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UNIVERSITY OF KHANH HOA



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**ĐỔI MỚI VÀ PHÁT TRIỂN DU LỊCH SAU ĐẠI DỊCH COVID-19**  
INNOVATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM AFTER COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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NHÀ XUẤT BẢN ĐẠI HỌC THÁI NGUYÊN

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## **Review of responsible tourism reporting systems in Europe and a lesson for Vietnam**

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**Abstract:** This article proposes an overview of reporting systems for assessing tourism business responsibility in compliance with responsible tourism values. The analysis focuses, in particular, on programs that have mainly been developed in Europe and addressed to tour operators. The analysis includes four reporting systems: The Responsible Tourism Standards of the Italian ATR; the system of the French ATES; the ATR system of the French ATT and the system of the English Responsibletravel.com. The main characteristics of every system have been described (objectives, approaches, standards and indicators, auditing procedures) and a final comparison has been developed to identify main commonalities and differences. We also compared the three dimensions of responsible tourism among these systems. Based on the analysis, Vietnam's small and medium-sized enterprises are able to benefit from the Responsibletravel.com system. The research highlights that this reporting system can assist tour operators in Vietnam in improving their responsible tourism practices.

**Keywords:** Responsible tourism, reporting systems, tour operators, small and medium-sized enterprises.

### **1. Introduction**

There is no doubt that mass tourism has a negative effect on local communities, tourist destinations, as well as the natural environment [29], with a significant impact on socio-cultural, environmental, and economic features. Hence, sustainable tourism development has been deemed an appropriate development orientation for reducing the negative impacts of mass tourism and enhancing the positive impacts of tourism on the economy, culture, society, and the environment. Sustainability is about preserving local culture [1] as well as improving the environment while providing employment and income for tourism destinations [31,32]. At the same time, sustainable tourism development involves the contribution of local communities to the decision-making process of tourism development [31].

The definitions of responsible tourism and sustainable tourism are interrelated. The concept of sustainable tourism originates from the idea of responsible tourism introduced by Hetzer in 1965 [29]. The concept of responsible tourism focuses on minimizing interference to the natural environment, respecting cultural diversity, and maximizing the participation of local people in the provision of tourism services, increasing the number of customers and enhancing tourist satisfaction. Moreover, we must implement it as a daily lifestyle not only at home but also during travel [35]. Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism of Destinations (2002), a side event at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, called for efforts to improve places for both people and visitors. The final purpose of Responsible Tourism is to create a better place for people to live and visit. The measure of its success is higher incomes, more decent jobs, and improved cultural, social, and natural foundations [13]. Responsible tourism revolves around the principles of sustainable tourism. Understanding responsible tourism and applying it to the field of tourism plays an important role in achieving sustainable development goals.

Vietnam's tourism industry has recognized the importance of sustainable tourism development and responsible tourism. Vietnam's Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism were sponsored by the European Union (EU) to build the capacity for environmentally and socially responsible tourism from 2011 to 2016 [33]. As part of the Vietnamese Tourism Development Strategy, this project was developed by responsible

travel companies to promote Vietnam's tourism industry. However, domestic studies only consider local awareness of responsible tourism and consumer behavior about responsible tourism [21],[32]. There is a lack of studies on responsible tourism rating systems. Therefore, this article analyzes several responsible tourism evaluation systems in Europe, compares their objectives, the number of evaluation criteria, and the way the systems are applied to provide a comprehensive overview of assessing tourism systems in Europe. This article also assesses the current situation of responsible tourism in Vietnam and lessons from using responsible tourism reporting systems.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. *The concept of Responsible Tourism*

The concept of responsible tourism also gradually took shape at the same time as the development of sustainable tourism in the 90s of the last centuries. In this sense, responsible travel can be viewed as a mirror image of tourism with stronger regimes and behaviors among all participants [29].

The use of the term "responsible tourism" was first recognized in the literature in the early 1990s, at a conference of the World Tourism Organization about alternative tourism in Tamanrasset, Algeria. The workshop was attended by a large number of industry experts with the desire to define the role and operation of alternative tourism. This alternative tourism is seen as socially responsible and environmentally conscious. Many professionals in the tourism industry have replaced the term alternative tourism with responsible tourism [31]. The company's main goal is to "ensure that all forms of tourism are respectful of the natural environment, architecture, and cultural environment of the host and that the interests of all outside work can be linked" [31].

