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ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS AND CERTIFICATION
PROGRAMMES – THE INSTRUMENTS OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

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GRATITUDE

I would like to thank all those people who participated in my stay in Greece and helped to make it nice and unforgettable. I am very happy that I won Erasmus competition and had a great opportunity to spend 5 months in such a beautiful country like Greece.

Of course there were some difficulties that everyone can face while living in a foreign country, but nevertheless, for me it was a great experience. I came during a tensed period connected with reforms of higher education; there were strikes, universities were closed for some period and of course, it led to some complexities with studies. But despite this hard situation atmosphere in Piraeus University was very kind, warm and hospitable. The professors, coordinators and all other people I met here were open-hearted, very nice in communication and every time ready to help. I never felt stressed or rejected, that is especially important for a foreign student. I remember only humanity, understanding and just kind hearts and smiles of the people I communicated in university.

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During my stay here I got acquainted with the magnificent nature of such a various, great ancient monuments and spirit of the Greek civilization, culture and way of life of a modern Greece. Greece is not only picturesque sunny country, full of beautiful places and unforgettable views but also a country with a great amount of saint places: monasteries, churches, relics of Saints. For me, as for an orthodox Christian, it was very important that I had an opportunity to visit and worship some of them. Besides, I am pleased for my mother that she came here to refresh her strengths during the difficult period at her work. She was full of impressions after 10 days staying in Greece and fell in love with this country...

It is hard to mention all what I have got here. I only know that I will be missing this precious country and hope that some when I will visit it again... I will never forget this period of my life and the people which I met here, and I say THANK YOU for everything!

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This work mainly focuses on the voluntary initiatives, such as environmental management systems and tourism certification schemes, which are implemented by the tourism businesses in order to contribute to sustainable tourism. The conception of sustainable tourism, policies and initiatives to support it are also discussed. The thesis provides an objective analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of these voluntary initiatives identifying similarities and differences among them, finding out the factors that make them effective and successful in terms of sustainable tourism development and also highlighting their drawbacks.

It was found, that it is entirely reasonable to have doubts about environmental management systems and certification schemes. Environmental management systems and a lot of certification programmes are essentially the formal conformance standards. It means they are concerned with whether an organisation's management procedures are consistent with its environmental policy and are not concerned with performance issues such as whether such systems actually protect the environment. The problem is that targets that imply sustainability may be difficult to define – no one has yet come up with a satisfactory methodology for defining tourism carrying capacity. That's why performance is clearly much harder to encompass than process.

Despite several drawbacks of environmental management systems and tourism certification programmes they have made significant progress over the last decade and have the potential to contribute towards the achievement of sustainable tourism. They may have a useful function in getting the managers to focus on the environmental impacts their organizations are making, and in the process of gaining certification actually produce some tangible reduction in pollution.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the world's largest and important industries and one of its fastest growing economic sectors [28]. It has a multitude of impacts, both positive and negative, on people's lives and on the environment. Tourism is changing rapidly as nature, heritage, and recreational destinations become more important, and as conventional tourism is forced to meet tougher environmental requirements. This presents a challenge to government and private enterprise to develop new approaches to the tourism market. Successful tourism must benefit local populations economically and culturally to give them incentives to protect the natural resources which create the attraction [23].

Tourism must contribute to growth and environmental protection and further social progress. That's why the development of tourism must be sustainable. It means such a tourism development which avoids damage to the environment, economy and cultures of the locations where it takes place. The aim of sustainable tourism is to ensure that development is a positive experience for local people, tourism companies and tourists themselves.

The World Tourism Organization claimed that 2007 should be a critical year to consolidate tourism as a key agent in the fight against poverty and a primary tool for sustainable development [26].

Sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism segments. Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability [24].

The need for greater sustainability in tourism services and activities is already widely recognized at all levels. There are many and varied planning and development methodologies, as well as tourism management techniques that make it possible to attain higher levels of sustainability and to increase them gradually. Such methodologies and techniques can be complemented by voluntary certification systems for tourism services and the companies that provide them, which began appearing on the international tourism market in 1990 and have proliferated over the past few years.

A voluntary initiative is any action taken by a company, industry, government or third party that goes further than existing environmental laws and regulations. Such self-regulatory techniques (voluntary agreements, programmes, standards and voluntary codes of conduct, guidelines, principles, etc.) are likely to be more effective than statutory regulation in addressing

specific environmental issues because they are flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances. Also, the tourism industry is more likely to take responsibility and ownership for any self regulatory approach [27].

A range of developments over the last decade illustrate that the tourism industry is increasingly aware of and willing to respond to its own impacts and to communicate the details of its environmental programmes to consumers and other stakeholders.

The *object* of this thesis is Environmental Management Systems (EMS) and Tourism Certification Schemes as they are mostly often used as the voluntary instruments for sustainable tourism. Despite several drawbacks of environmental management systems and tourism certification programmes they have made significant progress over the last decade and have the potential to contribute towards the achievement of sustainable tourism.

The *purpose* of the thesis is to provide an objective analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of these voluntary initiatives (EMS and certification) identifying similarities and differences among them, finding out the factors that make them effective and successful in terms of sustainable tourism development and also highlighting their drawbacks.

More specifically, it aims to:

- ü explain what the sustainable tourism is and briefly describe the policies and initiatives for sustainable tourism in European Union;
- ü explain what Environmental Management Systems and tourism certification are, how they work and bring about sustainable tourism;
- ü reveal the shortcomings of voluntary initiatives which are discussed and offer constructive criticism on this;
- ü give the examples and describe some of existing tourism certification programmes and VISIT organisation – joint initiative and common platform for eco-labels.

The thesis consists of four sections. The first describes the idea of sustainable tourism, which derives from the concept of sustainable development, gives key issues of voluntary initiatives for its achievement. The second gives information about the policies, strategies and initiatives for sustainable tourism in Europe. The third part – the biggest one - is devoted to environmental management systems and certification programs, and the last one is dedicated to variety of tourism certification schemes and the organization of Voluntary Initiative for Sustainability in Tourism.

Different sources of information were used to write this paper: issues, reports and case studies etc. which were obtained in the Data Bases www.sciencedirect.com, publications and internet. The methods of writing this work are: logical analysis, interpretation and comparison of the observed materials and visualization of empirical data.

I. SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND THE INSTRUMENTS FOR CONTRIBUTION TO IT

In the last decades the growth of environmental concern and policies has encouraged the increase in environmentally friendly products and services [23]. The terms “sustainability” and “sustainable tourism” are now prevalent in the literature and in most development programmes, even though there is much confusion about their meaning and denotation.

1.1. From Sustainable Development to Sustainable Tourism

The industry of tourism plays an important role in the environmental problems. This industry is not only profitable for countries but produces significant impacts on natural resources, pollution and social systems. Thus the definition of sustainable tourism has developed during the last years.

The “Sustainable Tourism” concept derives from the concept of “sustainable development” applied to the tourism sector [7].

Sustainable development, thus, implies a balanced relationship among human beings economic development and environment. It means to integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions at the same level of consideration.

Sustainable development for Europe has been defined in the EU Strategy for Sustainable Development in response to the global Agenda 21: ‘Sustainable development offers the European Union a positive long-term vision of a society that is more just, and which promises a cleaner, safer, healthier environment - a society which delivers a better quality of life for us, for our children and for our grandchildren. Achieving this in practice requires that economic growth supports social progress and respects the environment, that social policy underpins economic performance, and that environmental policy is cost-effective.’ [7].

Sustainable tourism is said to be a type of tourism that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future. Tourism’s relationship with the environment is complex. It involves many activities that can have adverse environmental effects. Many of these impacts are linked with the construction of general infrastructure such as roads and airports, and of tourism facilities, including resorts, hotels, restaurants, shops, golf courses and marinas. The negative impacts of tourism development can gradually destroy the environmental resources on which it depends. On the other hand, tourism

has the potential to create beneficial effects on the environment by contributing to environmental protection and conservation.

Sustainable tourism is about refocusing and re-adapting. A balance must be found between limits and usage so that continuous changing, monitoring and planning ensure that tourism can be managed. This requires thinking long-term (10, 20+ years) and realizing that change is often cumulative, gradual and irreversible [25].

Sustainable tourism in its purest sense is an industry which attempts to make a low impact on the environment and local culture, while helping to generate income, employment, and the conservation of local ecosystems. It is responsible tourism which is both ecologically and culturally sensitive [23].

Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary [28].

Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them [28].

There are many definitions and explanations of the sustainable tourism and also there is much confusion about its meaning and denotation.

The most quoted definition of “sustainable tourism” is given by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), World Tourism Organisation (WTO) and Earth Council in the 1996 Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Sector. “Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of the present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing the opportunity for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled, while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems” [7].

In general, key point is that the limits of the natural, economic, social and cultural base resources define sustainability of tourism. All types of tourism must be sustainable, whether they are in natural areas or not [20]. The sustainable development of tourism involves social responsibility, a strong commitment to nature and to the integration of local communities in any tourist operation or development, and in particular an equal sharing of the economic benefits. This also means that it encompasses broader dimensions such as spatial planning, territorial cohesion and transport, where the latter is used for tourism purposes [7].

1.2. Voluntary Initiatives for achievement of Sustainable Tourism

However, how can sustainable tourism be achieved? Tourism is an activity involving a wide variety of stakeholders at various levels. Dialogue and partnership amongst stakeholders and with the public authorities is necessary in order to promote the harmonious and sustainable development of tourism. The European Union has no direct competence in tourism - in most cases tourism is a local issue.

However, there are several strategic objectives for implementing the sustainability of the European tourism. An increasing number of tourism businesses have been affected by the changing nature of environmental regulations, particularly the shift to the principle of 'pollution prevention' rather than 'polluter pays'. Where regulations previously primarily tackled large-scale polluters once pollution had occurred, the new generation of financial and regulatory tools such as the European landfill tax on waste disposal, increase the costs of poor environmental practices for all businesses regardless of type and size. The Climate Change Levy in the UK, for example, could increase energy costs for hospitality establishments by up to 15%. Many businesses have also become increasingly aware that environmental management programmes can cut utility costs by up to 25% [21].

A voluntary initiative is any action taken by a company, industry, government or third party that goes further than existing environmental laws and regulations. It is a generic term used to describe voluntary agreements, programmes, standards and voluntary codes of conduct, guidelines, principles, etc., adopted by a company, industry, government or third party. Such self-regulatory techniques are likely to be more effective than statutory regulation in addressing specific environmental issues because they are flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances. Also, the tourism industry is more likely to take responsibility and ownership for any self-regulatory approach [27].

Voluntary initiatives complement but do not replace legislation, regulations, economic measures, information, and other policy tools. Key Elements of Voluntary Initiatives include:

- *commitment*: the political will to achieve effective implementation is required;
- *content*: the goal or target must be meaningful;
- *co-operation*: full involvement of stakeholders in preparation of the initiative is needed;
- *checking*: monitoring of implementation and of results is essential;
- *communication*: reporting to the public on results, as well as listening to feedback, is necessary.

Voluntary Initiatives have a range of benefits. They are more flexible than regulations and may be better suited to rapidly changing or complex situations. They also improve dialogue and trust between business, government and public and provide opportunities for innovation and flexibility in meeting environmental goals [27].

There are several voluntary instruments, which help firms to contribute to sustainable development (Appendix 1 gives brief information about them). This thesis focuses on the main of them (EMS and certification programmes) which are introduced by companies in order to achieve sustainable tourism principles (and also to reduce the costs).

Environmental Management Systems are voluntary instruments of preventative environmental protection with the aim of systematically monitoring and avoiding environmental impact. The standards most commonly used in Europe are the globally valid ISO 14001 environmental standard and the EU EMAS¹ directive. Both standards oblige certified companies to comply with all environmentally-relevant legislation. In addition, EMAS also requires the elaboration of an environmental declaration. Depending on the type of environmental standard that is applied, each operational unit is also required to produce a separate environmental manual and environmental programme. The manual specifies a special organisation structure and lays down the associated responsibility of the staff, the environmental programme used to achieve the environmental objectives, and the measures required. An independent expert regularly checks compliance with all of the regulations, and the implementation of the environmental manual and the environmental programme. Companies only gain certification if they fulfil each and every specification [22].

Companies that introduce Environmental Management Systems are enabled to make a positive contribution to systematic environmental protection, resource conservation and the avoidance of environmental damage.

