



**Quantification of tour operators' sustainable actions: a literature review and case study
of an American tour operator**

Olivia Marie Fuller

2023



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Advisor: João Paulo da Conceição Silva Jorge

An Internship Report submitted to the School of Tourism and Maritime Technology of
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Abstract

This paper explores the role of tour operators in promoting sustainable tourism practices, focusing on the case of FTLO Travel & Sojrn, a company committed to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Through a literature review, the paper examines the quantification of sustainability in the tourism industry, the role of tour operators in promoting sustainable practices, and the SDG goals of FTLO Travel. In this work is also provided a summary of the work performed during an internship at FTLO, including the primary duties and other activities. The findings suggest that tour operators have a unique opportunity to educate and raise awareness among tourists on the importance of sustainable practices, while also working with suppliers to adopt sustainable practices. The paper proposes the use of a supplier sustainability assessment to create sustainable supply chains and track progress towards sustainability goals. Based on these findings, the paper recommends further research on the effectiveness of sustainability certifications and supplier sustainability assessments in promoting sustainable tourism practices.

Keywords

sustainable supply chain management, triple bottom line, net positive tourism, sustainable tourism certification

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Introduction

This internship was an integral part of completing the Internship Project for the Polytechnic Institute of Leiria School of Tourism and Maritime Technology (ESTM) Master in Sustainable Tourism Management course. The first internship ran from August 30, 2021 to February 28, 2022. The second internship began February 28, 2022 and concluded on December 31, 2022.

As is discussed in the introduction of Chapter I, the first internship through Ultimate Budapest did not meet my professional development goals, nor was it a good base for this internship report owing to the company's lack of involvement or interest in sustainability or developing sustainable actions. Additionally, my role which developed into that of Marketing Manager was not conducive to conducting research that would be helpful or valuable to the company.

During the second internship with FTLO Travel, I was involved with maintaining the relationships between the company and its suppliers, which has allowed me great insight into the steps a company can make, hand in hand with the suppliers, towards greater sustainable action.

The purpose of this internship project was to determine the most effective way for FTLO Travel to measure its sustainable actions. The company was developed with sustainability in mind, and was happy to discover more about sustainable practices through this project. I had the opportunity to work with key members of the company, including the Founder and CEO, in order to discover how this research might best meet the company's aims. In the end, it was decided that the first step towards improving the company's sustainable actions, as is an overall goal of FTLO's, is to measure these actions in order to provide a baseline and starting point.

Therefore, the research undertaken as part of this project will help FTLO to understand the best way to measure its sustainable actions. This is important because without taking the time to discover the best method, the company may waste time and/or money on a less useful, less accurate, or less helpful method.

This internship project is divided into two chapters. The first chapter explains the context of the internship in depth, along with an overview of the company, FTLO Travel. Additionally, this chapter details my role within the company to provide an understanding of how this project developed.

The second chapter begins with a literature review that delves into topics such as the role of tour operators in sustainability, supply chain management, and quantification of sustainable actions. The methods of quantification of sustainable actions that are reviewed are sustainability certifications and supplier sustainability surveys. Finally, FTLO's sustainability goals are looked at from the research point of view, drawing connections between the company's goals and the relevant United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs).

After the literature review, at the end of Chapter II can be found the methodologies used in developing this internship project, the analysis and discussion of the literature, and the conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter I: About the Internship

This chapter will provide an overview of the company where the internship was performed as well as explain the company's vision and goals in order to give background for the reasoning behind choosing this company for the internship report. This information will also provide context for the discussion in Chapter II.

Next, there will be an explanation of the duties of the role, which will afford further insight into the knowledge gathered through this internship as it relates to the topic of this project.

1. Introduction

Originally, I began with an internship at Ultimate Budapest, a local ticket reseller based in Budapest that was born as a product of the pandemic. Though it had been discussed that I would work with local suppliers as well as the local council to discover ways to make the party tourism scene in Budapest more sustainable following Covid, this was not realized. Ultimate Budapest as a company was too new to be delving into such topics. The focus needed to be on expanding its customer base, optimizing SEO, etc., and I instead shifted into the role of Marketing Manager instead, as the company previously had no marketing division. I stayed with the company for 6 months in the hopes that my original project could come to fruition once the marketing team was founded, but when it became apparent that this was not a possibility, I left the company to find a new internship.

I researched companies that were more solidly grounded, though still preferencing those with a start up culture in order to ensure that they would be receptive to fresh ideas. My primary aim was to work in a company that places a strong emphasis on sustainability and was positioned within the travel and tourism sector.

Through this research, I came across FTLO Travel. This group travel company appealed to me because it was clear that they made an effort to work with local suppliers and to have a positive impact on local communities. Additionally, the itineraries are not simply "bucket list" items, but encourage guests to delve into the local culture to develop a deeper understanding of the country and surrounding community.

The company was happy to accept me as an Operations Coordinator so that I could learn more about company-supplier relationships and how it might be possible to improve the company's sustainable actions as they relate to suppliers.

Interning at FTLO Travel proved to be useful in both furthering my knowledge in this topic, as well as developing my interests in this sector, as the company proved to be extremely interested in and motivated to act upon sustainability within the travel and tourism industry.

Through this internship, I gained firsthand knowledge of and was actively a part of the company's supplier relationships and the steps taken to ensure that they are aligned with the company's sustainable goals. This internship provided valuable insights into the travel and tourism industry and highlighted the importance of sustainability in this sector.

2. About the Company

The characterization of the company is important in order to understand the scope of the internship and project. This subchapter explains the background of the company, details the customer base, defines the products the company offers, and provides an overview of the relevant partners of the company and considerations in choosing partners.

This information will also provide a foundation for the analysis of the company's operations and sustainability practices as they relate to literature in the following chapter.

2.1 FTLO Travel & Sojrn

FTLO Travel is a group travel company in the tourism sector, founded by Tara Cappel in 2016. The company was formed from the idea that travel can provide “perspective expanding experiences” (Cappel, 2022) and make an impact not only on the travelers themselves, but the locals of the community in the target destination.

The mission of FTLO Travel is “to facilitate cross-cultural understanding through meaningful experiences and connections with local people and fellow travelers.” (Cappel, 2022)

During the pandemic, when travel was halted, a sister company named Sojrn was formed. Sojrn is an adult study abroad program which offers 2 week or 1 month long stays in various locations around the world. In addition to living and coworking (in the case of remote workers) with like-minded individuals, each location has an assigned theme which the guests learn about during their stay.

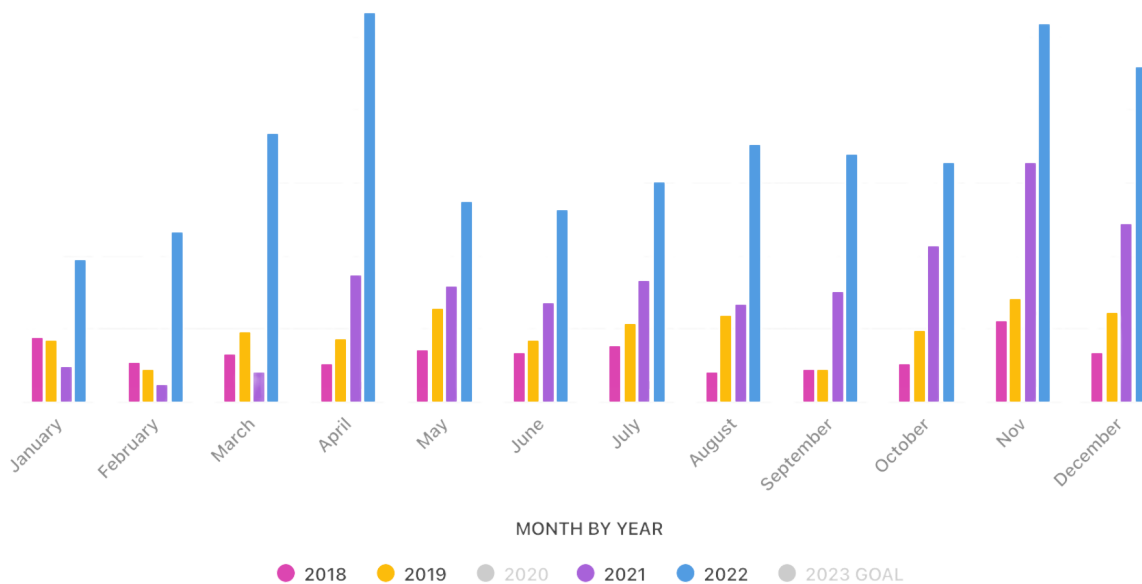
Examples include Wine in Tuscany, where participants learn about wine varietals and the art of wine tasting while living in the small town of Siena, Italy or Mental Wellness in Bali, where participants expand their knowledge on mental, physical, and spiritual wellbeing with a base in Ubud, Indonesia. Sojrn has a great deal of crossover with FTLO, for example shared suppliers such as a transport company in Tuscany or a food walking tour in Barcelona.