Responsible tourism can be considered as a form of sustainable tourism in practice [13],[14],[20]. The concept of responsible tourism and sustainable tourism are interrelated, so there is a mixture of concepts that confuse the public when approaching them. This is the reason for the existence of different definitions and the proliferation of many related concepts that are often defined as being similar to responsible tourism [5].

Goodwin (2011) stressed the roles of responsible tourism, which addresses economic, social, and environmental problems in a way that balances achieving development goals [16]. Even though they share many similar objectives, it remains important to emphasize that responsible tourism is not the same as sustainable tourism [24]. Thus, responsible tourism is also defined as an approach that maximizes the benefits of natural, economic, social, and cultural factors in tourism, but through the lens of individual and organizational responsibility [29]. The concept of responsible tourism involves taking into account the effects of tourism activities on the destination and attempting to maximize the positive effects and minimize any negative effects. Responsible tourism generates benefits for local communities, distributes benefits equally among local communities, and minimizes negative impacts on society and the environment [8],[9],[12]. Goodwin (2011) posited that responsible tourism creates more attractive destinations for tourists as well as better places for people to live. At the same time, he pointed out that responsible tourism is not a single concept. Rather, it is linked to all forms of human activity and adapts to evolving human needs and behavior [15].

### 2.2. *Principles of responsible tourism development*

Responsible tourism has a primary goal of addressing the problems arising from mass tourism, including environmental, social, and economic problems: uneven

distribution of economic benefits, damaging the environment, and losing the integrity of cultures. To achieve this goal, there needs to be a specific guideline with clear principles. The Cape Town Declaration of Responsible Tourism (2002) is regarded as the guideline for responsible tourism practices [7]. The event was attended by a wide range of tourism stakeholders around the world. Among these were travel agencies, tourism companies, national parks, government officials, tourism experts, non-profit organizations, hotel managers, and many others. All stakeholders involved in tourism organizations have been urged to join hands to develop an aligned system of practices centered on socioeconomic and environmental criteria to develop responsible tourism.

As part of economic responsibility, developers should choose development models that support the local community and do not adversely affect local livelihoods. In addition, the principles make sure that stakeholders are included in the process and that the benefits are shared with them.

In the concept of social responsibility, local communities are involved in the planning, decision-making, and tourism processes. We focus on promoting, conserving, and supporting social and cultural diversity through tourism.

Responsibility for the environment involves the proper management of resources, reducing waste and over-consumption, and sustainably restoring the natural environment. These issues should be accompanied by environmental restoration activities.

Shortly, the tourism industry requires us to take responsibility in doing our actions to reduce negative impacts and increase positive impacts on economic and social aspects as well as the environment, to promote sustainable development of tourism.

### 3. Methodology

This study provides a theoretical overview of some responsible tourism rating systems. Due to this, this study uses secondary data from scientific articles and scientific studies about responsible tourism and responsible tourism rating systems in Europe and Vietnam. A rich source of secondary data is collected for the analysis of responsible tourism rating systems. The comparative analysis method is used to examine the advantages and disadvantages of different rating systems. The study then concludes how tour operators can comply with responsible tourism principles in their travel businesses.

### 4. Results and Discussion

This article briefly introduces the responsible tourism reporting systems in Europe with names, organizations used, and country of origin. A comparison between these reporting systems is then given to all readers with their objectives, evaluation objects, criteria, indicators, and auditing unit. The current situation of responsible tourism in Vietnam will then be discussed with the possible using the Responsibletravel.com reporting system for SMEs of Vietnam.

#### 4.1. Responsible tourism reporting systems in Europe.

An evaluation system can be seen as a means to measure, ensure, and communicate compliance with certain requirements [19],[16],[2],[3]. The purpose of this tool is to establish a link between participants in the tourism chain by ensuring or certifying that service providers adhere to a specific set of standards and indicators [30].

A rating system motivates businesses and other companies to improve their economic, social, and environmental performance and rewards them for it. Therefore, a



rating systems can benefit governments, tourists, businesses, the environment, and local communities [2].

European countries are using several rating systems to assess responsible tourism in terms of compliance with responsible tourism values or CSR principles, including the Responsible Tourism Standards of Italy; The Enterprise Indicator for CSR of the Spanish QUIDAMTUR; the CSR Reporting Standards of the German KATE, and TourCert; the ATR system of the French ATT; the TOI and GRI; the system of the Responsibletravel.com and the Travelife Sustainability System of the European initiative Travelife [22].

