SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING FOR INLAND PORT MANAGING BODIES: A STAKEHOLDER-BASED VIEW ON MATERIALITY

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This paper provides insight on the usage of sustainability reports as tools utilized by port management officials. More specifically, this research aims to illustrate what expectations port management bodies have for effective sustainability reports. This research can be of use to policymakers as it illustrates which areas of sustainability are the most salient for port decision makers.

APPROACH:

The port of Brussels was used as a case study as it incorporates various internal and external stakeholders due to its proximity to residential areas while also being a major transport node in European trade. Data was collected from a survey distributed to relevant three types of stakeholders (personnel, clients, and the port-adjacent society) associated with the port.

MAIN FINDINGS:

- When comparing the three aspects of triple-bottom-line sustainability (namely environmental, economic, and social sustainability), it is found that stakeholders do not value all three criteria evenly.
  - Environmental sustainability is seen by stakeholders as the most critical aspect of sustainability and ought to take up roughly 50% of a sustainability report according to all three of the stakeholder groups. Port clients value the economic sustainability of a port second, while port personnel and the broader society place more emphasis on the social dimensions of sustainability reporting
- Port management bodies are more likely to be willing to expand the boundaries of what is examined in sustainability reports when the new potential material is likely to reveal positive outcomes, but is resistant to any initiatives that could lead to negative publications.
- The research of this paper illustrates the need for sector specific frameworks of sustainability reporting in the shipping industry to uphold minimum levels of compliance.
- While the inclusion of more sustainability information is theoretically a net positive for reporting, there lies a threshold where an excess of information for stakeholders could result in a cognitive overload and result in less meaningful action. Inclusion should focus on key sustainability initiatives and balance quantity with quality based on the size and complexity of the port in question to achieve maximum results.