In the tourism sector, **certification schemes** can also play an important role in bringing about more sustainable tourism because they provide participating companies with an action plan for improvement. Certification is, however, only one of a suite of tools required to make tourism sustainable. Effective and credible schemes need to be complemented by education, regulation and comprehensive land use planning.

¹ The Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) is the EU voluntary instrument which acknowledges organisations that improve their environmental performance on a continuous basis. EMAS registered organisations are legally compliant, run an environment management system and report on their environmental performance through the publication of an independently verified environmental statement. They are recognised by the EMAS logo, which guarantees the reliability of the information provided.

Tourism certification is provided by a wide range of initiatives that provide a marketable logo to companies that exceed (or claim to exceed) a specific standard. The logo allows businesses to demonstrate their environmental credentials. In theory, this allows consumers to identify companies whose operations are environmentally responsible or even sustainable. Certification is therefore “process” rather than “performance” based. This means a certified company has developed an environmental policy and set up an environmental management system, but may still be operating in an environmentally damaging manner. A company that is relatively more environmentally damaging than another that has not undertaken the programme may obtain certification and the logo. In addition, a large tour operator may be certified and use the logo on the basis of its head office operation, while its actual tours remain unchanged [21].

A good certification programmes should require participants to meet or exceed benchmark performance criteria prior to certification and use of a logo, and be underpinned by third party auditing and verification.

It is considered, that the success of schemes and EMS in terms of take up, depends upon consumer demand for sustainable tourism. This provides the tourism industry with a powerful market-driven incentive to demonstrate improved performance through certification. However, in some literature it is claimed that achieving the sustainable tourism does not require a marked interest from consumers. Some companies have suggested that they will only take steps to achieve sustainable tourism if they recognize a clear 'market demand' for holidays that are overtly 'green' or 'environmentally friendly'. However, it was indicated that few tourists want holidays that are 'green' within the mass tourism market. It may not be profitable or sustainable to encourage market demand for 'green' tourism as this demand may not occur, and also may not lead to sustainable tourism. Indeed, take up across the tourism sector has been slow and tourism certification has not matched the success achieved by schemes such as the *Forest Stewardship Council* in the forestry sector. One reason for this has been the apparent lack of concern for issues of sustainability in choice of holidays by consumers, despite recent research that indicates a growing willingness to pay for a more sustainable product. Currently, the strongest determining factors are price, health and safety.

Despite these drawbacks, Environmental Management Systems and tourism certification programmes have made significant progress over the last decade and have the potential to contribute towards the achievement of sustainable tourism. A number of areas, however, require development to improve both the credibility and effectiveness of tourism certification [21]. There is a clear need, therefore, for an analysis of the range of existing certification programmes as a first step to improving both credibility and comparability.

Development of voluntary recognition schemes for tourism was considered by The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) ‘the best way of ensuring long-term commitments and improvements’, in addition to economic and regulatory instruments [2]. It helps tourists choose sustainable holidays, on one hand, and, on the other, encourage the industry to adopt more sustainable practices.

This thesis explains what the Environmental Management Systems and Tourism Certification Programmes are, how they work, deal with each other and bring about sustainable tourism. It covers also the current situation and policy of Sustainable Tourism (mostly in EU), gives key characteristics of the variety of tourism certification programmes and VISIT organisation.

ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΠΕΙΡΑΙΑ

II. POLICIES FOR THE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN EU AND THE EXAMPLES OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Several attempts have been developed to define general principles, goals and objectives to support the process for implementing the sustainability of tourism in European Union. How these objectives are organized into sustainable development strategies for tourism, promoting economic growth without jeopardizing the rich natural and cultural heritage attracting tourists, is a common challenge faced by all European regions [7]. Tourism is an activity involving a wide variety of stakeholders at various levels. Dialogue and partnership amongst stakeholders and with the public authorities is necessary in order to promote the harmonious and sustainable development of tourism.

2.1. Recent Developments of Sustainable Tourism Policies

There is no coherent overall strategy for tourism in the European Union, yet. Encompassing a wide range of activities horizontally linked to several other sectors, tourism is currently regulated by a number of Community policies and programmes that either include a tourism dimension or have a significant impact on tourism related activities [7]. Taking into account only those policies most directly linked to the sustainable development of the tourism sector, some main recent progresses at international and European Union level are presented hereafter.

The Earth Summit held in Johannesburg in 2002 targeted tourism as a priority policy area to achieve sustainable development. Furthermore, the designation of 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism and the World Ecotourism Summit (2002) reinforced the effort to put the sustainable development of tourism on the international scene.

Within the European Union, the European Council of Cardiff asked in 1998 for the outlining of strategies aimed at the integration of environmental issues into specific sectoral policies, among which tourism. This request was drawn from EU policy documents such as the Fifth Environmental Action Programme that defines transport and tourism as the main sectors having an impact on the environment.

The EU Sustainable Development Strategy – that is the European level response to the global Agenda 21 – in 2001, and the Sixth Environmental Action Programme in 2002,

highlighted the question of natural areas' carrying capacity with regard to tourism development [7].

Several Directives related to the environment are relevant to tourism, among which Natura 2000, the Water Framework Directive, and the EU Integrated Coastal Management Zones Strategy.

The European Commission has put tourism on the policy agenda only recently, tourism development being considered primarily a matter of private company management. However, national, regional and local authorities were already implementing significant forms of control and support on tourism in areas such as tax policy, transport and telecommunications infrastructures, regional development, protection of the environment, training of personnel and promotion of tourism attractions and businesses. In 1999 the European Council recognized the significant economic role of the European Tourism Industry as well as the need to improve its competitiveness on the basis of balanced and sustainable development and environmental protection. In 2000 the European Commission set up five EU Working Groups on central topics (information, training, quality, sustainability, new technologies) which reached concrete conclusions, among which the decision of formulating a Community Agenda 21 for Tourism. The Agenda 21 for Tourism programme include an integrated evaluation of tourism activity throughout the EU, the development of an integration strategy for the sector, and the elaboration of harmonized indicators of sustainable development for tourism. It is specified that the preparation of a final document will be finalized by 2007. To tackle the preparation of this document the Commission launched a Tourism Sustainability Group in February 2005, that includes representatives from various stakeholder categories involved in tourism and sustainable development, local, regional and national authorities, tourism companies, trade unions and civil society organizations [7].

Tourism is covered in the Mediterranean area by the Barcelona Convention and the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) and supported by the MEDA programme. The Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development has adopted some recommendations and proposals for action on tourism and sustainable development [7]. Besides, the European Environment Agency has worked on the set up of a reporting mechanism on environmental and tourism issues at pan-European level. It was also developed a core set of sustainable tourism indicators that are supposed to be further elaborated and implemented by the individual Member States.

In 1995, with the World Charter on Sustainable Tourism the key concepts of sustainable tourism were defined. Again in 1995, The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) initiated the first Environmental Code of Conduct for Tourism followed by some Draft Principles for the Implementation of Sustainable Tourism in 1998. The most recent

developments in 2002 ended up with the launching of the Tour-Operators Initiative and the coordination of the Global Reporting Initiative (focusing on large enterprises), aiming to support tourism companies and tour-operators to implement concrete actions, develop indicators and monitoring systems to tackle the sustainability goals.

Although much has been done to support the sustainability of tourism, these efforts remain relatively small in size, sparse, not coordinated and not fully integrated to respond to the sustainability requirements. As a consequence, no real change can be noted in the unsustainable pattern of tourism consumption and production [7].

To respond to modern challenges while making the best use of available resources and taking advantage of all possible synergies the Commission proposed a renewed European tourism policy. The main aim of this policy is *to improve the competitiveness of the European tourism industry and create more and better jobs through the sustainable growth of tourism in Europe and globally*. This policy will be implemented in close partnership with Member States' authorities and the stakeholders in the tourism industry. The renewed tourism policy, proposed by the Commission in 2006, aims to help the industry meet a number of challenges while promoting overall competitiveness. Those challenges include facing up to Europe's ageing population; growing external competition, consumer demands for more specialised tourism, and the need to develop more sustainable and environmentally friendly practices. The revised policy seeks to produce more and better jobs by nurturing conditions that will help tourism grow strongly in the coming years [6].

However, the necessary information and incentive to undertake proper initiatives at the local and regional level are still lacking. High level policy formulations are often too complex and unclear and the burden of their implications seems a priori too heavy for local and regional managers to move in such a direction, paralyzing any further possible action [7]. Although the concept of a successful industry is now linked to ecological and social management, more efforts are needed to move towards a broader, integrated and effective approach. Hence, the practice remains far from theory. Given the great potentials and risks of European tourism, it is evident that tourism development policies deserve greater political attention at both European, national and local level.

2.2. Initiatives to Support the Development of Sustainable Tourism in European Union

The old Member States have several examples of sustainable initiatives in the tourism sector, mainly because these countries have been experiencing tourism and its pressures for a long time. France, Spain and the United Kingdom are well ahead in developing environmental or sustainable development indicators for tourism at national level. Denmark, the Flanders region, France, the Netherlands and Switzerland have a chapter dedicated to Tourism in their State of the Environment report [7]. At local and regional level, some tourist destinations are also developing environmental indicators for tourism such as Spain, Italy, France, and also Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany and Sweden.

Among the new Member States there are valuable initiatives, mainly related to tourism in natural protected areas, as in the case of Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. The Protected Area Network Parks initiative developed by Wild World Fund aims to gather European natural parks into a certification scheme ensuring sustainable tourism practices.

The Mediterranean countries are implementing some tourism policies within spatial planning regulations, Spain playing the leading role. France is currently developing a National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism that takes into account the governance of the tourism administrations. Sweden has already developed an Agenda 21 for Tourism mainly focusing on the industry [7]. Usually, the Northern and Central European countries are more oriented towards market-based strategies addressed to the tourism industry and promoting voluntary agreements such as Environmental Management Systems (EMAS and ISO 14001) and eco-labels (certification schemes).

Eco-labelling has indeed shown some potential to encourage an ecologically sensitive tourist industry, contributing to increase public awareness and a more responsible behavior not limited to tourism activities. In 2000, 46 tourism products were awarded eco-labels, most being related to hotels and campsites. In 2004, there were 253 tourism products in the EU 25 area, indicating an impressive growth in eco-labelling [7].

However, the numerous eco-labels with their own criteria for evaluation do not help the consumers to clearly distinguish among all products. As a consequence their use remains limited and the impact is still difficult to assess.

In 2003, the creation of an EU Eco-Label Award Scheme for tourism was launched with the aim of improving the credibility of the labeled products and services. This will also facilitate the evaluation of the penetration rate and the effects of tourism eco-labels in the future.

The Blue Flag initiative is a good example of profitable investment by the destinations in the labeling campaigns. The popularity of the Blue Flag has in fact been increasing rapidly among tourists, creating a positive competition among the ‘water’ destinations towards quality tourism [7]. The label communicates a clear message to the tourists and destinations managers recognize the advantage of the label and foster its adoption. The criteria for beaches and marinas to be awarded a blue flag cover four areas: water quality; environmental management; safety; services and facilities; environmental education and information [1]. In this year, 3312 Blue Flags were attributed to beaches and marinas of the 37 countries of the world (mostly European). The top country is Spain with 576 Blue Flags followed by Greece with 439. (Fig. 1).

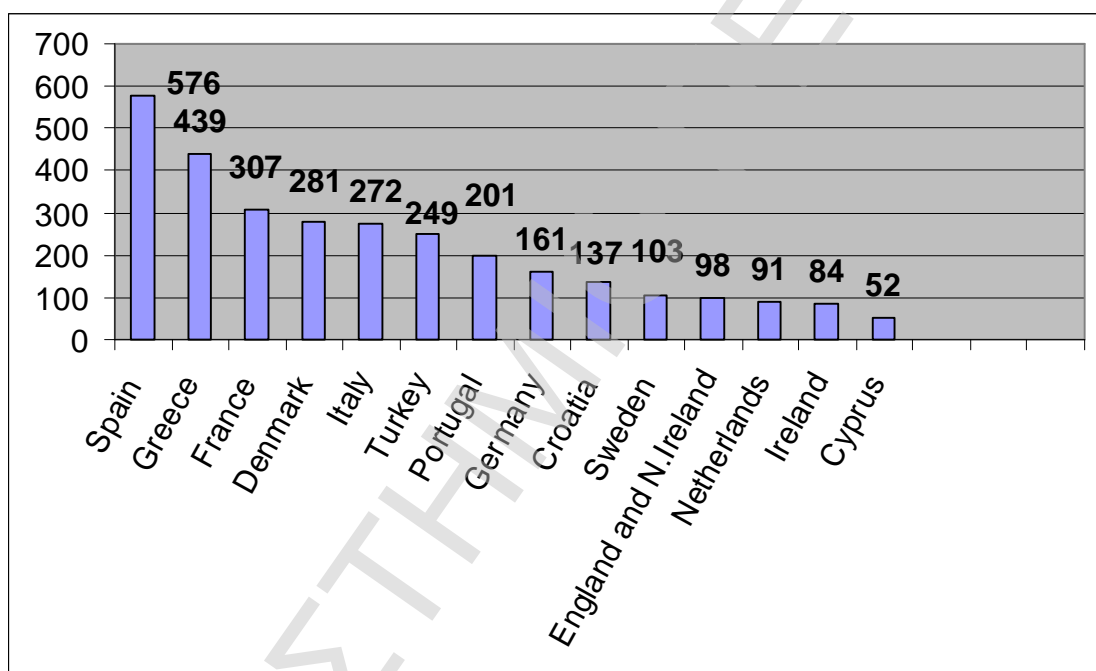


Fig. 1. Blue Flags in 2007 [1].