**Table 1. Reporting systems in Europe**

Name of the reporting system	Organization/Association	Country
Responsible Tourism Standards	AITR (Italian Association for Responsible Tourism)	Italy
ATES system	ATES (French Association for Fair and Solidarity Tourism)	France
Enterprise Indicator for Responsible Tourism	QUIDAMTUR	Spain
CSR Tourism certified	KATE Tourcert	Germany
ATR program	ATT (Association of Thematic Tour Operators)	France
Tour Operators' Sector Supplement	TOI (Tour Operator Initiative) GRI (Global Reporting Initiative)	European Level
Responsibletravel.com System	Responsibletravel.com (online travel agency)	UK
Travelife Sustainability System	Travelife	European Level

*Source: Adapted from [22]*

The purpose of this article is to analyze the sustainability assessment systems of tourism businesses that adhere to responsible tourism values, including the rating systems of AITR, ATES, ATT, and ResponsibleTravel.com. There are around 210 members in the Italian AITR system (the Association for Responsible Tourism, in English) including small and medium enterprises (travel agents, tour operators, and accommodation establishments) [22]. It was developed by the association to establish principles and values for certifying all trips conducted by their members using the label "responsible travel".

ATES of France was founded in 2015 by the Union Nationale de Tourisme et de Plein air (UNAT), Plate-Forme pour le Commerce Equitable (PFCE), the federation of

Lettres Vacances Tourisme (LVT), and several other French tourism associations. ATEs consists of nearly 23 tour operators selected according to a set of ethical criteria and is dedicated to developing tourism activities that will contribute to the growth and development of local communities by working closely with them [22].

The ATT (Association des Tours Opérateurs Thématiques-French) was created in 2004 by French small and medium-sized tour operators. They organize or promote "conscious" travel, usually with a specific theme, and encourage tourists and operators to behave responsibly, respecting local culture, politics, and the environment. ATT developed the ATR (Agir pour un Tourisme) rating system to inform and attract tourism operators as well as other tourism stakeholders to involve in responsible activities (such as tourism planning and developing travel packages [22]).

It is particularly interesting to note how Responsibletravel.com selects and screens its suppliers and partners. Initially, the travel agency required its suppliers to follow a binding policy that was based on the principles of responsible tourism. Furthermore, the system requires that they submit contracts, policy documents, and evidence demonstrating that their business practices meet the minimum standards established by the system's responsible travel code [22].

AITR defines responsible tourism as "tourism developed in accordance with the principles of economic and social justice while respecting the environment and local culture." This type of tourism promotes positive interactions between the tourism industry, local communities, and tourists. In the AITR perspective, the focus is on social aspects, such as the participation of the local community in decision-making and fair exchange between all stakeholders.

#### *4.2. Comparison between responsible tourism reporting systems*

As described in the previous sections, the assessment systems can be compared according to the type of approach they follow: the certification approach versus the responsible tourism approach. TOI-GRI and KATE both use a certification approach for their assessment systems. AITR Responsible Travel Standard (review of package tours) is the only program completely dedicated to responsible tourism. Other assessment systems are based on an integration of both approaches and at a different level, incorporating a market-oriented perspective and paying more attention to the internal operations, supply chains, and processes established by the tour operators. Responsibletravel.com, ATEs, and ATT are better aligned with AITR. The reason is that these organizations share the same goal of identifying and accrediting tour operators who specialize in responsible travel. Comparatively, QUIDAMTUR and Travelife have developed plans that are more similar to KATE and TOI-GRI, since they place a greater emphasis on accountability while also protecting consumers and raising their awareness. As a result, the article compares rating systems based on the principles of responsible tourism assessment, including AITR, ATEs, ATT, and Responsibletravel.com.

Table 2. General comparison of responsible tourism reporting systems

	AITR	ATES	Responsibletravel.com	ATT
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Differentiate responsible tourism from other forms of tourism.</li> <li>- Protect consumers and ensure that travel conforms to responsible travel principles</li> <li>- Protect AITR members from other TOs that only use responsible tourism for marketing reasons.</li> <li>- Provide minimum operating standards to AITR members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Have a common vision among members</li> <li>- AITES members promote transparency by making travelers aware of their responsible tourism practices</li> <li>- Increase public trust in AITES members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create new income and job opportunities for local communities through responsible tourism and minimize negative impacts on the environment</li> <li>- Identify and select partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promote sustainable and high-quality tourism.</li> <li>- Monitor the economic impacts of the destination.</li> <li>- Respect heritage, environment, and culture transparently r.</li> </ul>
Evaluation object	Package tour	The TO: travel organization and project carried out	The TO: policy, activities and travel characteristics	The TO internal processes and travel organization
Criteria	13	10	4	16
Indicators	23	29	14	24
Auditing	Self-evaluation and approval by AITR.	Self-evaluation and approval by AITES	Self-evaluation, consumers' reviews and approval by the agency	Third-party audit