FTLO Travel was originally based in LA, with no full time employees until its third year of operation. Now, the company is fully remote with 18 full time employees, excluding the CEO, and 3 part time employees. Though the majority of the employees are based in the USA, employees work from a variety of countries in the Americas and Europe, including Mexico, Brazil, France, and the United Kingdom. In addition to the aforementioned employees, the company also contracts over 20 Trip Leaders to guide the tours, based upon availability and need.

The company’s growth up to this point has been great. Each year has seen a great increase in sales, many over 50%, excluding 2020 where Covid impacted the sales of all in the travel industry. In terms of travelers, there were just 35 guests in the first year of operation, and 1,770 in the seventh year of operation in 2022. Finally, regarding destinations, originally the company launched with 4 destinations in Europe. At the time of writing, 24 destinations are on offer spanning 5 continents.

Figure 1

Sales growth of FTLO & Sojrn from 2018 to 2022



Note. This graph shows the 2018 - 2022 monthly sales of both companies, FTLO and Sojrn, combined. From.

One of FTLO Travel's goals is to reach 25,000 travelers per year in 2027. Within this time, the company is looking to possibly expand into other markets, as well as to incorporate a subscription service that allows access to other travel products.

In line with the company's sustainable values, FTLO Travel wants to continue to expand without overtouring a specific destination. Therefore, in order to support 25,000 travelers per year, the goal is not to simply increase the number of trips, but to increase the amount of destinations offered as well, expanding further into Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. At the moment, FTLO Travel does not have plans to offer trips in Oceania considering that the majority of the guests are from the USA and the distance and high cost for travelers to fly there indicate there would be a lack of bookings from customers.

This tactic to expand into a variety of new destinations, as opposed to simply offering more trips in the current destinations will not only help to avoid overcrowding, but will provide a wider range of products to customers, allowing for a greater possibility of repeat customers. This will also provide FTLO Travel with the opportunity to introduce customers to new, "up and coming" or underrepresented destinations, spreading the tourist dollar to regions that need it more than the already popular locations.

FTLO Travel's commitment to sustainable travel is further exemplified through its partnerships with local suppliers. The company works with local tour guides, transport companies, and accommodations where possible in order to support the communities visited and promote responsible tourism. Additionally, FTLO Travel encourages travelers to adopt sustainable travel practices, such as supporting local businesses and reducing water or energy usage in areas where these resources are limited. By prioritizing sustainability, FTLO Travel is not only creating a positive impact on the local communities visited, but also helping to ensure that future generations can continue to enjoy these destinations.

2.2 Customers

The current target market is young professionals aged 24-40, with the average customer at 32 years old. Over 75% of guests that book are female (see Figure 2), and an emphasis is

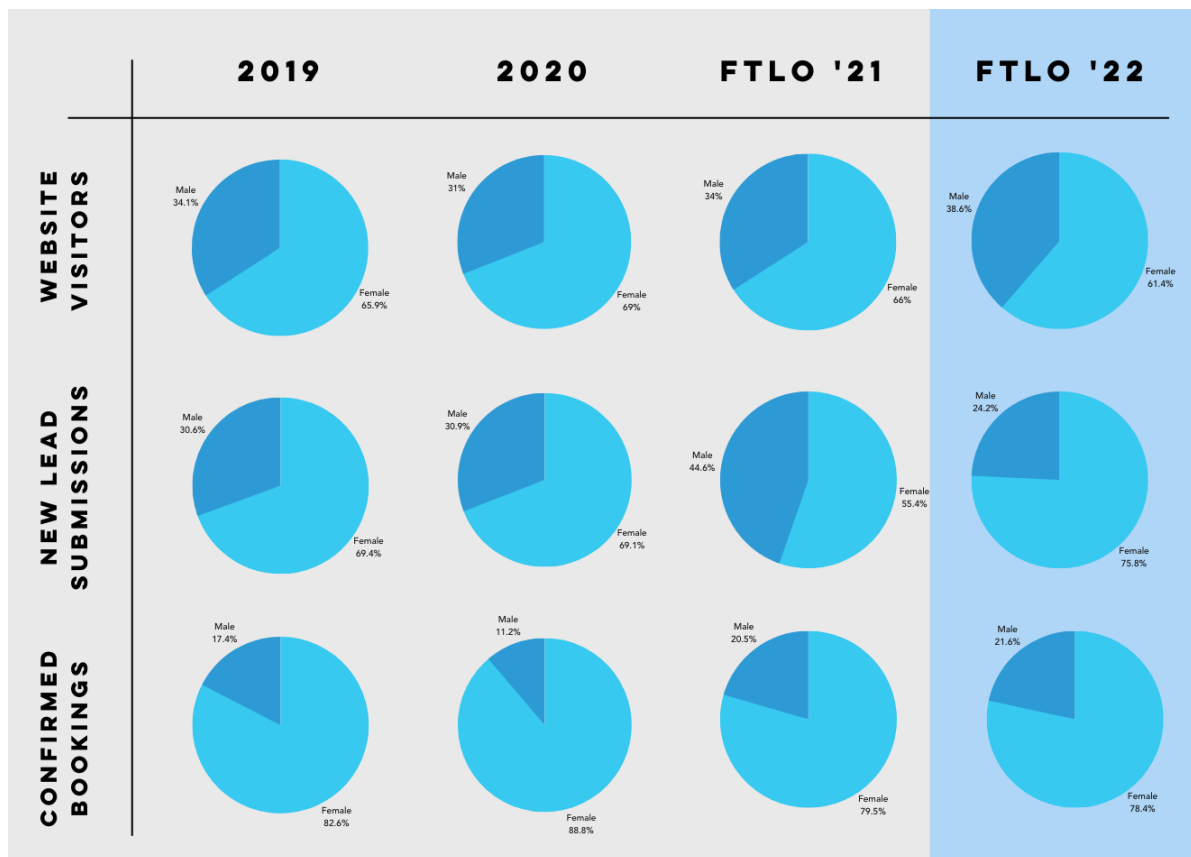
placed upon marketing towards male customers in order to provide a more equal gender balance on the trips. The customer base is primarily American, though interest from other nationalities, generally those from English speaking countries, is growing.

FTLO guests come from a wide range of backgrounds. Some have a good deal of experience in travel, but simply want a group of people to travel with. Others have little to no prior travel experience and are searching for a company to help them navigate the process.

FTLO has a very loyal alumni base, with many customers in 2022 being repeat FTLO travelers. The majority of the guests are traveling solo, though some travel with a friend or a partner.

Figure 2

FTLO Customer Breakdown by Gender 2019 - 2022

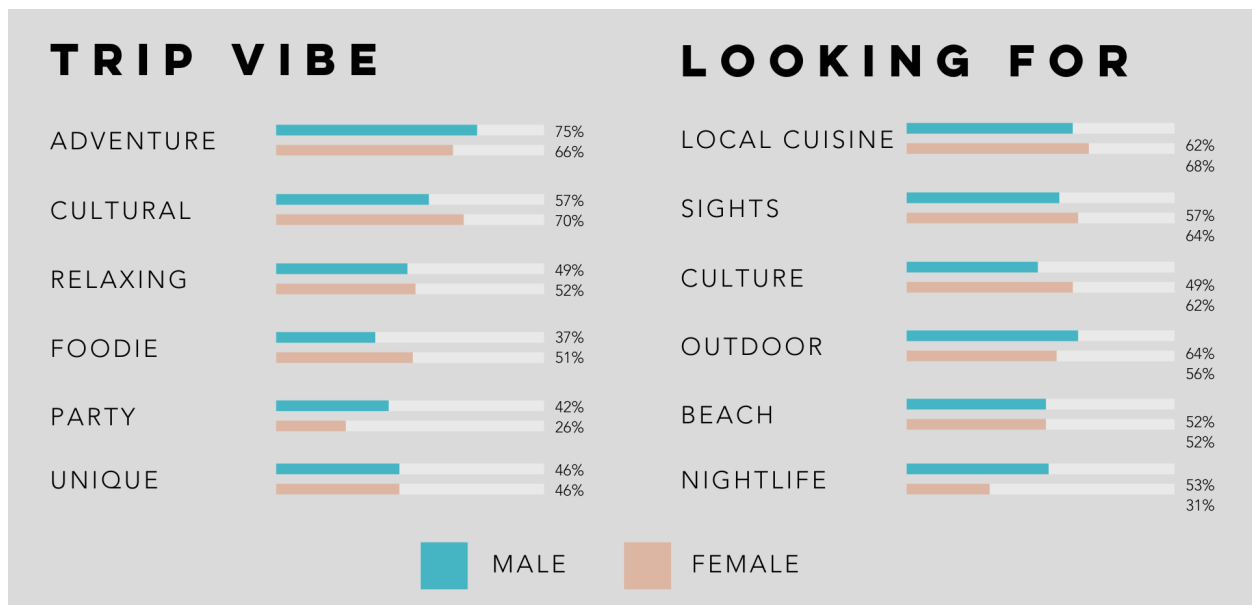


Note. This graph shows the percentage of male versus female FTLO customers from 2019 to 2022 in three stages of the sales process, from website visitors to new lead submissions, to confirmed bookings. From FTLO Travel, 2023.