III. VOLUNTARY INITIATIVES OF THE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Over the last decade, the international travel and tourism industry has been one of the prime proponents of the value of voluntary initiatives in reducing the negative and enhancing the positive impacts associated with its own activities [27]. In response, a wide range of voluntary initiatives has emerged from the sector.

3.1. Environmental Management Systems

Leading companies have argued that it is in their own interests to protect the environment and cultures on which they depend. Trade associations have also argued that it is difficult, if not impossible, to regulate the industry effectively when it is concerned predominantly with the movement of people rather than the production of goods. With the exception of a few transport providers, large-scale hotels and visitor attractions, impacts from the industry are diverse and emanate from a very large number of small businesses or from individual visitors. It is argued, therefore, that programmes that modify the practices of individuals have more potential to influence change than specific regulations targeting the activities of large businesses [14].

Standardized Environmental Management Systems (EMS) were developed in the 1980-1990s when many companies demanded new management tools to be able to follow environmental legislation and to approach sustainable development. Hence, EMS set off in a corporate context and existing theories therefore, mostly relate to trade and industry. Today, EMS has been incorporated in many public organizations [13].

Beginning with the mid-1990s, ISO 14001 and EMAS as the basis for EMS became very much in vogue as the tool for demonstrating environmental responsibility in the global marketplace. Consultants jumped on ISO and EMAS as the next opportunity in a mature market no longer driven by regulatory dynamics. There was a general belief that the approach would lead to environmental self-regulation by business organizations, and lighten the heavy hand of government that controlled by regulation. As a result, both the European and the international standard were met with some enthusiasm [32]. Whether this initial enthusiasm was justified is the subject of this paper.

The number of EMS (let's take ISO 14001 certificates) increase rapidly (Table 1) but they are unevenly distributed.

In the year 2005 85.17 per cent the world's ISO 14001 certifications were concentrated in Europe and the Far East (Table 1). Only 6.66 per cent were in Africa, West Asia, Central and South America. Many developing countries did not have any certifications. There are also marked differences within continents. In December 2002, Sweden had 2,730 ISO 14001 certifications (i.e. 307 per million inhabitants). Greece had 72 certifications (i.e. 6.8 per million inhabitants). European states, which are not EU members, tend to have low certification rates. In December 2002, Belarus, Bosnia and Macedonia had one each.

Table 1. Number of ISO 14001 certificates in the world during 2001-2005 yy [12].

| | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 |
|---------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| Africa/Western Asia | 924 | 1357 | 2002 | 3014 | 3993 |
| Central and South America | 681 | 1418 | 1691 | 2955 | 3411 |
| North America | 2700 | 4053 | 5233 | 6743 | 7119 |
| Europe | 17941 | 23305 | 30918 | 39278 | 47837 |
| Far East | 12796 | 17744 | 23747 | 35855 | 46844 |
| Australia/New Zealand | 1422 | 1563 | 1405 | 2092 | 1958 |
| Total | 36464 | 49440 | 64996 | 89937 | 111162 |

Figure 2 presents 10 countries which had the biggest amount of ISO 14001 certificates in the year 2005.

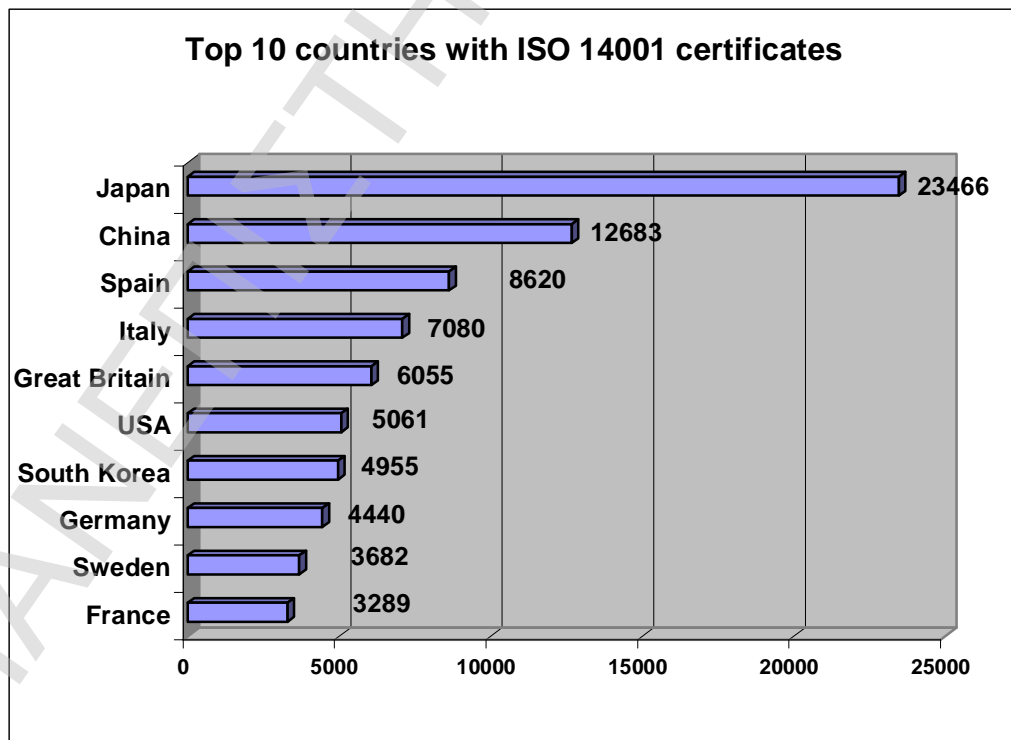


Fig. 2. Top 10 countries having ISO 14001 certificates.

But it is wrong to decide about the number of ISO certificates without taking into consideration the amount of population of this country. Figure 3 shows 10 countries with the biggest amount of certificates per million inhabitants.

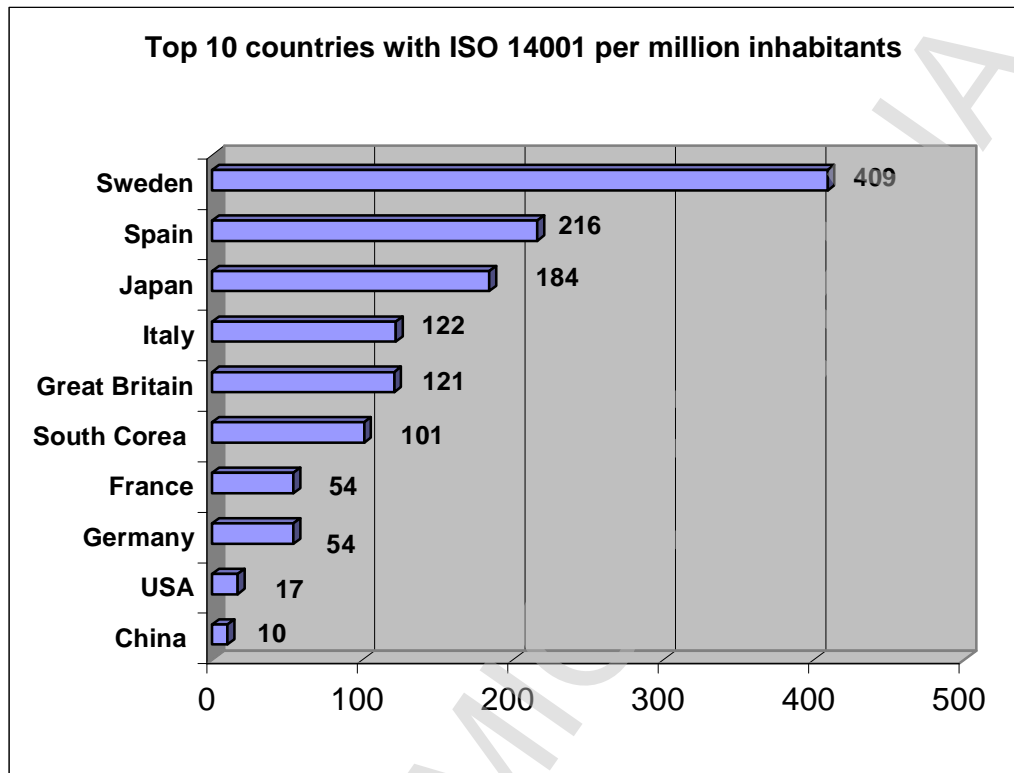


Fig. 3. Top 10 countries with ISO 14001 certificates per million inhabitants.

An EMS attempts to capture the environmental burdens of an entire facility or organization and encourage continual improvement of environmental performance. EMS typically consist of policies, procedures, and audit protocols for operations that create waste materials or emissions. For example, if a process produces a hazardous waste, then the EMS will detail how the waste is to be collected, handled, and disposed of; who is responsible for each activity; and what to do if a spill or leak occurs. The system also provides for auditing practices and reviewing these practices for improvements. The development and operation of an EMS follows the general four-step – plan, do, check, act [16].

3.1.1. Four step process of Environmental management systems

As have already been mentioned, EMS has developed within organizations over the past decade as firms looked for a means to address changing environmental issues. Organizations recognized that compliance with regulatory requirements was not adequate for competitiveness and efforts turned to pollution prevention and monitoring of operations for proper execution. The piecemeal oversight of facility environmental impacts by environmental, health and safety

personnel was not sufficient to control operations. Firms began to implement EMS to capture the various activities with environmental impact.

An EMS can encompass very different activities and environmental burdens depending on the organization utilizing it. An EMS incorporates aspects of the organization relating to the environmental burden and provides a structure for activities related to compliance with environmental regulations.

The general basis for an EMS is to write how a task with an environmental impact is to be done, do the task as it is written, and check periodically to verify that the task is being done as intended and, if not, correct the problem. This four-step process of plan, do, check, and act is often cited as the generic framework for initiating and maintaining an EMS. First, an organization should plan for environmental compliance requirements and environmental impacts that may occur. Second, the workers should do what is necessary to avoid non-compliance and environmental damage. Regularly, the plan should be checked to assure that it is operating properly and all environmental issues are covered. Finally, an organization should act to improve the system or change any problems that have developed. Following this methodology should allow an organization to evaluate its conformance with regulations and lead to improvements within the system [16].

Plan – *environmental policy, environmental impacts, and environmental goals.*

An environmental policy is the central component of an EMS. The policy typically details the organization's recognition of environmental impacts and states commitment to continuous environmental improvement. As a corporate level document, environmental policies provide guiding values and goals for all members of the organization. The comprehensiveness of policies varies widely from vague, sweeping generalizations, to more specific goals and mandates. Another part of the "plan" is to determine environmental impacts and compliance requirements. The range of impacts and regulatory requirements may include wastes and emissions, materials and energy use, or potential hazards from accidental releases. Once environmental impacts have been identified, most EMS include a set of goals or objectives for reducing environmental impact. The goals and objectives can be general, such as "work with suppliers to reduce packaging waste" (in the tourism organisation, for example, hotel, it can be "reducing energy consumption"). The objectives may change from year to year, but usually indicate an overarching goal of the organization in terms of reduced environmental impact. Some EMS define specific targets for improvement of the goals and objectives. For example, while reducing packaging waste may be an objective, "reduction of packaging waste by 10 percent by weight over the next year" (in a hotel: "reducing energy consumption by 5 percent...") is a target. Overall, the planning step in an EMS sets the groundwork for the later

steps. The commitment to environmental issues, the effort for continuous improvement and the establishment of goals and targets provides the framework for environmental personnel to focus their attention [16].