Source: Adapted from [22]

A comparison of CSR assessment systems of tourism enterprises is shown in Table 2 based on the following parameters: objectives; subjects of application; number and types of evaluation criteria; and methods for system evaluation. Similar to the AITR rating system, AITES, ATT, and Responsibletravel.com aims at identifying CSR-focused travel programs. AITES, ATT, and ResponsibleTravel.com also follow a certification approach, so in addition to the objectives of the CSR performance of enterprises, there are also objectives for members who pursue the certification of responsible tourism by these organizations. By applying the objects of AITR, AITES, and Responsibletravel.com systems, we can determine how tourism is organized, how tourism projects are carried out, and what the activities of tour operators are. In terms of tests and evaluations, the ATT system is checked and monitored by a third party, but the rest of the systems are primarily evaluated by the organizations and companies themselves. Each system will have different evaluation criteria and criteria based on the objectives and objects of the assessment. The following table describes a few of the main categories of evaluation criteria for the systems.

**Table 3. Criteria of reporting systems**

Reporting systems	Criteria
AITR	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The travel is organized with the participation of local communities</li> <li>2. Meetings with the local population are a fundamental part of the travel experience provided</li> <li>3. The travel program pays attention to local diversities and culture</li> <li>4. The travel program pays attention to the natural and environmental characteristics of territories</li> <li>5. The travel is flexible and organized in a way that allows tourists to deepen their knowledge of the destination</li> <li>6. The travel organizer provides appropriate information to tourists and makes them aware of the socio-economic and cultural aspects of the destination</li> <li>7. The travel organizer informs tourists about the values of responsible tourism</li> <li>8. The activities included in the travel program are organized respecting the local ecosystem and the habitats where they take place</li> <li>9. The travel organizer chooses the most suitable transport modes to minimize their use and the impact on the environment</li> <li>10. The travel organizer adopts approaches and techniques that minimize the environmental impact of tourist activities, considering the specific features of the travel</li> <li>11. The travel is organized according to the principles of transparency and equity for all actors along the tourism value chain</li> </ol>

	<p>12. The travel has been organized to maximize positive impacts on the local economy and the community</p> <p>13. Travel organizations respecting the Italian law in the field of tourism</p>
ATES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The local population is at the earth of the welcoming process and the travel organizer arranges the tourists' stay with its co-operation</li> <li>2. The travel operator chooses partners that are involved in a development project for the local community</li> <li>3. The travel operator organizes its travel programs to maximize impacts on the local economy</li> <li>4. The travel operator organizes its travel programs to respect the local economic, social and environmental balance</li> <li>5. The travel operator promotes the meeting between travelers and local communities during the travel</li> <li>6. The travel operator promotes responsible tourism and its principles and engages himself in spreading ATES philosophy and activities</li> <li>7. The travel operator declares the composition of the travel price</li> <li>8. The travel operator informs travelers about the development activities carried out at the destination and/or on the environment preservation actions developed thanks to the tourist activities</li> <li>9. The travel operator informs travelers about the destinations visited (environmental, economic and social situation, behavior rules)</li> <li>10. The travel operator organizes its activities and decides the travel price so a part of it can be given to a development fund reserved for local projects</li> </ol>
Responsibilitytravel.com	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Policy and Procedure</li> <li>2. Environmental policy</li> <li>3. Social policy</li> <li>4. Economic policy</li> </ol>
ATT	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide general information to clients</li> <li>2. Make clients aware of responsible tourism</li> <li>3. A selection of local stakeholders/partners who support local employment</li> <li>4. The transfer of competence to identified local stakeholders</li> <li>5. Inform clients to respect the local environment, heritage and cultures</li> <li>6. Management of tourist flows by destination</li> <li>7. The stakeholders/partners run their business according to the legal rules in force in their countries</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. The selected stakeholders/partners assure proper work conditions to their employees, considering specific local conditions</li> <li>9. The selected stakeholders/partners are made aware towards the application of a proper waste management policy and natural resource management policy</li> <li>10. The TO commits himself to a long-lasting relationship with its stakeholders/partners</li> <li>11. Training the internal staff according to the principles of responsible tourism</li> <li>12. Applying an environmental management policy within the enterprise</li> <li>13. Managing the communication policy</li> <li>14. Applying a procedure to share the value created by the activities</li> <li>15. Supporting actively and financially the development of local populations</li> <li>16. Considering the clients' satisfaction deriving from the enterprise's commitments</li> </ol>
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*Source: Adapted from [22]*