All customers are interested in unique, authentic travel experiences and want to fully experience the destination and discover the local culture (see Figure 3). The limitation placed on age range (24-40 years old) is a specific strategy that provides the guests with the comfort of knowing that their trip mates will be from a similar stage of life. Many guests are interested not only in the trip itself, but the connections they make with others on the trip, some of whom will become lifelong friends.

Figure 3

FTLO 2022 Lead Insights by Gender



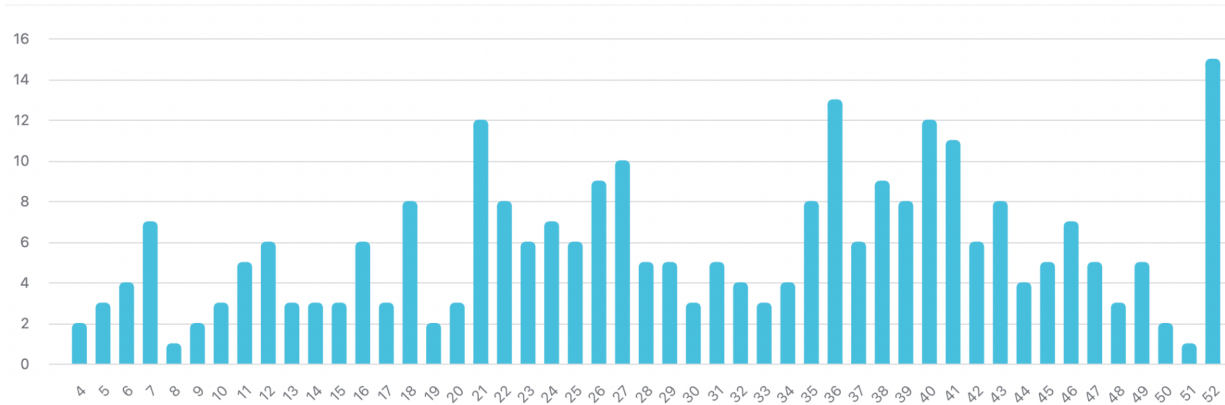
Note. These graphs represent the percentage of male versus female FTLO customers in 2022 who responded to a survey asking what trip vibe and aspects of a trip they would like from FTLO. Respondents were not limited to one choice, but rather could choose as many as were relevant. From FTLO Travel, 2023.

2.3 Products

FTLO Travel’s products are group trips that range in length from 4 to 11 days. These trips take place year round, though the majority of trips run during the Northern Hemisphere’s summer time and are especially popular surrounding American holidays, particularly Memorial Day in May and Labor Day in September.

Figure 4

FTLO 2023 Number of Trips per Week



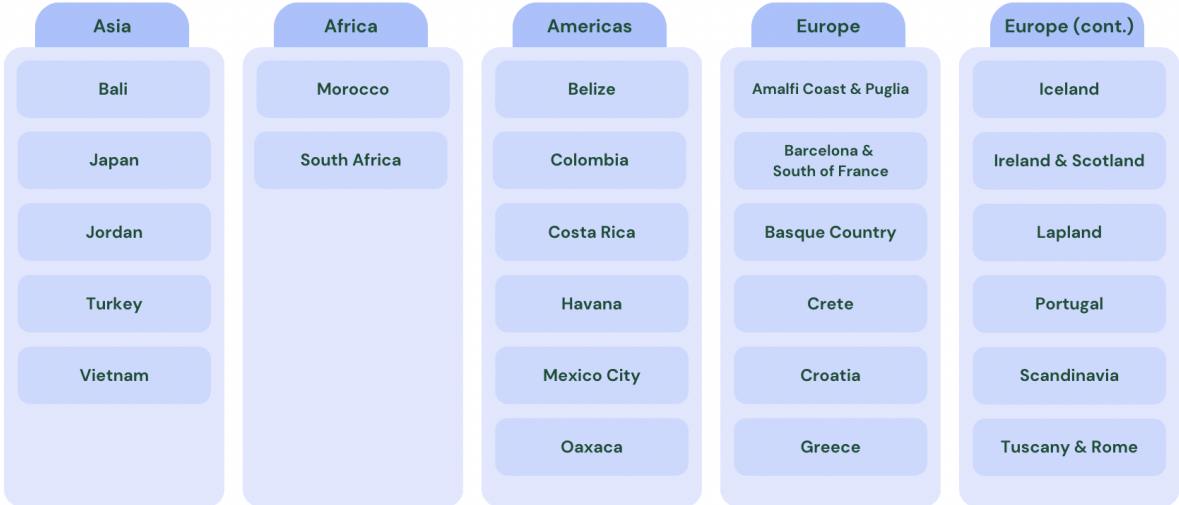
Note. This graph presents the amount of FTLO trips per week in 2023. This includes trips that are not yet available for bookings, but are in the planning phase and expected to launch and run in 2023. From FTLO Travel, 2023.

The group trips are offered across multiple continents including South America, North America, Europe, Africa, and Asia. The majority of the trips take place in Europe, though the company is expanding its range on all of the aforementioned continents. In 2022, the company ran 137 trips in just over 20 destinations and will increase the number of trips and destinations in 2023.

The company's expansion of trip offerings and destinations is indicative of its commitment to growth and innovation in the travel industry, while still maintaining a focus on sustainability and responsible travel practices.

Figure 5

FTLO 2023 List of Products



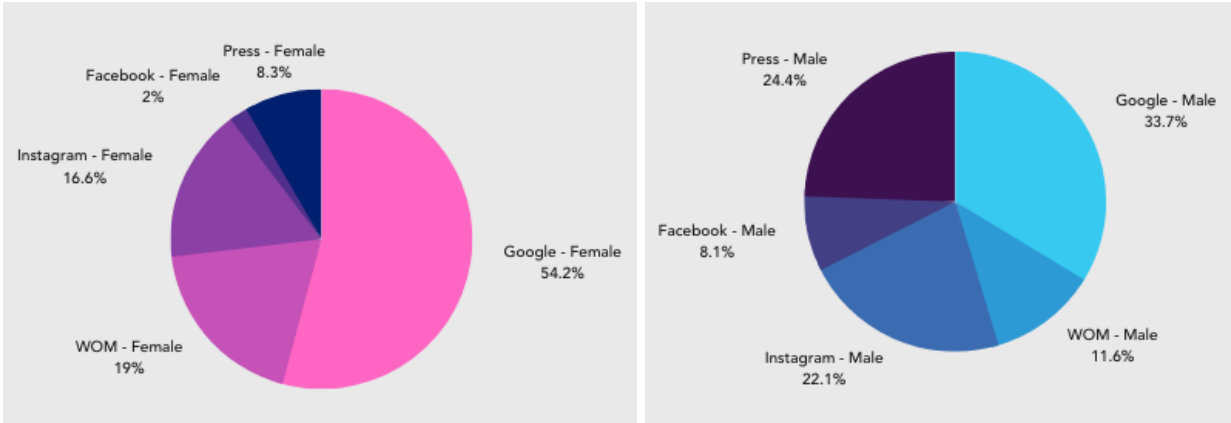
Note. These tables present the FTLO 2023 products per continent as of March 2023. This does not include trips that are still in the planning phase and expected to launch and run in 2023. From FTLO Travel, 2023.

The group trips tend to have 60% planned activities and 40% free time, allowing the guests to feel as though they are independently discovering the area while still taking part in carefully curated, unique activities which showcase the local culture. FTLO Travel’s aims to provide travelers with unique experiences that are not simply “checking items off a bucket list” or may not be readily available through traditional travel companies. An example of such activities include truffle hunting with a local family in Tuscany, playing “pelota,” a traditional sport in the Basque country, or learning drumming at a social impact music school in Colombia. In order to ensure a high level of customer satisfaction, FTLO Travel carefully selects its partners, including local suppliers and accommodations, to ensure they align with the company’s values and goals. By offering curated travel experiences and focusing on a specific age range, FTLO Travel is carving out a unique niche in the highly competitive travel industry.

The products are marketed through a myriad of tools, though booking can only be completed through the website, without the use of any OTAs. Customers are gathered primarily through word of mouth, social media, and email campaigns.

Figure 6

FTLO Leads by Gender 2022



Note. These graphs demonstrate the percentage of male and female customers that derive from various lead sources, including word of mouth (WOM), Instagram, Facebook, Google, and press, such as online news articles. From FTLO Travel, 2023.

2.4 Partners / Suppliers

FTLO works with two types of partners: Destination Management Companies (DMCs) and individual suppliers which includes hotels, restaurants, activity providers, and transport providers.

There is an emphasis on using locally owned DMCs and/or suppliers in order to support the local economy. Providing business to woman-owned or minority-owned establishments is an additional consideration. FTLO veers away from using multinational corporations and will only use chain brands where unavoidable. In this case, efforts are made to only use regional chains, such as a Spanish company that has hotels throughout Spain.

