to a specific region or country.

3.4.2 Destination Specific

GSTC encourages regional certification to blindly follow global criteria without considering the relevance to the destination and international certification to adopt the criteria without modification when expanding into new destinations. Following the extension of UK-based Green Tourism Business Scheme (GTBS) to Canada, Andrea Nicholas argues that the GSTC model must be adapted to respond to destination-appropriate criteria; *"I do not believe that it is possible to have sustainable tourism criteria that are applicable globally; the world's diversity precludes it"*. She emphasised the importance of the local area in any kind of sustainable tourism assessment, believing that the impacts of tourism need to be *"identified, prioritised and managed locally"* (TravelMole, 2010). While admittedly raising awareness, the GSTC's broad approach risks reducing focus and avoiding the local and national issues at stake.

The city of Cape Town has taken responsibility for identifying and prioritising local issues and has developed a Responsible Tourism Charter (Cape Town, 2009), which commits both the industry and the city government to addressing local priorities and reporting on progress. The southern Indian state of Kerala is another example where the local government has taken a progressive approach to responsible tourism. In 2007 Kerala Tourism introduced responsible tourism practices in four destinations with the goal of replication to other destinations. They are now ready to move into the second phase of the work and extend the experimental work to other parts of Kerala as well as developing responsible tourism classification criteria (Goodwin, 2012).

3.5 Monitoring & Evaluation

Establishing a system of monitoring and evaluation - or 'benchmarking' – is an important part of a business. As yet there are very few examples where monitoring and evaluation of the social and economic impact of tourism can be seen, and as such it becomes difficult to determine how tourism can benefit the fight against poverty. There is an assumption that businesses who operate in a less developed area will contribute to the local economy via a trickledown process, in terms of employment and through the economic development of the area as more money is spent, however there is still little evidence to support this theory (Goodwin 2006, WTO 2002). Yunis (2004) believes that *"tourism will not address poverty automatically"* and the importance lies in *"developing simple indicators and systems to measure the impact of tourism on poverty"*.

The International Tourism Partnership (ITP) offers tools and programmes to demonstrate the ways in which economic, social and environmental benefits are possible through practical action. One of these tools is the Sustainable Performance Operational Tool (SPOT) which can be used by businesses to measure the overall sustainability of their operations (International Tourism Partnership, 2011). It was the only tool with substantial social and economic indicators encountered during this research. Aside from the promotional literature, there is no evidence that SPOT has yet been implemented.

Without a complimentary reporting tool alongside these monitoring tools, there is no opportunity for other businesses to learn or be able to benchmark themselves against others and it remains solely an internal management tool.

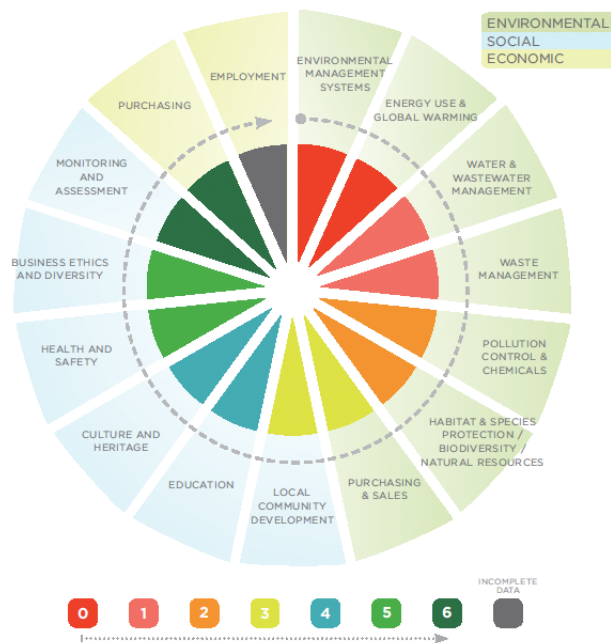


Figure 3-1 Sustainable Performance Operation Tool

3.6 Capacity Building

In addition to environmental impact management and reduction, one of the consequential benefits of certification schemes is their ability to become an educational tool to promote the message of responsible tourism throughout a wide range of organisations. In their very nature certification schemes facilitate the creation of networks, from businesses to local consultants, providing help and assistance to work towards responsible tourism. As a training tool, this can play a key part in capacity building, particularly in areas where the concept and understanding of sustainable development is in its early stages. While the foundations are there, the cost of supporting materials and how they can be developed is a major hindrance for many schemes.