AITR developed a methodology for defining the travel standard. There are five principles divided into 13 criteria and 23 indicators that determine if a product was designed and organized in full compliance with the values of responsible tourism. This reporting system emphasizes the central role of the local community, interaction between tourists and local people, perceptions of tourists, minimization of negative tourism impacts, and equity in benefit distribution. It is interesting to note that social and cultural aspects are emphasized more than environmental and economic ones.

Similar to the AITR, the ATES system is centered on the social aspect rather than the economic and environmental factors. It is also important to note that the system developed by ATES only applies to the structure and organization of the tour operators who are members of the association and not to their products or travel services, as required by AITR. This is organized according to the three main axes specified in table 2 mentioned above, 11 criteria, and 29 indicators. Like AITR, ATES requires that tour operators applying for the system submit proof they have complied with the principles of the charter. It is close to the approach of responsible tourism in which its main objective is to identify and recognize tour operators that work in full compliance with responsible tourism values.

Additionally, the system pays attention to the specific projects that operators are implementing with local partners as well as the local development program at each destination. ATES claims to minimize impact and respect balance at the destination, but it fails to provide metrics for these two aspects of corporate responsibility. It is a rating system based on criteria for promoting fair and sustainable tourism while ensuring the welfare of the local community and the encounter between tourists and locals. This asks the tour operator to adopt an internal responsible management approach in terms of working environment, staff satisfaction, environment preservation, etc.

Like ATES, ATT asks tour operators who join these systems to submit technical documentation proving compliance with association principles. ATT rating represents

the level of accountability in the conduct of its business, based on four main commitments which are explained by means of 24 indicators, as applicable to small and medium enterprises. Tour operators must document their performance with these indicators if they are to be considered compliant.

In order to obtain the certification, as the CSR Reporting Standards of AITR, AITES, the Responsibletravel.com system requires the company to self-assess, however, the ATT system requires an evaluation carried out by an external and independent group. For certification, ATT has chosen to partner with AFNOR Certification, an international organization that assesses and certifies products and services.

It is particularly interesting how Responsibletravel.com selects and screens its partners and providers. As a first step, the travel agency invites its suppliers to adopt a clear and serious policy based on responsible tourism principles. Secondly, these suppliers must demonstrate through appropriate documents that their policy and business activities comply with the minimum standards established by the agency. In addition, members are required to provide a short description of the responsible travel aspects of every trip and accommodation on the site. A paragraph describing how the particular holiday affected them is required. As a result of the analysis of the above rating system, it is evident that Responsibletravel.com has developed a comprehensive, multi-dimensional rating system that includes evaluation criteria for business policies, economic policies, society, and policies towards the environment.

#### *4.3. Current situation of responsible tourism in Vietnam and lesson from using the responsible tourism reporting system*

Vietnam is a growing destination. The number of international visitors to Vietnam as well as domestic visitors is increasing significantly. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Vietnam welcomed 18 million international tourists in 2019, an increase of 16.2% over the same period last year. Total revenue from visitors in 2019 also reached 726,000 billion VND [10], according to the General Statistics Office). As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated travel restrictions, visitor arrivals from abroad declined sharply in 2020 and 2021. International visitors to Vietnam reached an estimated 0.16 million in 2021. Travel restrictions were removed by March 2022, in an effort to help tourism recover. Vietnam is currently one of the top 11 countries with the highest growth rate of tourist arrivals in the world, about 26% per year. Vietnam tourism has won many awards including Asia's leading travel award, Asia's leading culinary destination, and Asia's premier cultural destination. The competitiveness of Vietnam tourism has been continuously improved. Two times, the ranking has increased by 12 places, currently, Vietnam's tourism ranks 63 out of 150 countries [17], quoted to Mr. Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism Ministry). Vietnam tourism is more and more known widely in the world, many domestic destinations have been chosen by international tourists such as Hae, Hoi An... In Vietnam, the tour and travel sector play a very important role. In 2010, there were around 900 international- market tour operators, more than 11,000 domestic- market tour operators, and around 18,000 registered tour guides in Vietnam [33].