Establishing long lasting relationships with the suppliers is key, not only from a business perspective, but also from a sustainability perspective. Suppliers are more likely to not only divulge their sustainability practices, but to make changes to these practices when requested if

there is a long standing relationship and mutual trust between the company and supplier (Kumar & Rahman, 2015).

Efforts are made to ensure relationships with suppliers are personal and long lasting. This means that members of the team attend travel markets in order to network with both current and potential suppliers, phone calls or video calls are set up periodically to have “face to face” contact where appropriate, and if a member of the Supplier Operations team is traveling in an area where we have suppliers, they will attempt to meet up with the suppliers in person.

FTLO’s suppliers are not just business partners, but an extension of the brand. They are a representation of the company’s vision and ethos, and as such, it is key that there is a culture of communication and learning on both sides of the partnership in order to provide the best guest experience - and one that is aligned with the one the company promotes.

3. Summary of the Work Performed at the Company

The work performed at this company in regards to managing the supplier relationships heavily influenced the decision regarding the topic of this project. In this subchapter, the primary duties of the internship, as well as the other activities I undertook during my time with FTLO Travel are outlined.

My experience at FTLO Travel highlighted the importance of sustainable supplier management in the travel industry and solidified my interest in exploring this topic further.

3.1 Primary Duties

As an intern at FTLO Travel, I was responsible for assisting with supplier management, which involved communicating with suppliers to ensure trip logistics were organized and executed smoothly.

My work was primarily focused on external suppliers and Destination Management Companies (DMCs). I maintained the relationships between the company and its suppliers and DMCs, ensuring that we were in good communication and that the relationship was mutually beneficial. Not only was I the day-to-day contact, supplying sales updates, confirming bookings and providing relevant information, but I was also responsible for informing suppliers of updates and changes to itineraries, as well as informing suppliers of issues during the trips and helping to solve these issues in a timely manner.

In addition, I worked with the suppliers to book trips for the next year. Where issues with suppliers could not be resolved or changes to the itinerary were necessary, I researched and vetted new suppliers, negotiated rates and contracts, and trained them in our company's systems.

Another aspect of my role was to provide on-trip support for the trip leaders. This entailed being available for the duration of each trip for questions and issues the trip leaders brought to my attention as they pertained to our suppliers. I would then review my

communications with the supplier in question and if the answer was not immediately apparent, I would contact the supplier to find a solution together. In some cases, extra research was needed to find alternate solutions.

As part of my duties, I ensured the budgets for each trip were kept up to date so that the trip's profit margin calculations were as accurate as possible. In addition, I reviewed and paid invoices for supplier related expenses.

Finally, I was tasked with managing the inventory of rooms available per trip. I gave decisions on whether or not a customer could be accepted for the trip based upon the amount of space remaining for that specific date and breakdown of room types available. Where a guest could not be accepted, I would provide dates for that trip with availability, or give alternative, similar trips that the guest may like to book where we could accept their booking.

My internship experience with FTLO Travel was an opportunity to learn in-depth about the supplier relationship management process and how it affects the guest experience, as well the impact of sustainable practices. I developed my communication, negotiation, and problem-solving skills, all of which are important in maintaining supplier relationships. Additionally, I gained a deeper understanding of the logistics involved in trip planning and management. Finally, I learned about the aspects of trip planning outside of operations, including customer experience, sales, and marketing, and how all of these departments work together to ensure that the guest experience is seamless.

3.2 Other Activities

Outside of my primary duties with FTLO, I had the opportunity to work on other projects. One such project was working with a new system called Airtable. Within this system, I created a way to keep track of deadlines and payments made to suppliers, as well as an automated checklist for each departure. Previously, employees were either expected to remember hundreds of deadlines, or to wait for suppliers to ask for payments. Additionally, final checks before each departure simply had to be remembered. Now, it is easy to see when a payment is due, to log what amount was paid on which date, and to easily see what tasks are required as a departure arrives.

This new system for tracking supplier deadlines and payments has helped to streamline our supplier management system, which allows for more efficient and effective communication with suppliers. Additionally, the system helps to reduce the likelihood of missed payments or deadlines.

Within Airtable, I also reviewed any issues or bugs that occurred as a result of the migration from our original system, and was part of the team that would troubleshoot these issues and work with an outside consultant to find solutions.

Another task was overseeing the student intern. Under my direction, the student intern carried out the creation of pre-trip departure materials and relevant research. The pre-trip departure materials include information such as how to arrive at the first hotel from the airport, safety notes about the country, visa information, and more. The research carried out pertained to all aspects listed, as well as finding replacement suppliers where needed or discovering recommendations for guests in specific cities.

In addition, I was given the opportunity to attend the World Travel Market in London in November of 2022. This travel market is a three day long experience that takes place at the Excel Center and provides attendees the opportunity to connect with current suppliers, as well as network with and meet new suppliers. This was a particularly interesting experience, as it allowed me to understand how those in the travel industry network and find partners, as well as helped me to deepen relationships with existing suppliers.

The implementation of the new system and oversight of the student intern's tasks helped to streamline supplier management processes, ensuring that payments were made on time and relevant information was easily accessible, ultimately contributing to FTLO's commitment to sustainability by maintaining positive relationships with suppliers.

These additional projects provided me with a broad range of experience in various aspects of the travel industry. Working with Airtable allowed me to develop skills in project management, organization, and problem solving. The oversight of the student intern was an opportunity to develop leadership and mentorship skills. Finally, attending the World Travel Market provided valuable insights into the travel industry and the opportunity to network with

industry professionals. Overall, these projects added to the breadth and depth of my experience during my time at FTLO Travel.

Chapter II: Research & Analysis

1. Introduction

This chapter begins with a review of the relevant literature to provide a basis of understanding for the arguments presented in the discussion. The literature review section aims to examine previous research conducted on the topic of measuring sustainability.

After the literature review is an examination of the methods used to conduct this internship project, followed by an analysis and discussion which will focus on identifying best practices and areas for improvement for FTLO Travel based on the literature review and real-life application.

Finally, this chapter closes with a conclusion based upon the literature review, discussion, and analysis, and provides recommendations for next steps and further research. This conclusion will provide a comprehensive summary of the findings and the recommendations section suggests future research opportunities to improve the chosen method of measuring sustainable actions within FTLO Travel.

2. Literature Review

First is examined the role tour operators play in the field of sustainability, with a look at the impact of the supply chain and a proposed framework for implementing sustainable actions within the supply chain.

In order to make an informed decision on how to analyze FTLO Travel's sustainability, it is important to understand how to quantify sustainable actions. The two methods reviewed next are sustainability certifications and sustainability surveys.

Finally, there will be a review of the company's sustainable goals as they relate to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, or UN SDGs, which places the framework for the relevant metrics for quantifying FTLO Travel's sustainable actions.

2.1 Tour Operators and Their Role in Sustainability

Tour operators are crucial players in the tourism industry. Just before Covid, there were over 12,500 registered tour operator businesses in the USA alone ("Industry market research, reports, and Statistics," n.d.). Though this number sharply declined with lockdowns and many companies going out of business, it is slowly building back up.

Considering the great number of tour operators in the industry, it follows that tour operators are well positioned to take a stand for sustainability. They have a strong influence, directing customers towards specific destinations or regions and communicating the desires of customers to local suppliers (Khairat & Maher, 2012).

Tour operators can use this influence to encourage tourists to explore new destinations in order to reduce overtourism (Carey et. al, 2007) and to work with local suppliers in order to help them achieve greater levels of sustainability by explaining the benefits of marketing themselves as a sustainable company or of working with a tour operator that is perceived as sustainable.

A. Supply Chain Management.

When it comes to sustainability reporting, tour operators tend to perform poorly, with very limited information made available (Van Wijk & Persoon, 2006). Though they may talk about the importance of sustainability, it seems many tour operators are unable or unwilling to produce specific metrics regarding their sustainable actions. One reason for this may be the difficulties in reporting on the sustainability of a tour operator's product, which is generally a package of services from multiple businesses (Khairat & Maher, 2012). However, considering the supply chain is the area where there may be the greatest impact (Font & Cochrane, 2005), it is important to look at how sustainability in the supply chain can be improved.

Schwartz et. al (2009) provide a framework for sustainable supply chain management (SSCM) in order to give structure and support to tour operators as they attempt to bring sustainability initiatives into their supply chain. "Any serious attempt by a tour operator to improve sustainability requires implementation of an SSCM framework, for most sustainability impacts take place in the supply chain." (p. 310)

This framework consists of the following: engage the business, create a policy for SSCM, integrate SSCM into the business, conduct a baseline assessment of suppliers, prepare and implement an SSCM programme and action plan, and monitor and evaluate the SSCM programme and report on progress made (Schwartz et. al, 2009).