Do – *environmental activities and environmental documentation.*

In the second stage, an organization outlines the actions for the EMS. Activities that fall under an EMS include work practices and operating instructions. An EMS will define the proper procedures for various tasks with emphasis on minimizing environmental impact or following environmental regulations. For example, activities such as handling waste materials or completing air permit reporting are included in an EMS. These activities are typically defined in EMS documentation. Documentation includes a wide variety of elements, including the environmental policy, regulations to which the organization is subject, procedures and protocols for activities, and records of monitoring and measurement. These documents define the activities of an EMS and how personnel across the organization should act to fulfil responsibilities and hopefully meet targets of improvement. The documentation puts into writing the structure of operations. For many organizations, the documentation of the EMS is the main task

Check – *environmental auditing and environmental performance evaluation.*

A third part of EMS is assessing the operation of the system. Auditing is the general term used to describe the evaluation of components of the EMS. Parts of an audit can include interviews with employees to determine their awareness of environmental issues and their responsibilities with respect to work being completed. Another common use of audits is examining problems that have occurred and have created an environmental impact. The audit would attempt to find the cause of the incident and recommend changes in the EMS documentation as an action preventing the situation from reoccurring in the future. This stage of “checking” allows for the environmental performance of the facility to be evaluated as well. This is accomplished by observing environmental performance metrics.

Act – *environmental training and environmental communication.*

A final component of an EMS is training and communication in order to allow the facility to act upon its environmental performance. Training and communication occur at many stages in order to improve awareness of the environmental impact of operations across all levels of the organization. Training includes more specific instruction on personnel roles and performance. Training ensures that personnel are prepared for their specific job tasks and understand the impacts to the environment that could result from incorrect performance. Communication entails informing all personnel of the EMS, the environmental policy, and their role in environmental matters. Communication should target all levels of the organization to improve awareness of individual responsibility in day-to-day activities and the commitment of

the organization to environmental issues. Some communication can also go beyond the organization to suppliers, customers, communities, and shareholders [16].

These four components of plan, do, check, and act form the backbone of most EMS. The final form of any EMS will depend on the characteristics of the organization – its business and operations, as well as its commitment to environmental issues.

3.1.2. Benefits and drawbacks of management system approach

The management system approach has a number of benefits:

§ *Good fit with the management ethos of larger companies.* Many of the large international travel and tourism companies are accustomed to implementing standardised management systems throughout their operations. Many, for example, have standardised health and safety and quality control manuals and a management system approach integrates an environmental focus into an existing framework without imposing excessive demands.

§ *Global reach.* There are many areas of the world where the resources do not exist in the public or private sector to finance the development of tourism certification initiatives that provide geographically specific criteria or where insufficient data is available to provide performance targets. By instance, the flexibility of Green Globe 21 means that it can be easily adapted and used in these areas if underpinned by appropriate training.

§ *Applicability to all tourism businesses.* The generic nature of the approach means that it can theoretically be applied to any tourism business, thus encouraging the widest possible application [21].

Figure 4 illustrates other benefits of EMSs, which are based upon ISO 14001 or EMAS.

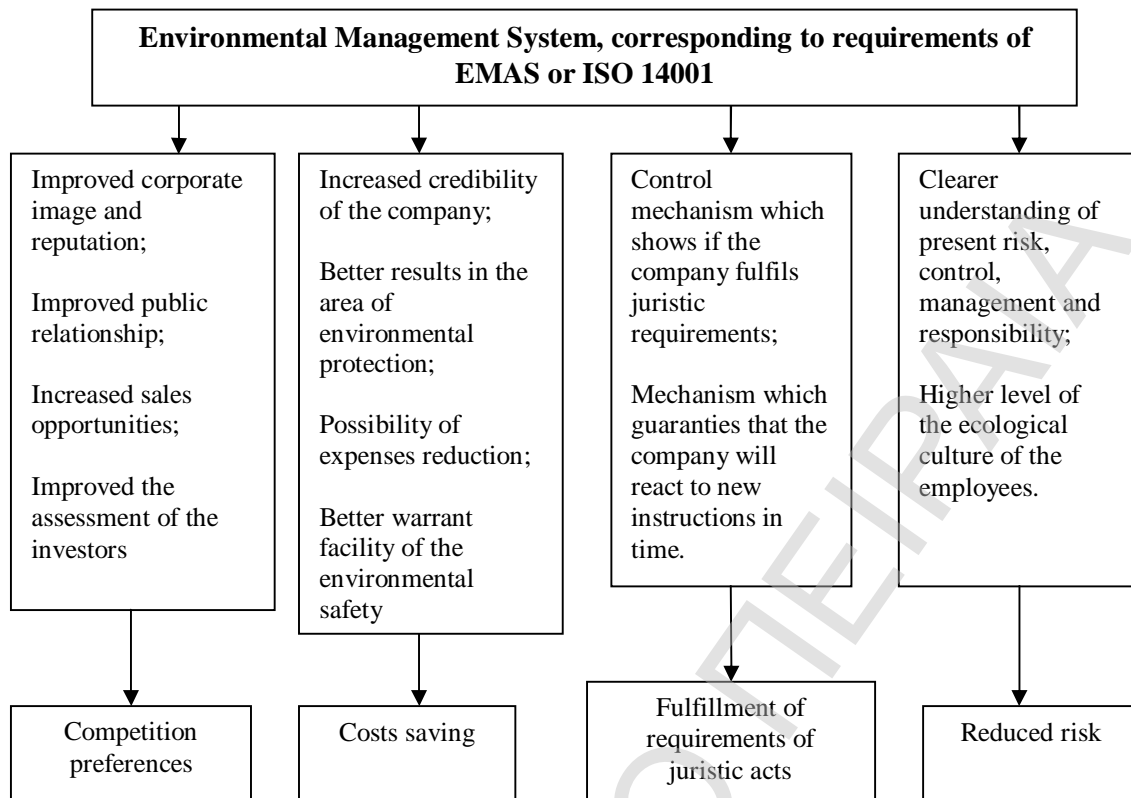


Fig. 4. Benefits of EMSs [19].

Management system approach also has drawbacks:

- The management system approach is less applicable to the small travel and tourism businesses that make up the bulk (circa 97%) of the travel and tourism industry. Management systems are often resource intensive to implement and small travel and tourism businesses are often not accustomed to their use. The considerable volume of paper work required by a management systems approach (and the level of technical knowledge required to implement such systems) often deters smaller players.
- The environmental aspects that companies choose to address may not be those that are of key importance for the future of the tourism industry or to the communities within which tourism is based. For example, community discontent at the development of ‘enclave’ tourism may be a key factor in determining the success of future tourism development in an area, but a company may elect initially to address its energy, waste and water management practices to gain cost savings. Region specific programmes can target these individual issues within their criteria.
- Those companies that bear the logo may be relatively less sustainable than their peers. The logo simply signifies that they are in the process of implementing a management system to address environmental or sustainability issues [21].

3.1.3. Critics of Environmental Management Systems

The hopes for ISO 14001 and EMAS centred on them leading to firms achieving sustainability. These hopes would be realised only if the standards led to environmental improvement through firms measuring the amount of environmental damage incurred and then seeking to reduce this amount in the future. In other words, the standards need to focus on performance [16]. Nevertheless, whilst this may have been the initial aim of the standard setters, these original aims were watered down and the standards came to focus only on conformance.

So, the question is: do EMSs lead to environmental improvement? It is easy to be cynical about this.

On the positive side, there is evidence that EMSs can potentially provide a powerful management tool, capable of contributing to substantially improved environmental performance. They place responsibility for decision-making on the people with most information about how best to protect the environment (enterprises themselves), giving them flexibility in achieving their goals, and a structure for doing so, enabling them to identify problem areas, reduce operational costs and provide a systematic way of addressing environmental challenges. If effectively implemented, such systems are capable of raising environmental awareness, motivating employees to search for innovative solutions, ensuring regulatory compliance, reducing environmental impact, delivering cost savings, improving operational efficiency and opening up new markets. Of course, much will depend upon the particular EMS that is adopted. The most widely used system is ISO 14001, which provides a consistent, internationally recognized standard. There is a great deal of evidence that ISO 14001 with its less rigorous certification and external auditing leaves serious concerns about the reduction of the environmental impact where EMSs are implemented [32].

Perhaps the most fundamental concern is that ISO 14001 is a process-based standard, which does not guarantee environmental performance outcomes. ISO 14001 is essentially a formal conformance standard, i.e. it is concerned with whether an organisation's management procedures are consistent with its environmental policy. It is not concerned with performance issues such as whether such systems actually protect the environment [32]. The emphasis is therefore on operational issues – not strategic ones. As a minimum, ISO 14001 certified companies must “commit themselves to conformance with applicable laws and regulations” (as distinct from actually complying with existing laws and regulations) but the standard does not itself set specific goals or performance levels. Nor does it specify rates of improvement, or prescribe specific goals, objectives or policies. Another problem relates to environmental audits and the question of whether such an audit (or a verification of the audit) should be conducted by

independent third party auditors or can appropriately be done “in-house”. The authors of the Swiss study of ISO 14001 state: “Audits can be a powerful tool for achieving effective improvements. However, in practice, an over-emphasis on compliance and conformance to standard requirements often does not support the intended improvement process”. Although conformance standards are not without value, they are apt to lead to “paper-chases” and “box-ticking” exercises. Proceduralising any business activity tends to minimise strategic thinking. In many respects, ISO 14001 and EMAS illustrate one of the worst trends in environmental management. They may create the illusion to executive management that all is well because the process is in place; management’s attention may shift from improving performance goals to completing a procedure and getting the box checked. Essentially, environmental concerns are reduced to a binary question, “Are we certified or not?” The formal requirements of environmental management and auditing systems may be simultaneously too complicated and too vague [33].

A major European study across a number of countries found no statistically significant relationship between adoption of a formal EMS and improved environmental performance. Crucially, the results of the most comprehensive report to date, based on the US National Database on Environmental Management, while generally positive, “show that motivations matter. Facilities that reported that the prospects for marketing potential, competitive advantage, increased revenues or support of other professionals were important influences on their EMS adoption decisions showed significantly higher aggregate scores for improvement in their environmental performance indicators.”

The quality of the data produced is a major source of uncertainty. In the year 1999, a questionnaire was sent to the environmental managers of every ISO 14001 certified company in Switzerland and 54 percent responded (i.e. 158 questionnaires). Some 60 percent of the companies experienced at least “some decrease” in their material and energy flows in relation to turnover. Only 10 per cent, however, reported a “strong decrease”, and 30 per cent either did not measure the changes or even experienced a worsening in efficiency. Some 50 per cent of the companies experienced at least “some decrease” (in material and energy flows), but only 10 percent reported a “strong decrease”; 40 percent did not know or even experienced an increase. Looking at products, the companies reported that only small decreases with regard to environmental impacts had occurred since EMS implementation. Fully 17 per cent did not know. It can be correctly observed: “Not knowing at all has to be considered as being the worst answer of all, since EMSs above all should create knowledge and sensitivity, even before improvements in productivity occur”[32]. It seems to appear, that some enterprises simply treat EMSs as tools for external image manipulation rather than for genuine environmental improvement.

If a large number of EMSs are largely ineffective in achieving environmental improvement, and in effect bulldogs with rubber teeth, then they are economically inefficient systems that not only do not help to cut down on environmental waste but actually create it by absorbing management time that could be better used elsewhere, increased expenditure on paper resources and other consumables, not to mention the ineffective impact of high salaried consultants with a predilection for ticking boxes [32].

One of the criticisms of the command and control approach is that it is a blunt instrument. Governments generally employ ambient, technology or performance based standards. These standards are not allocatively efficient and are unlikely to be cost-effective. If the above criticisms of ISO 14001 and, by association, EMAS, are well founded then they too are likely to be as ineffective in achieving the sustainability objective as the government based instruments. That is, EMSs are not the panacea or perfect solution for unsustainable business practices.

3.2. Certification schemes in Tourism

Tourism certification programmes have, for the most part, been developed by the industry itself. A range of developments over the last decade illustrate that the tourism industry is increasingly aware of and willing to respond to its own impacts and to communicate the details of its environmental programmes to consumers and other stakeholders [21].