According to Vu (2015), the Vietnamese economy is still weak with very low labor productivity, and inadequate and limited functions of state institutions. Therefore, it will be very difficult to force tourism businesses to act responsibly when they don't have the rights or have the right without suitable benefits. However, in the long term, there is a potential to develop responsible tourism in Vietnam [34]. According to Vu

(2015). Vietnamese economy is still weak with very low labor productivity, inadequate and limited functions of state-institutions. Therefore, it will be very difficult to force tourism businesses to act responsibly when they don't have the rights or have the right without suitable benefits. However, in the long term, there is a potential to develop responsible tourism in Vietnam [34]. Research findings from Deng (2014) indicated that the potentials of responsible tourism for local people were better income, better life, enhanced knowledge, exchange culture, natural environment, attitude change and values of local products [10]. The potentials of responsible tourism for travelers were awareness of greenness, exchange of culture, the experience of greenness, and satisfaction. The potentials of responsible tourism for travel agents were profits, connection, support, and reputation.

Bui, Phi, and Le (2022) stated that responsible tourism is not just a solution for sustainable development through providing the types of products or by the scale of operation, but making a shift in a set of values and actions that results in an improvement of tourism activities involving all stakeholders including tourists, tourism service suppliers, the local community and tourism managers. Tour operators play a very important role in connecting many tourism stakeholders from tourists to the local community to local destination authorities. A tour operator can offer responsible tourism products and services to encourage and educate tourists in using tourism products in responsible ways and can also improve awareness of local communities as well as benefitting the tourism destination across the three aspects of the economy, society and the environment. Furthermore, these tourism enterprises can reach visitors via marketing channels like publications and the media, which helps connect sustainable tourism destinations with customers [6]. In Vietnam, tour operators influence where a majority of international tourists stay, where they eat, the places they visit, how they travel, and the level and kind of interaction they have with the local people and the natural environment (Vietnam Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, n.d.). Despite tour operators' vital role, their responsible tourism behaviours in the context of Vietnam have not yet been investigated [6].

Some researchers have paid attention to practicing corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the tourism and hospitality industry [27]. Corporate social responsibility not only brings tangible benefits to enterprises but also brings extensive intangible benefits to help businesses develop sustainably. For tourism enterprises, the product directly affects tourists' satisfaction and intention to return, therefore, business practices need to be ethical and corporate responsibility is significant. Nguyen et al. (2020) conduct a study to examine the relationship between corporate social responsibility and financial performance in the tourism and hospitality industry. The study gives similar results to [18] and [25] which indicated that implementing CSR could improve financial performance and sustainable development [27].

Nguyen et al. (2020) also asserted that setting up well corporate social responsibility in tourism businesses in particular and Vietnamese businesses, in general, will not only help businesses thrive but also support businesses to solve strategic issues and social issues. Corporate social responsibility should be seen as the benefit of businesses so that it can actively be built with branded products trusted by consumers, internal human resources, valuable resources, position, and a good reputation [27]. To evaluate how well a tourism business put CSR in action, some countries have elaborated reporting systems based on principles of CSR and responsible tourism. Criteria of these



reporting systems may be different from one to another; however, they are built based on principles of CSR and responsible tourism.

Nguyen et al. (2022) critically review the literature about responsible tourism in Vietnam. The study showed that few studies in Vietnam clarified the actions that need to be taken to promote responsible tourism and measure their impacts on society. The study proposed a list of actions to promote responsible tourism based on the survey results with 122 tourists and 20 tourism experts. Respondents in this study were also asked two questions, including “Who should be involved in promoting responsible tourism?” and “Which actions should be taken to promote responsible tourism?”. They used 35 actions for 4 groups which are travel agents and tour operators (11 actions), destination marketing organizations (DMOs) (8 actions), related service providers (5 actions), and tourists (11 actions). Respondents were asked to express their viewpoint on the necessity of these actions, using the Likert five-point scale (from 1 totally not necessary to 5 totally necessary). The results showed that tourists are considered to be the most crucial stakeholder to promote responsible tourism (88.1%), followed by DMOs (83.9%) and tour operators (79%). A comparison between ratings of tourists and tourism experts for the most important actions of each stakeholder for responsible tourism was shown in this study [28].

Vietnam Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism also have developed key responsible tourism provisions for tour operators in Vietnam. Thanks to key responsible tourism provisions, tour operators can integrate sustainability within their internal management practices, the development of products, supplier engagement, customer relations, and relations with destinations [33]. Nonetheless, we haven’t had a reporting system to assess the CSR commitment of a tourism business.