Schwarz et. al argue that a baseline assessment is crucial in order to create a plan of action as well as to monitor progress made. It is recognized that some suppliers may need support and / or training in order to reach sustainability goals

2.2 Quantification of Sustainable Actions

It is easy for a company to say that it wants to become more sustainable, but it can be challenging for a company to know where to start. Even when the company has chosen the sector in which it wants to have the largest impact, without quantifying the company's actions,

improvements are hard to see or prove. Quantification allows for a baseline to be set, helps to set sustainability goals, and allows for measurement of progress.

Therefore, we must begin by discovering how sustainable actions are quantified. One popular method is by calculating greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. We will briefly touch on this later. This method may still require a great deal of guesswork, as many companies do not have the tools necessary to do these calculations. Two alternate, more accessible ways of quantifying sustainability are certifications and surveys, which we will review in this section.

By quantifying sustainable actions through certifications or surveys, companies can better understand their current level of sustainability and set measurable goals for improvement. This allows for clear communication of progress to stakeholders, and ultimately, a more sustainable future.

A. Certifications.

It is difficult to pinpoint the beginning of sustainability certifications, as many countries and private entities have created their own certifications with varying levels of visibility and adoption.

Certifications are a common way for companies to showcase their sustainable actions. By obtaining a certification, a company is publicly stating that it has met specific standards in sustainability. For example, the Rainforest Alliance Certified™ seal ensures that the product was sourced in a way that protects forests, wildlife, and the rights and well-being of workers and their communities. Other certifications, such as the Fair Trade Certified™ seal or the B Corp Certification, ensure that a company meets social and environmental standards, including fair labor practices and reducing their carbon footprint.

There are a myriad of certifications and standards. Ecolabel Index catalogs 231 ecolabels in Europe alone. Some standards are generally internationally recognized, such as ISO 14001. However, though some countries have adopted sustainability certificates on a

national level, for example, Costa Rica with its Certification for Sustainable Tourism Program, there is yet to be one universal standard enforced by law or regulation.

Certifications can be a great tool for quantifying sustainability, as they use surveys (discussed in detail below) with carefully selected questions to help turn actions into data points. Many certifications will incorporate a ranking system that provides benchmarks, either based on a comparison with other entities or utilizing a standard, such as greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

The possible benefits to certification for a company are both internal and external. Internally, the company can use the results of the survey to discover areas of improvement. Many certification programs offer advice or tools to help the company reach their sustainability goals and benchmarks. Additionally, there are a few certification programs, such as B Corp, that offer a community aspect, allowing their members to share their experiences with each other to promote cross cultural learning and exchange of ideas, or to work together on sustainability projects. One such project is “We the Change,” which is described as:

A collective of women leaders of Certified B Corporations and other purpose-driven enterprises championing business as a force for good. This includes promoting sustainable business practices and innovations, increasing the flow of capital to women-led enterprises, advocating for systemic changes to uplift marginalized identities, and aligning business practices with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals. (“Collective Action Initiatives from B Lab and Partners,” n.d.)

We the Change is an example of members of a certification program coming together to create an actionable sustainability initiative which will help the members to improve their sustainability as a company. These actions may also help improve their scores and reach the next benchmark for B Corp. This can be a motivating factor for some companies.

When a company is certified, it can also become a means of educating customers about the company’s practices, as well as the importance of sustainability. If enough companies are educating their customers and proving their actions by becoming certified, this may begin to set a sustainability standard for the industry.

Externally, certification shows that a company has taken steps towards proving their sustainable actions - that they are not just “greenwashing.” This may contribute towards a feeling of trust customers have towards the company (Ivanova et. al, 2018). A secondary external benefit is the possibility of educating customers on sustainability through the promotion of the certification and explaining how the company received it on their website or product packaging. In some markets, having certification may lead towards an increase in sales, as can be seen in the study “Assessing a Voluntary Environmental Initiative in the Developing World: The Costa Rican Certification for Sustainable Tourism” by Rivera (2002).

However, this last point is difficult to prove in many cases. It is thought that in Costa Rica, as the Costa Rican Certification for Sustainable Tourism is nationally recognized by the Costa Rican Tourism Board, this places more credibility and visibility on the certification. Considering most countries and tourism boards do not have one nationally recognized certification, consumers may not know which certifications to trust, or the certification may not have enough traction to be recognized as a true symbol of sustainability.

It is also shown in some studies that customers with a higher awareness of sustainability issues (mitigated by gender, race, education level, and other factors) are more likely to be willing to pay a premium for companies that are certified (Ivanova et. al, 2018; Martínez García de Leaniz et. al, 2018; Sarmiento & Hanandeh, 2018). This presents another challenge in marketing to a specific subset of customers in order to capitalize on the possible increase in revenue.

Without third-party verification, it can be easy for companies to become certified without having to hold to a particular standard. This was found to be the case in two studies by Rivera and de Leon and Rivera et al. that looked at the Sustainable Slopes Program in the USA in 2004 and 2006, respectively. The program is not third-party verified, nor does it have clear-cut environmental standards. The studies showed that non-certified slopes “had better environmental performance than certified areas and subsequently had equivalent but not superior levels for most environmental performance indicators.” (Blackman & Rivera, 2010, p.23)

Some more drawbacks to certifications are the financial investment and the time it takes to become certified. Most certification programs charge an annual fee to stay certified, and

some charge an additional fee for third party verification or for document review when moving from one level to another. B Corp certification can take 6-8 months to become certified for small to medium businesses. Generally, there is a lot of paperwork to be completed by the company, and the time invested means extra labor costs or diverting labor away from other tasks to focus on certification.

It is clear that there are many considerations when deciding whether or not to certify a company. There are many possible benefits, but equally many drawbacks. If a company wants to move forward with certification, it is advised to choose a program that is third-party verified, and recommended to research which certification program has the maximum recognition and visibility for the target market. These factors will need to be balanced with the time and financial investments of the program.

B. Sustainability Surveys.

Surveys are another way for companies to quantify their sustainable actions. Surveys can be completed by the company itself or by a third-party auditor. They can help to identify areas where a company is performing well in sustainability and areas that need improvement. Additionally, surveys can be used to measure the level of sustainability awareness and engagement among employees and customers. With this information, companies can identify gaps and take action to improve their sustainability practices. Some companies will use their own internal surveys or call in a consultant, who will have their own survey to offer.

Surveys are a great way to quantify information in that they create a baseline and can help form the basis of a ranking system. For example, if one were to ask 10 companies what sustainable actions they take, the responses could vary from waste management to community impact. Some companies might detail with numbers, others give no concrete examples. This leaves room for a wide interpretation of sustainability.

When a survey is introduced, the examiner can determine which areas of sustainability are of use, and turn paragraph-long answers into hard data. This data can then be compared against either a pre-set standard, or all answers received in order to rank which companies are the “most sustainable,” based upon the specific limitations set out by the survey.

While the benefits echo those of certifications - creating benchmarks and understanding where priorities might lie in terms of where sustainability can be improved, surveys usually lack the external benefits, such as marketing power. It may be harder to convince a customer that the company is not greenwashing when there is no external party involved to verify the results (Majeed & Kim, 2022). This, along with the difficulties in creating a personalized survey, is why some companies may turn towards external sustainability consultants to help them create a survey.

Survey questions must be chosen carefully. First, the company must decide on what subjects they would like data points. Many certification programs utilize the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) to guide the division of data into sectors and subjects. Below are three subjects on which FTLO Travel would like data points, using the UN SDGs most important to the company at this present time. Next, survey questions must be chosen to allow for answers that can be turned into data - avoiding open ended questions is a good way to do so (Bradburn et. al, 2004; Fowler Jr & Cosenza, 2009). Careful attention must be paid to ensure that the questions are framed as to not include any bias (Bradburn et. al, 2004).

Finally, the company should decide whether to use an external benchmark or an internal benchmark against which to compare data. External benchmarks might mirror those of a trusted certification system. However, internal benchmarks allow for more flexibility based upon the company's unique situation.

2.3 FTLO Sustainability Goals & UN SDGS

The founder of FTLO Travel has three sustainability goals for the company. The primary goal, which is the current focus, is to contribute towards net positive tourism. The secondary goal is to reduce the environmental impact of its products. FTLO Travel's tertiary goal is to promote gender equality.

A. Net Positive Tourism.

It cannot be denied that tourism can have negative effects on the environment and the local community. Net Positive Tourism (NPT) is the idea that the positive aspects of tourism outweigh the negative impacts. NPT encompasses SDGs 8 and 10 through the inclusion of the “triple bottom line” concept discussed below.

SDG 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

SDG 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries.

One way to view the impacts of tourism is through the lens of the “triple bottom line.” This can be defined as “an accounting framework that incorporates three dimensions of performance: social, environmental and financial” (Slaper & Hall, 2011, p.1). When this is applied to sustainability and tourism, it shows how tourism reaches beyond just one aspect, but has a much more holistic impact.