A wide range of certification programmes, which claim to help the market differentiate between those tourism products that are sustainable and those that are not have now been developed to help responsible tourism businesses implement sustainable programmes and display their credentials to consumers. However, not all programmes are as effective or as credible as they could or need to be. Some of these programmes are legitimate and credible, providing those tourism businesses that have genuinely adopted environmental improvement or sustainable development programmes with an opportunity to prove their credentials to consumers, suppliers, shareholders, governments and other businesses. Other certification programmes are little more than paid membership programmes, providing positive public relations to participating companies.

Certification is just one in a wide range of tools that seek to encourage sustainable business performance. Other tools continue to be developed and each has relative strengths and weaknesses (appendix 1). As a sustainable development tool, certification has its advantages, such as showcasing good practice and encouraging voluntary improvements; it also has its drawbacks, such as not being equitable and efficient [21]. The challenge is that there is already

only a low number of certified companies under eco-efficiency standards, and moving to eco-justice will require a greater commitment from tourism companies, and reduce the appeal of certification as a market-led tool for sustainable development [9].

3.2.1. Key characteristics of Tourism Certification Programmes

There are over 100 initiatives, targeting mostly the accommodation sector, and mainly in Europe. Most of them have started since the mid 1990s, with 20 more in development at present. These schemes have the dual role of increasing industry performance by providing guidelines on how to be more sustainable, directing applicants towards sources of help and in some cases providing advice directly, and at the same time providing marketing benefits. As the certification programs grow, they are promoting the certified companies to both distribution channels and to consumers.

Certifications and ecolabels basically serve three purposes, namely:

1. to stimulate tourism service providers to introduce improvements in their operations, aimed at greater environmental, economic, and social sustainability, by providing incentives and technical assistance to do so;
2. to differentiate and distinguish tourism products and services that meet environmental, social, and economic standards beyond the level required by the legislation in force;
3. to orient consumers with regard to the sustainability characteristics of the tourism services available on the market [14].

Additionally, certifications and ecolabels serve to promote and stimulate higher levels of sustainability and quality throughout the tourism sector, aside from enhancing the image of certified companies, with the commercial benefits that such enhancement brings.

Certification programs within the travel and tourism industry can be divided into two broad categories with subtle but significant differences: 1) **process-based** using an internally created environment management systems (EMS) tailored to a particular business, and 2) **performance-based** using externally set environmental and often socio-cultural and economic criteria or benchmarks against which a business is judged.

Process Initiatives:

Initiatives, such as Green Globe 21, that seek to 'provide an action programme for sustainable tourism' and encourage gradual improvement in individual company performance while making no reference to a baseline performance standard. These initiatives offer all tourism businesses that make a commitment to reduce their level of environmental impact the

opportunity to gain certification based upon the implementation of a process or system that addresses this impact. They make only limited reference to a company's current level of awareness or impact. It is argued that this approach is applicable to all industry players because it encourages performance improvement over time rather than simply awarding the best companies [21]. While providing a linear, benchmark-oriented structure, the drawbacks on process-based certification using standard ISO or environmental management systems are considerable: requiring costly outside consultants and fees of \$20,000-40,000 (for a medium-sized company); are complicated and heavily engineering oriented; focused on internal operating systems, not on a company's social and economic impact on the surrounding area or on how a business compares with its peers; and concerned only with *how* a company operates, not *what* it does [8].

Performance Initiatives:

Initiatives that seek to identify products, services or operators that are sustainable. The Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Programme (Australia), for example, accredits nature and ecotourism products (i.e., individual tours, attractions and accommodation) rather than whole businesses. This approach recognises only those businesses or products that demonstrate that they exceed a specific level of performance considered to represent best practice. It is argued that this approach helps consumers to choose those products, services or operators that have less impact or are genuinely sustainable. Those tourism businesses or destinations that have a higher level of environmental impact (especially the mass market and transport operators) are relatively unlikely to apply for membership of such programmes because they may find it difficult to meet the stringent criteria. The potential for such initiatives to bring about initial change across the entire industry is more limited [21].

The performance approach actively prohibits those businesses that cannot meet specific performance criteria from membership benefits while promoting only those products that are operating at best practice levels. This offers consumers a genuinely more sustainable choice but potentially prevents the vast majority of tourism businesses from attaining membership [8].

Within the two methodologies (process vs. performance), all certification programs share at least five components:

1. **Voluntary Enrollment:** At present, all certification programs in the travel and tourism industry are strictly voluntary; i.e., businesses can decide whether to apply for certification. Most do so only if they believe that certification can bring them market distinction and increased

profits. While many businesses view voluntary certification as a way to ward off government regulation, already some programs such as NEAP and Blue Flag receive government money, and CST is run by Costa Rica's government tourism division. It is likely that, in the future, governments will use more "carrots" such as marketing and promotion and "sticks" such as denying contracts in national parks or other environmentally or culturally sensitive areas to uncertified companies [8].

2. **Logo:** All programs award a selective logo, seal or brand designed to be recognizable to consumers. Most permit the logo to be used only after certification is achieved. This means that all of the companies that display the logo should have already achieved a specified standard of performance which is considered to highlight them as relatively more environmentally responsible or sustainable than their peers or implemented a system to address impacts.

A notable exception is Green Globe. When first established in 1994, Green Globe allowed companies that paid as little as \$200 to immediately use the logo before any certification process began. As reorganized in 2000, Green Globe 21 now allows businesses or destinations that become members and pledge to undergo certification to use the logo before they have implemented actions and been externally audited. Once certified, a slightly different logo – one with a "check" in the middle – is issued (section 4). Many experts argue that this is still inappropriate since such a slight distinction is lost on most consumers [8].

Many certification programs give logos for different levels of achievement, one to five suns or leaves, for instance. One of the more complex logos is that given by ECOTEL, which measures environmental performance in lodging facilities. ECOTEL offers a different logo (globe) in each of five areas (environmental commitment, solid waste management, energy efficiency, water conservation, employee environmental education and community involvement) and each logo, in turn, has a three-level scoring system. This allows businesses to display a combination of logos as they progress through different levels in each of the five areas. Within this approach, offering different logos to illustrate different levels of performance encourages companies to continue once they have tackled simple (and usually cost saving) tasks at the first level. But, again, this system may prove confusing to consumers. Unless logos are carefully promoted, however, there is a danger in such an approach. Consumers may think they are choosing the most sustainable products rather than simply selecting a company that is committed to implementing an environmental or sustainability programme [21].

The Green Tourism Business Scheme, David Bellamy Conservation Award and other programmes offer a simpler process whereby differing levels of award are provided according to the 'depth' of environmental initiatives that have been undertaken.

3. Complying With or Improving Upon Regulations:

All credible certification programmes require companies to make a published commitment to environmental improvement, but many do not explicitly extend this commitment to sustainable development [8]. Process-based certification programs require, at a minimum, that companies comply with local, national, regional and international regulations, while most performance-based programs (i.e. sustainable tourism and ecotourism certification programs) have criteria that require companies go beyond the regulations to include socio-cultural and conservation criteria. Unfortunately, regulations differ substantially from country to country, both in their rigor and in enforcement. In poorer countries where tourism is expanding but government regulations may be weak, certification programs can possibly help to promote and ensure compliance. However, those in developing countries also argue that certification schemes, by setting criteria beyond the financial and technical capacity of many small and locally-owned businesses, may unfairly tilt their awards and logos towards international chains and foreign-owned establishments. Thus, some initiatives, for example, ECOTEL and the Green Tourism Business Scheme provide their top level of award to those companies that display leadership that significantly surpasses regulatory requirements. Some programmes, such as Certification for Sustainable Tourism (Costa Rica), encourage businesses to work with regional authorities in areas where regulations are poorly developed or inadequately enforced to improve them. This is an area in which tourism certification can play a significant role, but which is not well explored by some of the international programmes [8].

Some tourism certification programmes, especially those with a regional focus, publish specific compulsory criteria with which members must comply as well as reaching a total score for all issues. Typically these programmes include elements of management systems, but also embrace regionally relevant or sector specific performance issues (Box 1).

Box 1. Specific Requirements For Socio-Economic Improvements Within A Regional Certification Programme [21].

Certification for Sustainable Tourism (Costa Rica), for example, specifies under the topic of the socioeconomic environment that:

16.1 60% of hotel employees are drawn from the local community.

16.2 The hotel provides training to local people so they can work effectively at the hotel.

16.3 The administrative employees of the hotel are Costa Rican.

16.4 The hotel contributes and support the training of human resources for complementary tourism activities.

16.5 The hotel hires human resources trained in complementary tourism activities.

16.6 The hotel does not hire anybody illegally. It also does not hire anybody below minimum requirements.

16.7 The job opportunities offered by the hotel are not creating unfavourable situations in the local community.

Criteria of this nature can only be provided for specific activities or within tightly defined geographical environments. However, such criteria can ensure that the tourism industry addresses the issues that are of greatest importance within an area, thus genuinely make a contribution towards sustainable development.

4. Assessment and Auditing:

All certification programs award logos based on some kind of assessment or audit [8]. A key issue for tourism certification programmes in the past has been the way in which compliance with the conditions of the programme is assessed [21]. This can be first-party (by the company itself, typically by completing a written questionnaire), by industry associations such as World Travel and Tourism Council, which ran the original Green Globe program, or by independent or third-party auditors who are not connected with either the company seeking certification or the body that grants certification and issues the logo. Third party auditing is considered the most rigorous and credible because it avoids any conflict of interest. At present, an estimated 200 private auditing agencies exist globally [8].

Some programmes, for example Certification for Sustainable Tourism (Costa Rica), Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Programme (Australia) and ECOTEL (HVS International), use scoring processes to pre-screen businesses. These are followed-up with spot checks, audits or written references at a later date. Other initiatives, for example Green Globe 21, operate auditing processes implemented by the programme secretariat or by an independent auditing company to assess compliance. Many of the early programmes operated a self-assessment process for providing an award. Over the last decade, the number of certification programmes operating according to self-assessment processes has diminished significantly and most credible initiatives now offer some form of third party verification. For example:

- Operating according to similar principles to ISO 14001, performance of Green Globe 21 businesses achieving the certification standard (the logo with the tick) is verified by external and professional environmental auditing companies. All businesses are visited prior to the award of the full certification logo with the exception of large companies taking out corporate membership. A sample of properties from these corporate businesses will be visited and their performance verified each year.

- The credibility of NEAP is maintained through a number of measures. All operators are required to provide the names of two referees (one of whom must be a protected area manager) along with their application. In addition, across the board paper audits on one set of NEAP criteria are undertaken each year. Operators can also expect a random, on-site audit on the entire set of NEAP criteria at some stage during their three-year period of accreditation.

- Inspections for the Green Tourism Business Awards take place every two years and are carried out either by a Scottish Tourist Board grading officer or by an environmental auditor. This is an innovative approach which combines quality grading visits with environmental or sustainable development assessments [21].

5. Membership and Fees:

With very few exceptions (national programmes where the government is prepared to subsidise the costs) and in common with international standards, certification programmes charge some type of membership fee [21]. This money is used for administration and to support advertising and promotion of the logo and of the companies that are certified [8]. This is usually structured according to the company size and, where different grades of certification are available, the level of certification applied for. For most businesses, this membership fee is a significant barrier to entry, especially where it cannot be offset against guaranteed cost savings on an on-going basis. In many instances, the certification costs can be equivalent to quality grading costs. Many businesses consider the latter to be of greater importance because they have higher consumer profile [21].

The level of this fee varies significantly even within individual schemes and many programmes do not disclose their membership fee structure. Membership fees often need to be supplemented by fees for third party verification and access to other services, such as consultants or training programmes. Fees generally underpin the operations of the secretariat function, help to maintain membership services (including marketing the logo to consumers), and underpin any publications.

Generally an additional fee is charged for training materials, inspections and audit visits. Most tourism certification programmes have some type of structured fee level, which charges

larger businesses relatively higher fees than the small and medium enterprises. Some tourism certification programmes are now very sophisticated in terms of their auditing processes, but this sophistication comes at a cost that is often prohibitive for small and medium sized businesses.

Some programmes, such as the Green Business Tourism Scheme (Scotland), try to overcome excessive fees by combining assessment for lower levels of their award with a quality-grading scheme. This is one approach that can widen access for all tourism businesses to certification initiatives. Other organisations, for example, Certification for Sustainable Tourism (Costa Rica) have the costs of certification subsidised partially or wholly by the public sector as a part of its interest in promoting sustainable tourism [21].