The Responsibletravel.com rating system seems to be suitable for assessing tourism enterprises in Vietnam because it considers all economic, social, and environmental aspects, as well as giving SMEs a simple way to integrate it [22]. This study introduces the evaluation criteria of ResponsibleTravel.com to assist travel companies in Vietnam. This is also because most of the travel businesses in Vietnam are small and medium enterprises.

#### *4.4. The responsibletravel.com Reporting system*

It is interesting to note that in the Responsibletourism.com reporting system, the audit based on feedback sent by reviewing a particular operator or accommodation on the website of a travel agency is an essential part of responsible tourism policies. Tour companies and hotels receive all of these reviews to encourage continuous improvement.

According to Responsibletravel.com, the company’s system for verifying the responsibility of businesses and basic service providers is based on the Responsible Travel approach. Travel operators and other service providers who demonstrate their commitment to corporate social responsibility and responsible tourism will be able to deliver truly positive visitor experiences. The system of responsible tourism encompasses all economic, social, and environmental values [22]. Furthermore, this view is reflected in indicators related to business policy, tours, and individual services. Additionally, the system contains indicators of the relationship between the company and service providers. The indicators are designed to ensure fairness for all stakeholders, including the local community and tourist destinations (Table 4).

**Table 4. The criteria and indicators of the Responsibletravel.com reporting system**

<p><b>1 Policy and Procedure</b></p> <p>1.1 Provide a copy of the company's responsible travel policy</p> <p>1.2 Provide written confirmation that the company policy has been provided to staff, destination suppliers, and travelers</p> <p>1.3 Provide written confirmation that the company has a procedure for responding to travelers' complaints &amp; suggestions concerning responsible travel practices</p>
<p><b>2 Environmental policy</b></p> <p>2.1 Provide evidence of initiatives to reduce waste, and evidence that the company policy requests waste management practices of suppliers (reduce-reuse-recycle)</p> <p>2.2 Provide evidence that travelers are provided with suggestions for how to reduce water use in their destinations</p> <p>2.3 Provide evidence that travelers are provided with relevant suggestions to minimize damage to the environment, wildlife, and marine ecosystems</p> <p>2.4 Provide evidence that the company provides suggestions for a destination to have local projects with direct or indirect environmental benefits</p>
<p><b>3 Social policy</b></p> <p>3.1 Provide evidence that travelers are provided with accurate pre-trip information on the social and political situation in each destination</p> <p>3.2 Provide evidence that travelers are provided with suggestions of ways to minimize negative impacts on local cultures</p> <p>3.3 Evidence that the company's policy requests destination suppliers to ensure that a local guide accompanies all group visits to local communities</p> <p>3.4 Provide evidence that the company provides suggestions for a destination to have local social projects with direct or indirect benefits to the host community</p>
<p><b>4 Economic policy</b></p> <p>4.1 Provide evidence that the company policy requests destination suppliers to employ local people wherever possible</p> <p>4.2 Provide evidence that the company's policy requests destination suppliers, where local standards permit, to make use of local produce, manufacturers, and other services</p> <p>4.3 Provide evidence that travelers are provided with pre-trip suggestions of local services that provide local community benefits (e.g. restaurants, guides...)</p>

*Source: Adapted from [22]*

Although the system covers the three aspects of the triple bottom line and all of the main values of responsible tourism, it should also include the percentage of income that is retained in the destination by the local community. The system seems to be easily implemented by small and medium enterprises [22]. As a result, small and medium-sized tour operators in Vietnam can use the criteria of this reporting system to examine and reassess their operations and take measures to resolve problems they have made progress on and strengthen the implementation of responsible tourism practices.

## 5. Conclusions

In the study, reporting systems for responsible tourism assessment in Europe were synthesized and compared. These may apply to corporate audiences or corporate travel programs. All programs pay particular attention to consumers, asking tour operators to provide them with comprehensive information about the destination to raise their awareness about responsible behaviors and to ensure transparency and safety. While great importance to the local community is given in particular by the systems of AITR, ATEs, and partially ATT. As it will be better explained in the next paragraph, the applications of some programs are limited to a specific country (ATEs, ATT, AITR, and Responsibletravel.com) or are available solely to associate travel agencies to evaluate their suppliers and partners. Despite these limitations, these reporting systems have been included in the analysis since they can offer interesting cases for discussions on the approaches and the indicators used.