Some positive social impacts of tourism in a region may include recognition of the destination in the global community and improved infrastructure to either support the amount of tourists or attract more tourists. Additionally, the cultural exchange between locals and visitors is important for “ecologically sustainable sociocultural development” (Pearce, 1995). As stated by Armenski et. al (2011), “The quality of interaction between tourists and residents contributes to both tourists’ experience and perception of the visited destination and residents’ acceptance and tolerance for tourist.” (p.114-115)

On the other hand, some negative social impacts include the watering down of local culture either due to locals enhancing factors the tourists show an interest in and downplaying other aspects of their culture, or through the demonstration effect. However, it should be noted that in a study by Monterrubio et. al (2014), the locals played an active part in determining which of the tourist’s actions, habits, etc. they would adopt. This indicates that the demonstration effect is not necessarily a negative aspect, though it may be where it overrides local culture. Finally, another negative social impact of tourism is increased crime (Fuji & Mak, 1980) due to many factors, including the increase in the amount of potential victims (Biagi & Detotto, 2014).

Another impact factor is environmental. Examples include the carbon emissions related to the mode of transportation to the desired destination (plane, train, car, bus, etc), or the possible destruction of local flora and fauna or a cultural heritage site, such as Machu Picchu, as the site becomes over trafficked. It is also true, however, that tourism can increase revenue for conservation of protected areas (Dharmaratne et. al, 2000).

An overview of many of the economic impacts of tourism on a region or country are outlined by Ardahaey (2011) in “Economic Impacts of Tourism Industry.” Taxes, wages, employment, exchange rates, and foreign investment are just a few examples of where tourism might shift the economics of a region. For example, as argued by Fuller (2021):

if local entrepreneurs are given a chance, whether through governmental regulation of multinational companies or special benefits for local talent, this can help the community in a myriad of ways. Some benefits include social status for those involved in the business, job creation, and a portion of the tourism income remaining in the area’s economy. An increase in income leads to increased spending, which can have an impact on the overall wealth of the area. (p.1)

As tourists choose locally owned businesses, there is an increased benefit to the local economy because there is no cut being taken from a multinational corporation in order to distribute to international shareholders or pay the salaries or people outside of the country. Locally owned businesses ensure that a larger portion of the money stays within the country (Ardahaey, 2011).

The counter to this argument is that tourism can draw an influx of international companies to the destination which they see as an area ripe for business. This is particularly true for developing nations, where international companies may put together “all-inclusive” or “package” deals, playing into the insecurities of Western tourists and giving them an option that makes them feel safe. However, these companies are not providing much economic benefit to the local community if they use only their own services. If tourists choose to use the services of these companies over locally owned businesses, there is generally a reduction of tourist dollar impact on the local economy (Ardahaey, 2011).

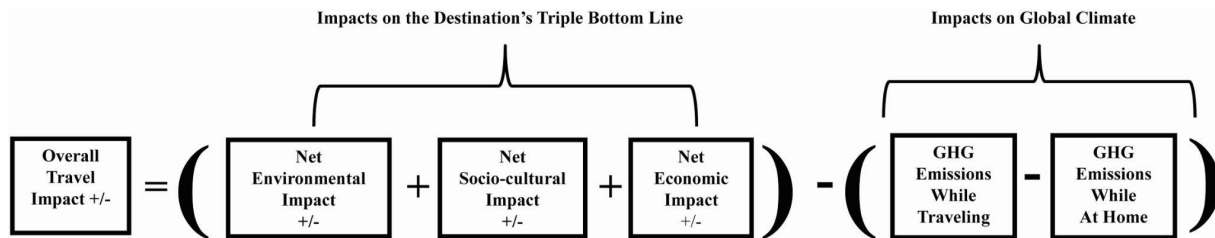
It is clear that tourism has both positive and negative impacts, but what is not always clear is whether the positives outweigh the negatives.

As Boley (2015, p. 220) states in *To Travel or Not to Travel? Both Have Implications for Sustainable Tourism*, "...statements calling for drastic reductions in travel need to be balanced with a discussion of the ramifications of traveling less on the sustainability of a destination's triple bottom line."

In order to determine net positivity, Boley (2015) suggests the following qualitative framework for individuals:

Figure 7

Model for Calculating the Overall Travel Impact of an Individual



Note. This model is the work of Boley in their article to create a framework for calculating the overall net impact of travel. From "To travel or not to travel? Both have implications for sustainable tourism," by Boley, 2015, *Tourism Planning & Development*, 12(2), 208-224.

In order to adapt this calculation for a travel company, the "Impacts on Global Climate" would need to be adjusted. This adjustment could include summing all the "GHG Emissions While Travelling" of each customer, then subtracting the sum of all customer "GHG Emissions While At Home" for each destination/product. Based on this framework, this would give us the Overall Travel Impact for each destination/product. It should be noted that this does not take into account the company's GHG emissions as a business.

In summary, Net Positive Tourism is a complex issue that is difficult to boil down into one formula, though Boley does an admirable job of it. One must consider the triple bottom line, and not focus solely on one aspect, such as environmental impact. However, it may be useful for a company to temporarily focus on one sector at a time in order to ensure their efforts are not being divided to the point of becoming useless, but rather can be concentrated for maximum impact.

B. Environmental Impact.

The secondary goal of the company, to reduce environmental impact, is directly related to SDG 12.

SDG 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

The environmental impacts of our actions are easy to dismiss when they aren't directly impacting our lives at the present moment. However, they become much more apparent when, for example, a ski holiday must be canceled due to the lack of snow in the Alps (Fidler, 2023; Foulkes, 2023).

In our subconscious, many of us are aware that global warming is a threat to our lives and those of our loved ones (Parncutt, 2019), or that the buildup of waste in our oceans is harmful to wildlife (Wabnitz & Nichols, 2010). Yet bringing sustainable consumption into the forefront seems to be a struggle for many companies and consumers. How might this be achieved by a group travel company such as FTLO Travel?

A step towards sustainable consumption is waste reduction. A project titled "URBANWASTE – Urban Strategies for Waste Management in Tourist Cities" piloted waste management tactics, three of which were examined in a study by Obersteiner et. al (2021). The three tactics were preventing food waste, enhancing waste separation and collection, and reducing single use plastics. The study showed that all of these helped to lower greenhouse gas emissions.

By raising awareness among the guests and encouraging them to make conscious decisions and adopt environmentally sustainable practices, FTLO Travel can help to create a culture of sustainability and responsible consumption, contributing to a more sustainable future for all. FTLO Travel might utilize methods such as encouraging guests to bring reusable water bottles to destinations where the water is safe to drink or by asking guests to refuse daily room service and towel changes. Other suggestions involve minimizing plastic usage, purchasing locally-made souvenirs, or using public transportation. It is important to ensure that these options are easily accessible and convenient for travelers, as convenience is often a deciding factor in behavior change (Dolan et al., 2013).

Waste consumption is not only the responsibility of the consumer. FTLO Travel can work with suppliers to ensure that the products and services provided are environmentally sustainable and reduce waste. Suppliers might switch to LED light bulbs or start using locally produced products, reducing the need for excessive packing materials from shipping as well as reducing the need to order massive quantities in bulk, much of which may be discarded. Suppliers also might be encouraged to provide recycling bins in hotel rooms.

Another way that FTLO Travel could contribute to SDG 12 is by supporting suppliers with sustainable tourism practices. This includes promoting eco-friendly accommodations, tours, and activities that have a positive impact on the environment or providing trainings or training materials to suppliers to encourage them to develop such practices. By working together, FTLO and its suppliers can create a more sustainable supply chain, ultimately reducing the environmental impact of tourism.

C. Gender Equality.

As a female owned and managed company, gender equality is important to FTLO Travel. Therefore, a future goal of FTLO Travel's is to ensure gender equality (to the best of the company's ability) through the use of suppliers that are female owned or managed, which is in line with SDG 5.

SDG 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

One example of this is the company choosing to use a Destination Management Company (DMC) that is owned and managed by a female who in turn uses her influence to provide employment opportunities for women who come from abusive homes. In the destination country, it is considered “against the norm” for a woman to be so highly involved in a business role. However, as will be outlined in this subchapter and can be seen through this example, women in business can have a positive impact not only on the business itself, but on the surrounding community.

As evidenced in a case study of 2500 Danish firms by Smith et. al (2006), “the proportion of women in top management jobs tends to have positive effects on firm performance, even after controlling for numerous characteristics of the firm and direction of causality.” (p. 569) It is important to note that “the results show that the positive performance effects are mainly related to female managers with a university degree while female CEOs who do not hold a university degree have a much smaller or insignificant effect on firm performance.” (p.588) However, results such as these outline that gender equality in business can have a positive effect on business performance.

Another area where gender equality in business has an impact is in the local community. While connections between businesses and their local community are not unique to women alone, “female entrepreneurs are more likely to emphasize social value” states Hechavarría et. al (2017, p. 252), while “male entrepreneurs are more likely to emphasize economic values.” (p.252) This of course does not mean that males solely prioritize actions that have a clear economic impact on their business, but it does imply that women are more likely to be oriented towards making an impact on their community.