3.2.2. Sustainable Tourism and Certification Schemes

So, can tourism certification programmes in their present form bring about sustainable tourism? This is a difficult question to answer when the actual components of sustainable tourism are yet to be fully defined or agreed (there are more than one hundred definitions of the term in existence), and given that very few (rising from 1 to 5 per cent) of all tourism businesses belong to credible certification programmes.

Three key issues - social equity, long-term economic benefit for all, and environmental protection - are enshrined in all sustainable development and most sustainable tourism definitions. Within the WWF vision, for example, sustainable tourism and its associated infrastructure should:

- be compatible with effective conservation and operate within the area's natural capacity, for the regeneration and future productivity of natural resources (examples of The Green Globe and CTS in the Box 2);
- minimise its ecological footprint (issues relating to the ecological footprint involve: energy efficiency/conservation /management; fresh water conservation/ management; minimal use of non-renewable natural resources; ecosystem conservation/management; land use planning/ management; air quality protection; noise control; waste water management and minimization; purchase, storage and use of hazardous substances);
- give proper consideration to local culture and local people in host areas, and ensure that these people have an equitable share in the benefits of tourism. Those certification programmes that do embrace these issues generally consider them under the following terms:

- ü the establishment of processes to consult with stakeholders about the operation of the

- business, new development plans, or the environmental programme specifically;
- ü integration of social considerations (predominantly use of the local supply chain) into purchasing decisions;
 - ü ensuring that the consumption of water and energy do not prejudice access of local residents to these resources;
 - ü provision of information about appropriate behavior and dress codes to guests;
 - ü provision that companies should not promote activities, such as sex tourism;
 - ü the implementation of local employment policies (especially for senior management roles);
 - ü input into local training initiatives, and
 - ü employing people according to local laws and paying staff at or above minimum wage levels [21].

Box 2. Conservation requirements of Green Globe 21 (generic) & Certification for Sustainable Tourism – (specific) [21].

The Green Globe 21 standard requires companies to conserve local and global biodiversity through the protection of natural ecosystems, sensitive habitats and endangered species. For hotels, this requires the following actions:

- educate guests about local endangered species and measures to be taken to protect them;
- encourage guests to respect natural ecosystems, e.g. by providing environmental educational information;
- encourage guests not to purchase products made from endangered species;
- build habitat creation into landscape design;
- support organisations working to protect local and global biodiversity.

Within the CST initiative, more specific actions are listed under a range of headings, including:

- native plants are predominantly used on the hotel’s gardens;
- the hotel does not allow the dispersion of non-native ornamental plants used on the hotel gardens to the surrounding environment;
- the main tree species in the hotels are identified according to their local and scientific name;
- the hotel’s gardens are maintained avoiding the use of fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides;
- the hotel owns – and appropriately manages - a natural protected area;
- the hotel implements specific actions to promote the non extraction of flora and fauna by tourists or other individuals;
- the hotel’s external illumination system does not produce alterations to the natural environment or changes to wild animal behaviour.

Social equity, long term economic benefit for all and environmental protection are also embraced to some extent by most tourism certification programmes. Each of these three aspects of sustainable tourism is not, however, reflected equally in such programmes (Table 2). Programmes can be divided into those that do not extend beyond the concept of eco-efficiency, those that focus predominantly on the concepts of eco-efficiency and biodiversity protection; and those that seek to encourage the adoption of genuinely sustainable tourism.

Table 2. Coverage of key elements of sustainability by different tourism certification programmes [21].

| | Eco-efficiency / natural resource protection | Biodiversity protection / ecological footprint | Social aspects of tourism development | Economic aspects of tourism development |
|--|---|---|--|--|
| Green Globe 21 | J | J | J | K |
| Green Tourism Business Scheme | J | J | L | K |
| Nordic Ecolabel for Hotels | J | J | L | L |
| Certification for Sustainable Tourism | J | J | J | J |
| ECOTEL | J | J | K | L |
| Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Programme | J | J | J | J |

Key: J Programme explicitly addresses this issue
 K Programme addresses this issue to some extent
 L Programme does not really address this issue.

While the development of voluntary initiatives in the tourism sector must be seen as positive, it is important to recognize that such initiatives vary widely in terms of their origin and philosophy, their geographical coverage, whether or not they use labels and logos, and their accreditation and verification systems. The problem is that such a large number of self regulating schemes applicable to tourism can in the end limit the potential to attain the objectives of sustainability due to the following reasons:

First, the existence of such a number of schemes could be considered as a source of confusion for tourism organizations, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, which make up the larger part of the tourism industry in almost all countries. They generally lack the information necessary to investigate the costs and benefits of such schemes and, in fact, they do not have easy access to them. Yet the impact of voluntary initiatives will not be fully felt without total participation of the smallest enterprises in such schemes. On their part, many large companies, especially multinationals, have tended to stay away from such systems and have instead developed their own environmental management schemes, which in certain cases also

include certain social or economic commitments, and which are subsequently associated in one way or another to their brand image already established in international markets [15].

Secondly, in the presence of such a large number of available schemes, there is a risk that companies will choose those that are the least demanding. The problem therefore is that there would be a tendency to comply with the lowest common denominator, with certified companies enjoying the benefits of environmental certification without truly improving their environmental performance in any significant way beyond that required by the regulations in force.

Thirdly, the presence of so many voluntary initiatives, each with its own label and logo, does not help consumers recognize those tourism enterprises and suppliers that are truly committed to environmental or sociocultural improvement schemes so that they can choose them over others that have made no such commitment. If consumers cannot differentiate between the initiatives taken by enterprises, entrepreneurs will not see any market advantage and will abandon such voluntary initiatives [15].

Despite the potential competitive advantage and the compelling reasons that are often quoted to encourage tourism businesses and destinations to adopt sustainable tourism programmes, there are still very few certified products in the market. Although, the market share of certified sustainable tourism products rises from less than 1% to 5% and the voluntary tool of eco-labelling in tourism, becomes a growing success.

Lack of participation by the industry relates to:

- scepticism about the potential of individual tourism businesses to bring about more sustainable tourism destinations in the long term;
- confusion about the relative merits, costs and savings of different systems and the requirements of the many standards, logos and programmes that currently exist, and
- uncertainty about the importance of environmental or sustainable credentials to visitor purchasing choice.

Indeed, it is possible that environmental labels stopped having a positive influence on consumer choice some time ago. Confusion in the market place, caused by a proliferation of general environmental logos, has resulted in a loss of consumer confidence: most of the logos or symbols (in use) were either the manufacturers' marketing claims or packaging symbols [14]. The certified product is not meaningful to the consumer for two reasons: firstly, lack of awareness, and secondly, the perception that it does not have significantly different attributes. Consumers cannot tell from the available information whether a certified product is better than the average product, on the points that matter to the tourist. The small number of certified companies, and the fact that the basic quality attributes are very different (a 5 star hotel and a

guest house can have the same environmental label) means that choosing providers based on an eco-label is not likely. This is partly attributed to the fact that certification programs have no in-house marketing or communications specialists [21].

Such confusion, combined with scepticism about the use of different logos by a range of companies in or servicing the same location, could seriously undermine the significant potential that certification has to bring about sustainable tourism. There is therefore a real threat that the expansion of certification initiatives for tourism products could confuse both businesses and consumers and result in claims for sustainable tourism being discredited, as has happened for other products.

Different studies described in the literature reveals interesting results regarding the distribution and level of adoption of voluntary initiatives:

- the great majority of certified tourism products are situated in Europe (78%), 17% in other continents, while 5% are intercontinental;
- 2/3 of eco-labels are created and administrated by private tourism associations and other non-governmental organisations (NGO), and 1/3 by government organizations;
- the cost of development of the eco-labels studied were covered by private sources (1/3), public sources (1/3), or mixed corporations;
- 47% of these eco-labels were implemented between 1996 and 2000, 47% are older, and 6% are still in the implementation phase;
- over the past five years, eco-labels applied to accommodation have made it possible to reduce the amount of energy and water consumption as well as waste production equivalent to that produced by 2000 hotels in one year;
- the average performance of certified accommodation establishments can be considered to be up to 20% better than the average performance of enterprises in Europe [15].

However, in spite of its leadership position, there is objectively a small number of certified tourism businesses in Europe. In addition, the promotion of the existing certification schemes is scarce. European voluntary initiatives are certainly not reaching the level of notoriety they should have among their regional public, and therefore are missing to achieve their main role, which is promoting sustainable tourism products. It represents a challenge and a responsibility for the region, since certification schemes developed here are likely to be emulated in other regions. Europe has thus a moral obligation for excellency in this subject. It has to be underlined that it has also the economic power to realise it.

3.3. Cohesion and shortcomings of EMS and Certification Programmes

Broadly speaking, environmental or sustainability management systems underpin all of the mainstream tourism certification systems. These have common, well-defined and tested elements that have evolved over the last decade as international companies in all sectors have sought to implement targeted programmes to tackle environmental impacts. The management system approach has been adopted by the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) and lies at the core of ISO 14001 (for environmental management systems), ISO 9001 (for quality management), and SA 8000 (for social auditing). With the exception of ECOTEL, all of the programmes examined make the criteria for their management system available and easily accessible to the public (generally through a website). Table 3 illustrates the common elements of management systems that are embraced by both generic international management system standards and also tourism certification programmes.

Table 3. Common elements of management systems also embraced by certification programmes [21].

| | Compliance with regulations | Assessment & prioritization of environmental or sustainable aspects | Publication of environmental or sustainability policy or mission statement | Nomination of representative responsible for environmental/ sustainable issues | Staff training to implement the policy | Targeted action plan to reduce impacts | Monitor progress | Consult with stakeholders | Report results publicly |
|---|-----------------------------|---|--|--|--|--|------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| ISO 14001 | J | J | J | J | J | J | J | J | L |
| The Natural Step | J | J | J | J | J | J | J | J | K |
| Green Globe 21 | J | J | J | J | J | J | J | K | L |
| Green Tourism Business Scheme (Gold level) | J | ♦ | K | K | J | J | J | J | L |
| CST (Level 5 - advanced) | K | ♦ | J | J | J | J | J | J | K |
| ECOTEL (Primary criteria) | J | ♦ | J | J | J | K | K | L | L |
| Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Programme | J | ♦ | J | J | J | J | J | J | L |

Key: J -Programme explicitly requires companies to take this action

K-Programme requires companies to address this issue to some extent

L-Programme does not really require companies to address this issue.

♦-Programme identifies specific key environmental aspects to be addressed within its format.

Ultimately, whether certification results in sustainable tourism or not depends upon what is being certified, or the 'unit of certification'. The most crucial distinction here is between (management system) *process* and (environmental) *performance*. In the case of ISO 14001 and Green Globe 21 (based upon ISO 14001), for example, it is a series of steps to be taken, a process, which is being certified. In and of itself, a process is insufficient to generate sustainable tourism (as it has been already said.) [14].

A company that establishes an environmental management system following the steps set out by ISO 14001 may achieve certification against the international EMS standard. However, in undertaking ISO 14001, organisations set their own targets for improvement (based on an initial review). A key problem here is that ISO 14001 is therefore not a 'standard' at all as it does not set environmental *performance* objectives. It is only concerned with whether a company's EMS conforms to its own stated environmental policy. EMS standards are therefore management system standards, not performance standards. Implementing, monitoring and continually improving its management system, as required by ISO 14001, does not mean that a company is sustainable. The setting of environmental performance targets (by the company within the EMS process) may indicate and facilitate year on year improvement, but unless these targets relate accurately to the capacity of the surrounding environment to absorb and assimilate its impacts in perpetuity, they will not indicate sustainability *per se*. Nor is a certified company's performance necessarily better than that of another company that is not certified but which may already be exceeding the certified company's targets [21].

While ISO 14001 does not pertain to encompass sustainability, some tourism certification programmes do. Only where universal *performance* levels and targets that tackle sustainability (environmental, social and economic) are specified within and by a standard, and where criteria making their attainment a prerequisite are present, can something akin to sustainability be promised by certification. Performance is clearly much harder to encompass within a certification programme than process, particularly one that aspires to have international applicability across a range of situations. Targets that imply sustainability may be difficult to define – no one has yet come up with a satisfactory methodology for defining tourism carrying capacity – and they may alienate businesses that seek gradual improvement. It is essential, however, for the credibility and effectiveness of tourism certification schemes, that both consumers and the travel and tourism industry understand and recognise this process-performance distinction. Without the comparability that setting performance levels allows, tourism certification schemes remain open to the accusation of green wash. Crucially, consumers and businesses alike must ask what is being certified before assuming a logo implies sustainability.