The available monitoring tools designed specifically for SMEs within the tourism industry have often been funded through development agencies and, therefore, their objectives invariably include some form of capacity building. One such tool is the Envirotel e-tool, developed through funding by the United Nation Environmental Programme. The tool's key objectives are to integrate environmental practices into small to medium sized hotels by providing basic knowledge and tips to help facilitate an increase of environmental management and resource efficiency in accommodation providers (UNEP, 2010). The software alerts the user if they are not operating in an environmentally friendly manner by stating there is room for improvement but failing to provide any further information on how the business could improve. Only by searching through several screens is it possible to find some supporting advice, even then the product does not seem aimed at the intricacies of the business world.

Air & Noise

- Do you encourage your guests or employees to complain about poor indoor air quality in the hotel?

 Yes No N/A
- Have you provided non-smoking areas in lobby and restaurant, and designated non-smoking guestrooms?

 Yes No N/A
- Do you instruct your staff and request your guests to keep the noise level low in the reception area?

 Yes No N/A

N/A : not applicable

SUBMIT

Your hotel has adopted 0/3 good practices. There is a lot of room for improvements. Please Review your activities to make the more environment-friendly.



Figure 3-2 The Envirotel Training Tool

When a business shares its experiences, both the good and bad, with the industry, there is the scope to create a global learning platform, facilitating access to information that has the potential to either encourage the replication of good practices and/or provide lessons on the not so good practices.

3.7 Commitment to Deliver

More tourism businesses need to report on their performance against their responsible tourism policy commitments. These policy claims made by a business are as much a part of the contract with the consumers as the claims made about the food or the view. If a businesses claims to invest 10% of its profit into the local community this needs to be verified. If a business claims to use all local guides and when the guide is not local this needs to be highlighted.

Reporting on social and environmental issues has the potential to increase loyalty and to give a sense of distinctiveness. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reporting means a company is more transparent and accountable to external stakeholders, enabling investors to avoid risk and consumers to support more sustainable businesses. In 1999 GRI released a draft of their Sustainable Reporting Guidelines and subsequently 20 organisations soon published their sustainability reports based on these guidelines. GRI is now on its third release (G3 Guidelines) with the fourth release planned for 2013 and the number of participating members has grown to just over 3,500 (GRI Database, 2012). Major players, such as Thomas Cook and TUI, have recently started reporting through the GRI G3 Reporting Framework, however, only 1.6% of businesses reporting through the framework are tourism and leisure.

4 WHY ANOTHER PROCESS?

The actual market value of certified sustainable tourism for a business has not been intensively researched and as such there are no empirically valid studies available (Personal Communication - Font, 2011). Font and Epler Wood (2007) found there is no real evidence of consumer demand for certification schemes, which is no real surprise when considering the fact that the consumer benefits are still unclear. Nevertheless, there has still been considerable investment in certification schemes on the understanding and belief that certification will indeed provide a significant marketing benefit for businesses within the tourism industry. The latest figures from the GSTC state that the UN and other charities have already invested US\$200,000 in the scheme and a further US\$1,000,000 is being sought from the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank, amongst others (Partnership for Sustainable Development, 2009). This lack of market value is not the only hurdle for certification; the process suffers a plethora of other major weaknesses, outlined in Section 3: Evaluation of Current Initiatives. If GSTC is to continue to receive financial investment and have meaning, it is imperative that it takes ownership of these issues - even if this means considering an alternative approach.

It is unsurprising that these systems have had mixed success, and that a good deal of confusion and some cynicism still continue to permeate tourism markets regarding claims to sustainability. Would it not be better for enterprises to evaluate what changes are achievable, effective and rewarding to their business, community and environment, and thereafter implement, monitor and transparently report the outcomes of those changes?

4.1 Availability of Monitoring & Evaluation Tools

Minimal financial support has been invested in monitoring and evaluation tools for the tourism industry which reflects in the tools being either incomplete, overtly simplistic or no-longer available. TourBench, a basic web-based environmental monitoring and benchmarking tool funded by the European Commission, is no-longer available. Similarly SPOT has not yet been implemented and Envirotel is rudimentary.

Monitoring and evaluation tools are an integral part of business and yet many businesses do not have the resources, the capacity, the knowledge or the financial means to establish such systems. Considering this, it becomes all the more obvious that the lack of functional monitoring tools available is slowing the progression of reporting becoming a meaningful part of the tourism industry.