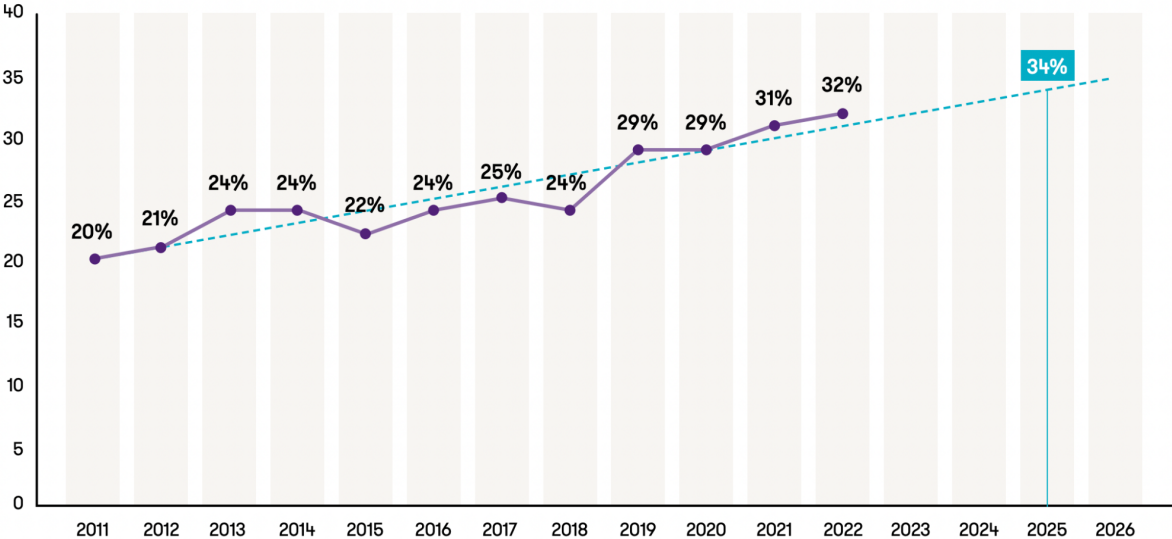
An example of this can be seen in “We have to leverage those relationships: how Black women business owners respond to limited social capital” by Jackson (2020). In this study, all of the surveyed black women business owners said that community involvement was important to them and their businesses. Many believed that the community not only supported their businesses, but that they had an impact on their community, be it through becoming an example for other black women, or providing them with services not previously available to them.

It is clear that women are underrepresented in business leadership roles, though some regions are closer than others to reaching equality (See Figure 8 and Figure 9). Much literature

is dedicated to discovering what factors contribute towards this inequality and some countries have implemented measures to combat this. Eagly and Carli (2012) argue that schemes aimed solely at women may not have the maximum effect desired, but that males also need to be an active part of the solution.

Figure 8

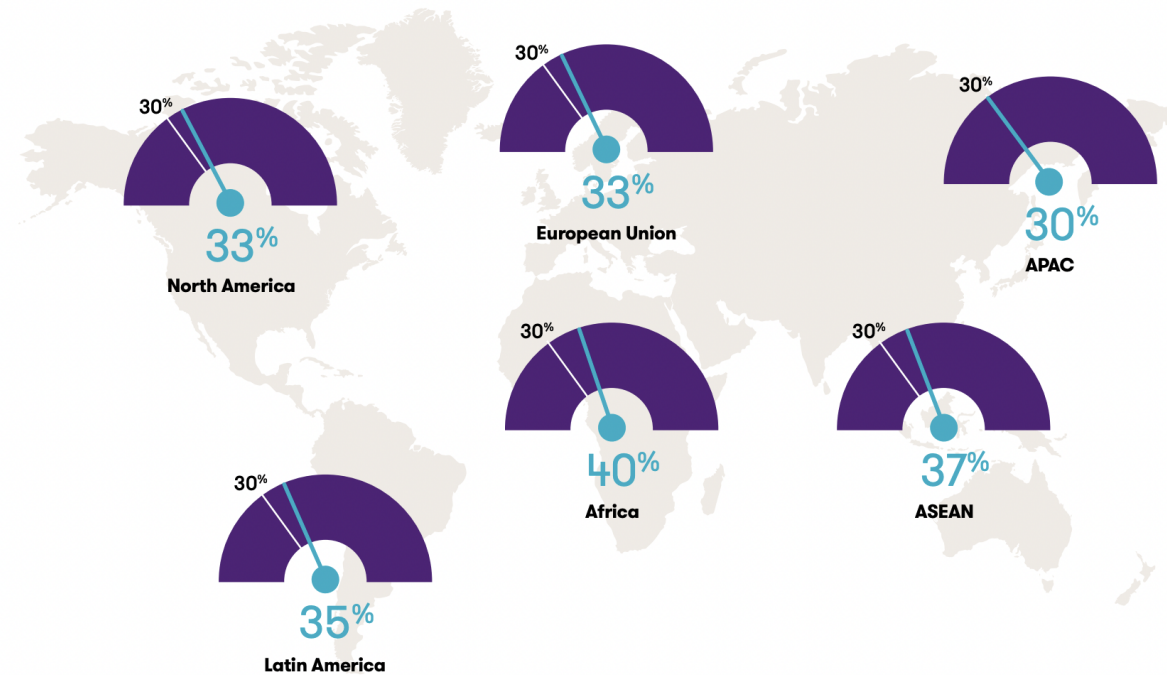
Global percentage of women in senior management roles from 2011 through 2022



Note. This model is the work of Grant Thornton in the 2022 business report to give a clear representation of how the percentage of women in senior management has increased from 2011 to 2022. From “Women in Business 2022: Opening the door to diverse talent,” n.d., *Grant Thornton*.

Figure 9

Regional percentage of women in senior management roles from 2011 through 2022



Note. This model is the work of Grant Thornton in the 2022 business report to give a clear representation of the percentage of women in senior management in 2022 across regions. The 30% line is included to represent the “tipping point,” or the percentage that indicates significant change. From “Women in Business 2022: Opening the door to diverse talent,” n.d., *Grant Thornton*.

Companies such as FTLO Travel (which has many women in leadership roles) can play their part by choosing to work with companies that have females in leadership positions.

The company can also support initiatives that promote gender equality, such as partnering with organizations that provide education and training for women in tourism or supporting programs that empower women in the destinations where FTLO Travel operates. By prioritizing gender equality both within the company and through its partnerships, FTLO Travel can contribute to a more equitable and just society.

This goal of gender equality can also extend to the experiences and activities offered by FTLO Travel. The company can aim to work with suppliers who offer activities that are inclusive and do not perpetuate gender stereotypes. For example, rather than offering a typical “spa day” activity that is often marketed towards women, the company can offer a self-care activity that is inclusive to all genders. By actively working towards gender equality, FTLO Travel can make a positive impact on the community and society as a whole.

3. Methodologies

3.1 Interviews

The methods used comprise interviews with key members of FTLO Travel and a sustainability consultant, as well as research into relevant literature. Additionally, research of current sustainability certifications and sustainability surveys was important in determining the best path forward for the company and gathering ideas for survey questions that might be used.

I conducted unstructured interviews with three people in gathering information for this paper. I spoke with the founder and CEO of FTLO Travel and Sojrn, the Executive Vice President (EVP) of Operations for both FTLO Travel and Sojrn, and the founder of ecollective.

In interviewing the company's founder and CEO, Tara Cappel, I gained valuable insight on the company's history, mission, goals, and vision. These factors heavily influence the company's focus in terms of sustainability.

In the two interviews with Cappel, the topics discussed included: which of the UN SDGs were of the greatest importance to the company, what the founder wanted the company to achieve in the next 5 years, what sustainability actions had been previously considered, the current method of determining sustainability at FTLO Travel, and what the preferred method of sustainability measurement might be based upon these items.

Carrie Angoff, the EVP of Operations at FTLO Travel and Sojrn provided a look at how certification and surveys might be utilized within the company. She walked me through the processes that would need to be put into place for each option, which helped foster an understanding of what might be feasible and what the limitations of each option might be at this point in the company's growth.

Finally, I interviewed Charlie Cotton, the founder of ecollective. Ecollective is a carbon consulting firm that helps companies measure and reduce their carbon emissions using Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Protocol. The goal of ecollective is to assist companies in becoming carbon net zero.

Cotton reiterated that the greatest sustainability impact for tour operators is through the supply chain. This guided my research in supply chain management. He also provided examples of survey questions used to discover local economic impact and gave advice on getting responses from suppliers.

3.2 Research

In addition to the interviews, research into relevant literature was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of sustainability in the travel industry. This included reviewing studies on the environmental and social impacts of tourism, sustainable tourism certifications, and best practices for sustainable supply chain management.

The literature review also explored the challenges that tour operators face when implementing sustainable practices, such as the difficulty in measuring the impact of sustainability initiatives and the cost of implementing sustainable practices. The findings from the literature review were used to inform the development of a sustainability strategy, namely the supplier sustainability survey, for FTLO Travel, as well as to identify potential barriers that the company may face when implementing these strategies.