Several aspects of the comparison revealed that, despite some similarities, reporting systems differ greatly from one to another. Although they focused on ensuring and promoting responsible tourism, the difference characterizes the systems considered in terms of objectives, assessment procedure, indicators, and type of auditing. The systems of ATEs, ATT, and Responsibletravel.com are more linked to the program of AITR since they share the objective of identifying and recognizing those tour operators specializing in responsible tourism travel. ATT is the only organization that, after a self-evaluation procedure, requires an audit by an external, independent third party that is in charge of granting the certification (AFNOR for the ATR System of ATT). Objectivity, transparency, and credibility are enhanced in the eyes of consumers and the public. For the other programs, the company must first self-evaluate, then the association needs to ratify, and finally, the consumers need to review.

Another significant element is represented by the level of attention paid by programs to the triple bottom line, i.e. to the environmental, social, and economic dimensions. In particular, AITR and ATEs focus more on social aspects than economics and the environment. These reporting systems stressed the extreme importance of the social aspect, in particular to the host community involvement and the encounter between tourists and local people. The company's relationship with the local community is assessed by measuring fairness, respect, and equity, as well as cultural exchanges between tourists and locals, which should be included in the tour operator's product. This focus depends on the fact that the members of these associations are specialized in responsible tourism, for which these aspects are strategic. The socio-cultural dimension is also developed by ATT, through a set of indicators proving that the tour operator respects labor rights and provides detailed information about a destination's socio-cultural background and the association's ethical code.

There are different reporting systems for Responsible Tourism that assess travel companies based on different criteria, so Vietnam needs to choose the most suitable reporting system to apply to all travel companies. It is difficult to say which system is the best one, since each program has its strengths and weaknesses according to what can be defined as an "ideal system", i.e. an assessment of tourism responsibility across the whole supply chain that considers social, cultural, economic, and environmental factors and the single travel package and that involves all stakeholders (internal staff, suppliers, clients, local population). In this context, it would be helpful to explore whether the poor diffusion of some systems and, on the contrary, the popularity of others means that some initiatives are of a higher quality. When compared with other rating systems, there are

fewer evaluation indicators in the Responsibletravel.com system, making it easier for smaller and medium-sized travel agencies to apply. Because most Vietnam travel businesses are small and medium enterprises, the research analyzed the evaluation criteria of the Responsibletravel.com system so that businesses can use the system's evaluation criteria to self-evaluate their involvement in responsible tourism. In terms of the assessment method, Responsibletravel.com relies on tourists' input, so the assessment is more efficient and cost-effective than that conducted by external agencies such as the ATT system. Tour operators should reinvent themselves and offer more traditional tours, while still maintaining a responsible approach to how they operate. Tour operators should adhere to environmental, social, and economic policies and respond to travelers' complaints and suggestions concerning responsible travel practices. Each tour operator may also use other criteria or evaluation indicators based on the size and character of their business.

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## **Tổng quan các hệ thống đánh giá du lịch có trách nhiệm tại châu Âu và bài học cho Việt Nam**

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**Tóm tắt:** Bài viết này cung cấp tổng quan về các hệ thống đánh giá trách nhiệm kinh doanh du lịch, trong điều kiện tuân thủ các giá trị của du lịch có trách nhiệm. Đặc biệt, phân tích tập trung vào các chương trình chủ yếu được phát triển ở Châu Âu và được áp dụng cho các công ty lữ hành. Phân tích bao gồm bốn hệ thống báo cáo: Tiêu chuẩn Du lịch có Trách nhiệm của ATR Ý; hệ thống ATIS của Pháp; hệ thống ATR của ATT Pháp và hệ thống của English Responsibletravel.com. Các đặc điểm chính của mọi hệ thống đã được mô tả (mục tiêu, cách tiếp cận, tiêu chuẩn và chỉ số, cách thức đánh giá) và một bản so sánh cuối cùng đã được phát triển để xác định những điểm chung và khác biệt chính. Chúng tôi cũng so sánh ba khía cạnh của du lịch có trách nhiệm giữa các hệ thống này. Dựa trên phân tích, các doanh nghiệp vừa và nhỏ của Việt Nam có thể được hưởng lợi từ hệ thống Responsibletravel.com. Nghiên cứu chỉ ra rằng hệ thống đánh giá của Responsible.com có thể hỗ trợ các công ty lữ hành cải thiện hoạt động du lịch có trách nhiệm của mình.

**Từ khóa:** Du lịch có trách nhiệm, hệ thống đánh giá, doanh nghiệp lữ hành, doanh nghiệp vừa và nhỏ.