4.2 Addressing Capacity Building

For a business to successfully adopt responsible tourism into its operations it must first recognise and acknowledge how its operations affects the local community and impact the environment. Without this knowledge and the inclusion of all stakeholders the business will struggle to achieve any goals it sets. All members of staff must be involved in the process - for example there is no incentive for junior staff to take on extra work, which often accompanies sustainability, without realising the benefits responsible tourism can bring. Nonetheless, it can never be a solely bottom-up movement; management hold the final responsibility on approving new initiatives, introducing new procedures, overseeing procurement policies, etc. The European Leader Association for Rural Development (2011) believes that *“the bottom-up approach should not be considered as alternative or opposed to topdown approaches from national and/or regional authorities, but rather as combining and interacting with them, in order to achieve better overall results”*. This holds true for responsible tourism and with this in mind, capacity building becomes an extremely important part of any process, be it reporting or certification.

The processes of reporting and certification both require a business to have a certain level of office management and organisational skills. This may seem a basic requirement but in reality many SMEs, particularly in developing countries, operate with a simplistic approach and fail to understand the need to monitor their operational outputs and record their financial transactions. Before starting the process of monitoring, evaluating and reporting, rudimentary data collection, such as staff records and logging utility bills, must be introduced. This in itself becomes a form of capacity building prompting the business to improve its operational practices.

4.3 Transparent Reporting

While it is often believed that the pressures for CSR came as a response for consumer demand for sustainable tourism, both Bien (2005) and UNEP (2005) suggest that the real demand comes from larger purchasers, such as governments, wholesalers and other members of the commercial chain. With pressures coming from higher authorities, legislation will soon dictate that the large European tour operators must report their CSR strategies and as a result, create a distinct need for sustainable supply-chain management and consequently a need for socially and environmentally purchased and managed products (Dodds & Joppe, 2005).

Transparency is at the heart of responsibility; it is not about the label or the words. The tourism industry requires a public mechanism for identifying what companies are really achieving; formally published transparent annual reports would go a long way to delivering this. These reports should record what the company or destination has achieved, thus enabling the stakeholder to appreciate the progress made.

4.4 Authenticity of Claims

Any credible scheme must insist participating businesses undergo third-party verification. This method was suggested by the WWF in 2000 but as yet has not been put into practice throughout the reporting and certification market. Neither GRI nor Global Compact require businesses to have their reports third-party verified, albeit it encouraged. Many certification schemes are no better; the Sustainable Tourism Eco-Certification Programme (STEP) only requires self-assessment for their 1 and 2 Star rating (STI, 2009). The industry needs independently verified reports published and centralised to allow easy comparison between companies who are taking the steps towards a more transparent industry.

Not moderating the content of a report allows for a business to either omit indicators it has not achieved or blindside its audience with the use of creative writing to skirt around the real issues. Independent verification goes a long way to eliminating these two behaviours but without some form of grading systems there is always going to be a level of self-interpretation. Even though unrelated to tourism, lessons can be learnt from the grading of achieved criteria used in the Access to Medicine Index (Figure 4-1). This approach appears to be an uncomplicated yet an informative representation, which could be applied to reporting in order to increase transparency and information accessibility.