4. Analysis & Discussion

It is clear that tour operators have influence on tourists and suppliers. This influence may be used in order to promote sustainability. Tour operators have a unique opportunity to educate their guests and raise awareness regarding the importance of sustainable tourism. Tour operators can encourage the customers to make choices that have a positive impact on the environment and local communities through a variety of outlets, such as marketing, educational materials on their website, or even the tour leaders. Tour operators can also use their influence to encourage suppliers to adopt sustainable practices, such as supporting the local community, reducing waste and emissions, and promoting fair labor practices between genders.

There are, of course, challenges to this lofty ideal. One is that tour operators need to have a deep understanding of the customers' perceptions regarding their tourism experience, not only as it relates to sustainability, but in regards to what the guests want - do they want to explore new destinations as opposed to the standard, popular locations? Why, or why not? A great deal of research is needed to begin. Tour operators must balance the demands of customers with the need for sustainability and be able to communicate the importance of sustainable practices to both customers and suppliers.

Another challenge is the resources needed. A tour operator would need the resources to market the new destination or to conduct research. Yet another challenge would be in imparting the importance of sustainability to local suppliers. Many suppliers are unlikely to want to change their habits without understanding the positive economical impacts (Khairat & Maher, 2012; Richards & Font, 2019). For this reason, it is important for tour operators to work closely with suppliers and educate them on the benefits of sustainable practices, as well as providing support in making the necessary changes.

One way a tour operator can promote sustainability is through becoming certified. There are a variety of certification options available to tour operators, such as Travelife, EarthCheck, and Green Globe, each with their own criteria and requirements to achieve certification. As can be seen through the literature above, sustainability certification can be beneficial to a company in many ways, both internally, through providing benchmarks and motivation, as well as externally, for example in the marketing potential. Additionally, it can help push for a standard of

becoming certified in the tourism industry and promote awareness of sustainability issues in customers. When more and more tour operators become certified, it can lead to a more sustainable and responsible tourism industry overall.

There are also many drawbacks, such as the financial investment and the time it takes to implement the certification system. Additionally, it is important to choose the correct certification program, as they are not all held to the same standards, and therefore may not produce the desired benefits. Another important note is that certification does not necessarily mean that the tour operator is truly sustainable. Some companies may simply meet the minimum requirements for certification without truly making significant efforts to become more sustainable.

FTLO Travel wants to become B Corp certified, though it is not a major priority at the moment. However, the strongest argument against choosing to begin sustainability reporting with B Corp certification is in fact none of the aforementioned items, but rather that the largest impact upon sustainability comes from our supply chain (Schwarz et. al, 2009), and not the company as an entity.

Sustainability certification can be extremely useful. However, the B Corp certification program that FTLO Travel would like to be a part of shows the actions a company itself is making to be sustainable - not that of its products. As a remote company whose product is an experience, not a tangible item, our company impact is not as great as that of our products. Overall, though certification could be a good step for FTLO in the future, it is not where we will make the largest impact. The greatest impact will be made when we improve our products.

Therefore, it is important to first focus on the company's supply chain management before pursuing certification programs. FTLO Travel has chosen to focus on utilizing a sustainability survey in order to create benchmarks and work on furthering relationships with suppliers and promoting sustainable practices within the supply chain. This approach aligns with the advice given by sustainability consultant Charlie Cotton to focus on the supply chain as the greatest impact for tour operators in terms of sustainability.

The framework proposed by Schwarz et. al (2009) indicates that internal surveys are a good way to get a baseline assessment of suppliers. In this way, the tour operator is able to control which questions are asked, and can focus on the areas of sustainability that are most

important to the company and its vision. The tour operator will be able to create a ranking system that allows it to see which products need the most changes and will allow it to provide this insight directly to our suppliers, with whom the tour operator can work together to make improvements. This approach encourages suppliers to be more transparent about their practices and accountable for their impact on the environment and local communities.

Schwarz et. al's (2009) SSCM framework gives clear instructions on how to organize an assessment of suppliers:

Due to the large number of suppliers in different destinations, assessments will need to be prioritised according to either key impacts, destinations, product or supplier types, and will need to be gradually phased into the business. Accommodation and excursion providers are generally addressed first, in part because accommodation is the key to all packages and because it is more tangible and easier to measure. (p. 308)

Therefore, the survey created for FTLO Travel's supplier sustainability assessment will focus on the SDGs relevant to the company's mission and values and begin with key impact areas, including accommodations and transport providers.

The assessment will be created with questions to determine the suppliers' impact on the triple bottom line - the local economy, the local community, and the environment. Additionally questions will be included that give insight into the gender equality practices of the suppliers.

The results will be used to determine the baseline of supplier sustainability and will be referenced as improvements are made in order to track progress. The accommodations and transport providers with the lowest scores will be prioritized. The results can then be input into Boley's calculation for net positive tourism (Figure 2) in order to determine the overall impact FTLO Travel has upon a specific destination.

Some limitations include the difficulty in receiving survey responses from suppliers, as well as the possibility of false reporting. If the suppliers do not recognize the benefit of sustainability reporting, it may be challenging to collect completed surveys. On the other hand, some suppliers may falsify their answers if they believe that their responses may lead to a decrease in business for being considered "not sustainable enough."

In order to combat these limitations, FTLO Travel will attempt to educate suppliers on the importance of sustainability, as well as impart upon the suppliers that survey responses will be used to gather data and help suppliers improve, rather than to “weed out” unsuitable suppliers.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, tour operators have an opportunity to further sustainable tourism through educating their guests and suppliers and raising their awareness on the importance of sustainable practices.

One way to do so is to encourage guests to make choices that have a positive impact on the environment and local communities. Another is to work with suppliers to adopt sustainable practices or modify their current methods. Additionally, tour operators might choose to become certified in order to raise awareness of sustainability, set a standard for the industry, or to have a standard to which to hold themselves accountable, ensuring they meet specific benchmarks. Tour operators may face challenges such as balancing the demands of customers with sustainability, educating local suppliers on the benefits of sustainable practices, or choosing the right certification program.

It is important for tour operators to work closely with suppliers to create sustainable supply chains. One effective way to do this is by conducting a supplier sustainability assessment using a framework such as the one proposed by Schwarz et al. (2009). This assessment can provide a baseline for supplier sustainability and enable tour operators to track progress and work towards a more sustainable tourism industry overall. It may be difficult to convince suppliers to respond to the surveys due to a lack of understanding the importance of the survey or a fear of losing business due to incorrect answers. In a similar vein, some suppliers may provide incorrect information in order to appear as though they are performing better than they are. It may be helpful to educate suppliers on the impact they can have upon sustainability, as well as the company's vision as it relates to sustainability. Additionally, strong supplier relationships may prove helpful in convincing suppliers to send in complete, truthful responses to the survey.

Through this internship project, valuable insights were gained into the sustainability practices of FTLO Travel & Sojrn, a travel company that is committed to sustainability and achieving the UN SDGs.. It was concluded that FTLO Travel can best quantify its sustainability actions through a supplier sustainability survey, allowing the company to work towards its sustainability goals of net positive tourism, reducing environmental impact, and promoting

gender equality. Overall, this internship provided a unique opportunity to contribute to a company making a positive impact on the world and learn about sustainable tourism practices.

6. Recommendations

There were, of course, some limitations of the internship and research. As FTLO Travel is still a small company, the emphasis during much of my internship was on rapid growth, while continuing to provide a high level of service. This meant that there was not as much time and resources as would have been preferable in order to develop sample surveys or discuss the ideas and research with suppliers.

Were I to have had more time and resources, I would have conducted interviews with a sampling of FTLO Travel's current suppliers to gain a greater understanding of the base understanding of sustainability the suppliers already have, as well as their motivation in making steps towards more sustainable actions. I also would have created a sample survey to send out to a sample of suppliers to help determine the expected response rate and to help inform the survey questions.

More research is recommended to determine which factors impact the triple bottom line in order to create the survey for FTLO Travel's suppliers, as well as to properly use Boley's calculation. Additionally, it should be considered which GHG emissions are to be used, whether it be that of the company or of the individuals traveling.

Boley's calculation (Figure 1) provides a good visual reminder of the factors at play when determining net positive/negative tourism, but utilizing the calculation practically is challenging, as many of the items, such as "Net Socio-Cultural Impact +/-" are difficult to quantify. This could prove an interesting area of research to help further understand the impact of tour operators.

Other recommended areas of research might include investigating the effectiveness of different sustainability certification programs in promoting sustainable tourism practices among tour operators and their suppliers or examining the impact of tour operators' sustainability efforts on local communities, particularly in terms of socio-economic development and cultural preservation.

These research areas can provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of promoting sustainable tourism practices and achieving the UN SDGs, and can

help tour operators, policymakers, and other stakeholders make informed decisions to create a more sustainable tourism industry.

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