Despite common 'system' elements, there is a vast chasm between the level of detail specified within the management systems for different programmes. Some tourism certification programmes, for example Green Globe 21, model their approach on the ISO 14001 environmental management system standard. They thus specify that a management system must be developed to prioritise and address impacts in nine key performance areas. This provides the Green Globe 21 programme with a degree of flexibility that enables its application in any sector of the travel and tourism industry and to any geographical location. It requires a company or destination to identify its own negative impacts and to address these systematically to deliver continuous improvement [21].

Despite the shortcomings and problems of tourism certification programmes and environmental management systems significant progress has been made by many of them over the last decade. The wide range of stakeholders that have been involved in the development of these initiatives, those individuals and organisations that have developed and promoted them, and those businesses that have invested in them, have played a significant role in taking some of the necessary steps towards a more sustainable tourism industry.

IV. THE VARIETY OF TOURISM CERTIFICATION SCHEMES AND VISIT ORGANISATION

There are a number of leading global, regional national, and sub-national sustainable tourism and ecotourism certification programs, (including Blue Flag, Green Globe 21, Green Hotel Initiative, Kiskeya Alternativa, Alianza Verde's Green Deal, PAN Parks, Smart Voyager, and Saskatchewan's Horizons) and new certification initiatives (in Belize, Brazil, Fiji, Kenya, Peru, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Fiji, and Vermont) [14].

Europe has far more "green" certification programmes than any other region of the world. In 2004 there were more than 50 environmental certificates and awards in Europe covering all types of tourism suppliers, including accommodation, beaches, marinas, protected areas, restaurants, handicrafts, golf courses, tour packages and various other tourism-related activities. More than 40 schemes certify accommodation services: hotels with or without restaurants, camping sites, youth hostels, farm houses, alpine huts, holiday houses, guest houses, bed and breakfast lodgings and others.

4.1. Certification Schemes

Many examples of the world tourism certification schemes were already given in this paper. It is not possible to offer a detailed examination of all of the programmes that claim to offer tourism certification. Nor is it possible to assess the credentials of all the programmes available world-wide to identify which is best – many have different strengths and weaknesses and some local programmes are only available in their native language [21]. Therefore below are given the brief characteristics of some tourism certification programmes that:

- ü are nationally or internationally relevant;
- ü are relatively widely known within the industry;
- ü have set criteria for membership;
- ü use some form of verification to ensure members are meeting specified criteria;
- ü appear as examples of good practice in one or more pieces of tourism literature, and
- ü appear to comply with the UN Commission on Sustainable Development recommendations for tourism certification programmes which recommend that schemes.



Certification for Sustainable Tourism

This standard is based on a firm understanding of the importance of ecotourism principles and many aspects of the standard are drawn from detailed research into the principles of ecotourism and a firm understanding of the importance of Costa Rica's environment and culture to its prosperity. The standard includes a firm commitment to certify only those companies that comply with rigid environmental standards [21].

The Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST), is one of the first systems, if not the first, to achieve the integration of the principle elements of sustainable tourism, analyzing good management practices, the environmental and social impacts of services, as well as the client's perception of image and the congruence between the service offered and the product's promotion. In its seven years of operation in Costa Rica, CST has been able to objectively measure sustainability of operating businesses, improve business environmental and social practices, and motivate businesses to improve practices and clients to choose sustainable tourist businesses. The main objective of this proposal is to transfer CST and make it fully applicable in other countries, in such a way that these countries can share a common foundation for promoting sustainability in tourism. This will achieve a number of goals: economies of scale, greater market recognition of the standard, increasing consumer awareness, and substantial improvement in the environmental and social impacts of tourism [18].

The widespread implementation of CST will produce direct individual benefits to businesses (reduced costs, increased occupancy, and better image) while offering substantial environmental and social guarantees to the local population. At a regional level, it serves as a unifier and a common basis for the promotion of sustainable tourism.

It is a program that seeks to categorize and certify each tourism company according to the degree to which its operations comply to a model of sustainability. To this effect, four fundamental aspects are evaluated:

1. *Physical-biological parameters*

Evaluates the interaction between the company and its surrounding natural habitat.

2. *Infrastructure and services*

Evaluates the management policies and the operational systems within the company and its infrastructure.

3. External clients

Evaluates the interaction of the company with its clients in terms of how much it allows and invites the client to be an active contributor to the company's policies of sustainability.

4. Socio-economic environment

Evaluates the interaction of the company with the local communities and the population in general.

For each and every one of these items a list of specific questions is designed [18].

ECOTEL (HVS international)

The ECOTEL® Certification is a third-party seal of approval awarded by HVS Eco Services to hotels and motels that "demonstrate a heightened level of environmental sensitivity." HVS Eco Services, an environmental consulting firm serving the hospitality industry, created the ECOTEL® Certification in November 1994 and has since awarded the certification to less than 5 percent of the hotels that have applied. The ECOTEL® Certification was developed in response to a heightened level of environmental consciousness among travellers, as illustrated by the US Travel Data Centre's studies, which show that 87 percent of consumers claim to support environmentally-oriented travel companies [11].

Demand for eco-tourism prompted both travellers and hoteliers to wonder what aspects and what level of environmental performance were considered "good." The ECOTEL® Certification helps establish a benchmark for environmental performance, as well as a way for hotels' own environmental claims to be independently verified.

According to HVS Eco Services, undergoing the ECOTEL® evaluation can help to highlight potential environmental and conservation opportunities that can result in significant cost savings. In addition, some ECOTEL®s (certified hotels) are reporting increases in bookings for meetings and room reservations since attaining the certification.

As it was mentioned in the section III, The ECOTEL® Certification consists of a five-globe rating system where each globe represents a different category of environmental performance: solid waste management; energy management; water conservation and preservation; employee education and community involvement; legislative compliance and native land preservation. Hotels can be evaluated in any of these categories, although most choose all five. Hotels need only one globe to be considered an "ECOTEL®". Physical facilities and operating procedures are evaluated according to HVS Eco Services' criteria, that are reviewed and updated quarterly as well as in response to periodic technological innovations.

Although the criteria are proprietary information, evaluated hotels are briefed on which specific certification requirements they failed to satisfy. Based on the evaluation, hotels can be awarded an ECOTEL® Globe Award for each qualifying category [11].

National Ecotourism Accreditation Programme

The Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program (NEAP) represents the most significant accreditation measure within Australia at present. This programme focuses exclusively on ecotourism holiday products rather than destinations or businesses. The standard is based on an understanding of the real credentials of ecotourism operations [4]. The programme builds on the national and local nature of ecotourism operations and also builds in an awareness of the importance of client feedback within such programmes. The Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program was originally launched in January 1996. An integral component of the program is the inclusion of regular reviewing and upgrading of the criteria. The criteria have been designed for nature tourism and ecotourism accommodation, tour and attraction products. A product can achieve accreditation at one of the following three levels: Nature Tourism², Ecotourism³ or Advanced Ecotourism [3].



Green Globe 21

Green Globe 21 is an international certification programme for sustainable travel & tourism. It covers companies, protected areas and communities. Green Globe 21 membership is open to any travel and tourism company of any sector, size or location.

Green Globe 21 seeks to have global scope and to target the mainstream (mass) tourism businesses. The Green Globe 21 approach has the strength that it can be adopted by any company in any location. It can be especially useful in those countries where governments lack the will or resources to establish their own certification programmes. The Green Globe 21 programme also targets the mainstream tourism businesses that generally have a lower level of

² Under NEAP nature tourism is defined as: ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas.

³ Under NEAP nature tourism is defined as: ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation.

environmental awareness and less motivation to adopt sustainable development programmes. To encourage membership Green Globe 21 therefore has less stringent requirements in terms of actual environmental performance than programmes that target ecotourism businesses [21].

Green Globe 21 has a basis in, and considerable similarity with, the ISO 14001 environmental management standard. The programme requires continuous improvement within the environmental management system. The programme places environmental management within a consistent framework that can, theoretically at least, be used by any tourism business anywhere in the world to monitor systematically tourism impacts. This is particularly useful for those countries where the Government or tourist association is not able to establish its own certification initiatives. The standard makes reference to many of the impacts of tourism (including social and cultural issues) rather than purely the environmental impacts of tourism [10].

The standard sets regulatory compliance as a bare minimum requirement (although companies do not need to assess their compliance until their initial year of ‘commitment’ to develop an environmental management system has expired). The management systems approach fits well with the existing quality and health and safety systems approaches that are used by many of the corporate companies. It lends itself easily to the development of management manuals and to the systematic training approach used by these businesses.

In using a network of facilitators and in operating training programmes globally, the initiatives helps to build capacity for sustainable tourism. The programme ensures credibility by using third party auditors to undertake the verification work. It is one of the few programmes that have managed to gain a moderately high level of industry awareness and some consumer awareness.

There are two (it can be said also three) stages to the Green Globe 21 Programme:



Affiliate is the introductory stage where companies learn more about Green Globe 21, and prepare for Benchmarking and Certification.



The Green Globe logo awarded to companies when they make a commitment to achieving the standard.

This stage involves measuring a company's environmental performance over ten key performance areas including minimising, reusing and recycling waste, energy efficiency and management of fresh water resources.



The Green Globe logo awarded to companies once they have achieved the requirements of the standard.

Certification is about developing an environmental management system, being successfully benchmarked, independently certified and meeting the requirements of the Green Globe 21 Standard [10].

Green Tourism Business Scheme

The Green Tourism Business Scheme (GTBS) is an environmental accreditation scheme for Scottish tourism businesses. Since its inception in 1997 the GTBS has been championing sustainable tourism in the UK, and has become the largest and most successful scheme of its type in the world [24].

The scheme criteria cover over 120 measures of sustainability and businesses can choose to implement any of these measures to gain an award, although they must implement a minimum number of measures; 30 for Bronze; 45 for Silver and 60 for Gold. The main technical sections are:

- *Compulsory* - compliance with environmental legislation and a commitment to continuous improvement in environmental performance.
- *Management* - demonstrates good environmental management including staff awareness; specialist training; monitoring and record keeping.
- *Communication* of environmental actions to customers i.e. green policy; email & website; education, community and social projects.
- *Energy* - efficiency of lighting, heating and appliances; insulation and renewable energy use.
- *Water* efficiency i.e. good maintenance; low-consumption appliances; flush offset; rainwater harvesting as well as using eco-cleaners.

- *Purchasing* environmentally friendly goods and services i.e. products made from recycled materials; use and promotion of local food and drink; use of FSC⁴ wood products.
- *Waste* minimisation by encouraging, the “*eliminate, reduce, reuse, recycle*” principle i.e. glass, paper, card, plastic and metal recycling; supplier take-back agreements; dosing systems; composting.
- *Transport* - aims to minimise visitors car use by promoting local and national public transport services; cycle hire info; local walking and cycling options; use of alternative fuels.
- *Wildlife* - on site measures aimed at increasing biodiversity i.e. wildlife gardening; native species; nesting boxes, as well as providing information for visitors on the wildlife on and around the site [24].



The European Ecolabel (Eco-Flower) for tourist accommodation services and camp site services

The European Ecolabel was originally created to reward tourist accommodation services and tourists that respect the environment. Tourist accommodation is the first service sector for which ecological criteria have been developed. This will open up new and major opportunities for the Flower. In 2004, the European Commission also established criteria for camp site services. The European Ecolabel signals environmental good performance as it is an added quality value when consumers are choosing a resort. Enterprises bearing the Flower Logo have officially been distinguished as being amongst the most environmentally friendly in their area.

The criteria aim to limit the main environmental impacts from the three phases of the service's life cycle (purchasing, provision of the service, waste). In particular they aim to:

- ü limit energy consumption;
- ü limit water consumption;
- ü limit waste production;
- ü favour the use of renewable resources and of substances which are less hazardous to the environment;

⁴ FSC – Forest stewardship Council - is an international not-for-profit membership-based organization that brings people together to find solutions to the problems created by bad forestry practices and to reward good forest management.

- ü promote environmental communication and education [5].

Box 3 represents the eco-test which offers Eco Flower scheme for accommodations in order to evaluate their performance on sustainability.

Box 3. Eco-test for evaluating sustainability of accommodation [5].