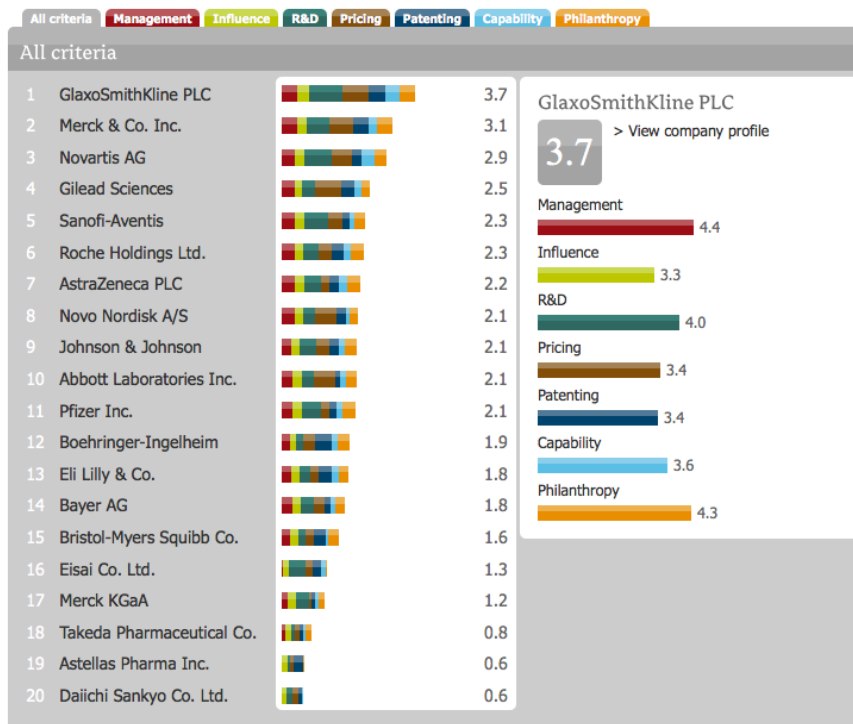


Figure 4-1 Access to Medicine Index

5 RESPONSIBLE TOURISM REPORTING

The Responsible Tourism Reporting approach is both principled and practical. The focus is on specific business operations and their measurable impacts. The scheme calls for businesses to transparently show what they are doing in responsible tourism, how they are doing it, and what is being achieved as a result. As an illustration, a company might report improved working conditions, increased local procurement and reduced water consumption against both baseline starting positions and the industry average, and will enclose accounts of how each of these outcomes were achieved (or otherwise).

In order to offer appropriate guidance to SMEs, Responsible Tourism Reporting takes on board that each operator's capacities, position in the local tourism industry, relationships with the local community, and interactions with the local environment are different. Making decisions within the guidelines provided by Responsible Tourism Reporting, participating businesses determine the standards and priorities for achievement, and then set about measuring performance against goals they themselves have set. Following external verification by Responsible Tourism Reporting auditors, they can publicly report their achievements, and in the process, explain and justify their sustainable business choices using Responsible Tourism Reporting report templates. Participants can also showcase their achievements on an annual basis via a dedicated online Responsible Tourism Reporting platform.

5.1 Participant Benefits

Ultimately, Responsible Tourism Reporting seeks to achieve positive outcomes for the natural environment and local communities, but it seeks to do so through inculcating better business practices in tourism SMEs. In particular, monitoring and reporting the outcomes of appropriate operational changes in these is seen as a fruitful avenue for minimising the negative impacts of the tourism trade and creating better environments, communities, and livelihoods. Cost-savings may accrue as a result of these efficiencies, or on the basis of operational changes instigated following an external evaluation.

Responsibility-taking is linked to better staff morale as well as better management. Direct employee benefits may feed through to other aspects of the business, providing better quality experiences for travellers, for example. Some travellers also enjoy a *feel good factor* knowing that their good time was had at no expense to the local environment or people. So better sales or an increase in enquiries may be detected via the channels where the business is showcasing its responsible tourism practices.

The strength of the scheme is through its members; as more businesses become involved, the higher the standard will become and this in turn will encourage the initiative to grow and develop. As the scheme grows, the number of potential indicators a business can report on will increase, driven by the industry with realistic goals and not by a panel of experts. The more businesses that are prepared to stand united and produce these transparent, independently verified reports, the more the green-washers will be undermined.

5.2 Industry Benefits

Through further development and implementation Responsible Tourism Reporting expects to demonstrate the benefits of transparent reporting within tourism. It will show how, by taking a responsible tourism approach, poorly conceived tourism business practices can be reversed, and businesses encouraged to exploit tourism for the broader benefit of the local economy, community and environment. It will highlight those operations that are performing well and why, and this information will be shared within the industry.

The reports themselves will be a key outcome, and over time, will trace the progress of sections of the industry on indicators such as carbon footprint, water consumption, staff welfare and philanthropy. As the reports are transparent, third-party verified and based on measurable outcomes, they will provide a credible and meaningful way for the industry, local communities and holidaymakers to engage, learn and adopt, thereby promoting responsible tourism knowledge transfer.

Destinations can also learn from aggregated information on the impacts and outcomes, and these may subsequently be used to help raise the profile of a specific destination where Responsible Tourism Reporting participating enterprises are clustered.

6 CONCLUSION

Amongst the core values of responsible tourism, found in the Cape Town Declaration, are commitments to mutual respect, diversity, transparency, sustainability and quality (Cape Town Declaration, 2002). These values need to be evidenced in any responsible tourism reporting process. For progress to continue and for the approach to be valued in making “*better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit*” responsible tourism businesses need to report the outcome of their approach. Responsible Tourism Reporting gets beneath the current accreditation programs to directly tackle the ways individual tourism operations might be threatening environments, cultures and communities. It aims to offer an affordable scheme, open to any tourism business, regardless of size, experience and profitability, so that they can begin taking steps towards responsible tourism and transparent reporting.

7 ORGANISATIONAL BACKGROUND

Responsible Tourism Reporting is registered in the UK as a Community Interest Company (CIC), with primarily social objectives where surpluses are principally reinvested in the development of the business or in the community. CICs are independently regulated and must meet the criteria set by *The Companies (Audit, Investigations and Community Enterprise) Act 2004* and the *Community Interest Company Regulations 2005*. For more information on CICs please see www.cicregulator.gov.uk.

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