Eco-test for accommodation

Check your accommodation and assess your environmental performance by ticking off what you already provide:



Energy

- Energy-efficient electrical equipment
- Electricity from renewable sources
- Appropriate thermal insulation
- Automatic switch-off systems (light, heating, etc)
- Collection of energy consumption data

Water

- Water-saving taps and showers
- Water-saving dishwashers, washing machines, WC's etc.
- Flexible change of towels and sheets
- Appropriate waste water treatment

Staff training on ...

- Environmental issues
- Right dosage of detergents and cleaners
- Effective waste, water, energy and resource management
- Maintenance and servicing of equipment

Information for guests on ...

- Local environmental facts and news
- Environmental measures taken at the accommodation
- Ways to save water and energy
- How to separate waste
- Public transport links

Green procurement

- Energy and water efficient equipment
- Eco-labelled products
- Refillable bottles
- No disposable bottles, toiletries, cups, plates or cutlery

Dangerous chemical substances

- Eco-labelled indoor paint, varnish and detergents
- Appropriate use of chemical substances
- Collection of chemical consumption data

Waste

- Waste separation
- Appropriate disposal of waste
- Avoidance of disposable and hazardous products
- Separation and disposal of hazardous waste

Others

- No smoking areas
- National Eco-label
- Bioclimatic architecture
- Food from local and organic farming
- Use of photovoltaic and wind energy
- Heat pumps, district heating, heat recovery
- Use of rain and recycled water
- EMAS or ISO 14001

Evaluation

Up to 9 points

Some way to go to get the Eco-label. You could tune into best practice by getting more detailed information on the Eco-label criteria. Call your Competent Body.

10 to 20 points

You're on the right track for the EU Ecolabel. Get the complete requirements with all 84 criteria (mandatory and optional) in detail. Your Competent Body is ready to help.

21 to 37 points

The EU Eco-label looks exactly the right tool to show your guests your environmental performance. Call your Competent Body to get the complete criteria and information on the application proced

4.2. Organisation of Voluntary Initiative for Sustainability in Tourism

In 2001 the leading European eco-labels for accommodation started to collaborate and built up a common platform for eco-labels called **VISIT** [4]. The Association was established in 2004 at Reisepavillon, Europe's leading Green and Ecotourism Fair. This was the culmination of ongoing liaison and co-operation between a dozen leading tourism eco-labels. Eight of these labels (based in the Netherlands, Italy, Denmark, Latvia, France, United Kingdom, Switzerland and Luxembourg) founded the organisation together with over 1,500 participating tourism enterprises, as well as strategic bodies as supporters and associates, e.g. the environmental management certificate Ecocamping. Further eco-labels, e.g. from Austria and Spain already expressed their interest to join the Association [30].

In general, the eco-labels involved represent nationally based organisations in (primarily) tourism accommodation. The alliance between the labels within VISIT is based on mutual understanding and recognition and the agreement to adopt a common standard. This standard sets the framework by which credible tourism eco-labels should operate in Europe. This ensures the consumer has a reliable environmentally-friendly tourism choice and an indication that there are efforts to improve the destination towards more sustainability.

VISIT is the first association of its type anywhere in Europe and its primary goal is to ensure that eco-labelling in tourism is successful, practical and responsible. The secretariat of the organisation is run by Ecotrans, an international organisation with a strong reputation in establishing effective networks and collaboration between tourism and environmental organisations. Since its inception in early 2004 the VISIT organisation is encouraging other tourism eco-labels and initiatives to become involved. Its mission is: *"To promote and support sustainable tourism development through the representation, promotion and mutual co-operation of international, national and regional certification schemes and other voluntary initiatives for sustainable tourism at an international level."* [29].

4.2.1. Membership in VISIT

Membership to VISIT is available at two levels: as a full member or as an associate member. Full membership is open to tourism eco-labels. These are environmental certification systems operating in the tourism sector that require an on-site verification undertaken by an

independent certification body. All full members of the Association are required to comply with the statutes of the organisation. They must be prepared to recognise other full members as legitimate national eco-labels, co-operate with them, and work towards the objectives as well as meet the common standard of the organisation. Associate membership is open to any organisation with an interest and/or commitment to the objectives of the VISIT Association. Membership levels have been set at a low minimum level to establish the organisation and encourage further participation [30].

Ecolabels which meet the 21 key criteria (they are presented in the Annex 2) may apply to join VISIT. At present VISIT has not established the formal accreditation procedure to check compliance with the 21 key criteria.

Any visit member ecolabel whether full or associate:

1. accepts all other ecolabels provided with full member status as meeting the VISIT standards;
2. accepts the VISIT standards as a reasonable standard for the provision of a sustainable tourism award for tourism services;
3. is required to provide and update the VISIT board (and the other Full members) with details of: *a*). the existing geographical boundaries of the ecolabel, *b*). the existing product group range available for certification, *c*). the present and future plans of the label with regard to the growth of the ecolabel and its development;
4. respects the (sovereignty) role, responsibilities and activities of the other full members of VISIT and the other full members right to exist;
5. will not contact full member products (licences) without the express permission of that full member;
6. will not undermine, create bad publicity, reduce standards, or provide special offers to the labelled products of other full members (or their market niche) without their approval;
7. will seek to avoid competition and will commit to resolve and avoid conflicts with other full members;
8. the operating areas of the existing full members will be outlined by VISIT and these areas of activity will be respected by all full members. Areas of overlap will: *a*). form the basis of discussion between labels for joint promotion and co-operation, *b*). require that full members resolve potential conflicts before they are likely to occur;
9. should an invitation be received by a full member to undertake a certification in another full members area of activity/geographical region, the full member is required to inform the other member and discuss mutually acceptable terms for their certification to avoid conflict or the potential erosion of higher standard ecolabels to lower ones;

10. in the event of a conflict between full members both parties will be invited to take part in a board meeting or technical committee meeting to resolve differences equitably;

11. in the event of a dispute remaining between labels both parties will be required to present their cases to the general assembly where both or either parties may be expelled;



12. should an ecolabel be observed to maintain an approach of creating conflicts with other ecolabels (full members), creating a climate of lowering standards within the VISIT organisation and otherwise fail to uphold the principles of sustainable development in practice, the label may be required to make a written account of their development plans and these and their labelled products may be scrutinised by a peer group for re-evaluation as a full member;

13. full members are required to disclose to VISIT their memberships of any other tourism ecolabel associations, their legal status and ownership and formal relations or agreements with any other full members. In future VISIT shall give a guarantee of minimum standard for the operation of a type I Tourism Ecolabel to the consumer and the licensee (business choosing a VISIT accredited Ecolabel). The minimum standard is based on the VISIT accreditation system [29].





4.2.2. Current members of VISIT and their special differences



The table below presents tourism certification schemes which are members of VISIT association [4; 30].

Table 4. Members of VISIT.

| Label | Description |
|--|--|
|   | <p>Den Groenne Noegle - French & Danish ecolabel Over 100 accommodation businesses from youth hostels to 4 star luxury hotels.</p> <p>The Green Key is a diploma awarded companies within tourism: hotels, youth hostels, conference- and holiday centres, campsites, holiday houses, leisure facilities and restaurants. To obtain The Green Key the company has to fulfil a long list of environmental requirements. These requirements are contained in a number of criteria. They consist of a number of standardized international criteria, which are mandatory in each country, and more specialized national criteria, adjusted to national legislation, infrastructure and culture. Some of the fields covered are: water, waste, energy, involvement and awareness of guests, environmental management, staff involvement, use of chemicals, open spaces, and food and beverages.</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| | <p>Since 1994, The Green Key has been awarded to hotels, youth hostels, holiday cottages and camping sites. Since 2001, Green Key has been awarded to establishments in Estonia, Greenland and Sweden.</p> |
|  | <p>Das Österreichische Umweltzeichen für Tourismusbetriebe - Austria Approximately 200 places to stay of all kinds and restaurants</p> <p>The Austrian eco-label for tourism with the “Hundertwasser” logo is the first state eco-label for tourism in Europe. Since 1997 Austria has offered visitors a growing choice of hotels, holiday farms, youth hostels, private guesthouses, camping sites, holiday apartments, mountain guesthouses and restaurants, which are guaranteed to comply with high environmental standards. In addition, they offer excellent cuisine with regional produce grown on mountain farms, which also helps to maintain a diverse and intact natural environment.</p> |
|  | <p>Legambiente Turismo – Italy</p> <p>Since 1997, when the certification system “recommended eco-friendly hotels” was first launched in the bathing resort of Riccione, Legambiente Turismo’s scheme has been steadily growing. In 2004, 192 hotels and 46 other accommodation businesses (totalling over 45.000 beds), 42 bathing establishments and 20 camping sites along the coasts, mountains and cities-of-art in Italy were awarded Legambiente Turismo’s eco-label with the well-known Green Swan logo. Its criteria include a better use of water and energy resources, reduced waste production, good local cuisine and breakfast choice of organic ingredients, tips to help visitors become acquainted with the local culture and natural environment, and cycle hire.</p> |
|  | <p>The Milieubarometer - Netherlands 230 camping sites, holiday resorts, hotels, group accommodation and attraction parks</p> <p>In the Netherlands the Milieubarometer shows visitors what level of environmental quality is offered by the tourism business, with its wide range of leisure facilities for families, youth groups and other visitors. Since 1998, three different categories of the Milieubarometer can be reached. Bronze is good, Silver is even better and Gold fulfils even the high standards of the State eco-label Milieukeur. Visitors can enjoy their holiday at these sites with a clear conscience.</p> |
|  | <p>El Distintivo de Garantia de Calidad Ambiental - Spain 70 accommodation businesses in Catalonia</p> <p>This label has been implemented in 1994 by the province of Catalonia (Spain): it initially addressed only industrial products. Since 1998, the label is also available for services and in the field of tourism: So far 70</p> |

| | |
|--|---|
| | <p>accommodation businesses have been awarded: 26 hotels, 16 camping sites, 20 youth hostels and 8 rural farmhouses. The management and measurement criteria are divided into mandatory and optional criteria and cover waste management, saving of resources (water and energy), landscape impact, green purchasing, noise and information to guests about environmental issues, local excursions and typical regional products.</p> |
|  <p>La Clef Verte</p> | <p>La Clef Verte - France 100 camping, caravan and chalet sites, guesthouses</p> <p>France is a paradise for camping enthusiasts in Europe. There are around 10,000 camping sites offering visitors a vast choice, from basic, idyllic camping on farms to luxurious sites by the sea or near a tourist attraction, with every conceivable facility. Since 1999, the Green Key has provided a guarantee that environmental protection does not suffer beside all the luxury. There are 100 sites from Brittany to the Mediterranean, which take specific measures to maintain biodiversity, the effective preservation of resources and undertake environmental education.</p> |
|  <p>Green Tourism</p> | <p>Green Tourism - United Kingdom</p> <p>The Green Tourism Business Scheme is the UK's tourism eco-label. The scheme was developed in 1998 by VisitScotland (The Scottish National Tourist Board). It has over 450 businesses in Scotland ranging from croft houses and distillery visitor attractions in the Scottish Islands, to the Edinburgh International Conference Centre, major sporting estates and hotels as well as family run self-catering cottages, youth hostels, visitor attractions and bed and breakfasts. All businesses must meet a relevant quality standard (star rating). The scheme is being adopted in England with 100 members in key destinations in Devon, the East of England, Blackpool and the North West. There are 3 levels of awards, Bronze for good practice, Silver for best practice and Gold for overall excellence in environment and sustainable practices.</p> |
|  <p>Ecolabel</p> | <p>Luxembourg Ecolabel</p> <p>The diversity of the landscape and culture of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, with the attractions of its towns, its national parks and its forests, is reflected in the excellent accommodation offered here. Since 1999, visitors can choose from a range of particularly environmentally-friendly hotels, youth hostels, private accommodation, holiday apartments, gîtes and campsites by the Upper Sure Reservoir, in the Our Valley or in the city of Luxembourg. In addition to a high environmental standard, the 21 establishments offer excellent local produce and high-quality service.</p> |
|  <p>Nordic Swan</p> | <p>Nordic Swan - Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Norway 79 hotels in Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland and Iceland</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| | <p>In 1989, consumers got the opportunity to choose environmentally suitable products with high quality, helped by the official eco-label, the Nordic Swan. Today, travellers have also got the opportunity to stay at an eco-labelled hotel in these countries, as since 1999 hotels have been awarded the eco-label. The Nordic Swan shows that the hotel has got a carefully considered long-term environmental programme, covering the entire business with limit values, for example, for water, chemical and energy consumption.</p> <p>This programme has been developed using the guidance provided by the ISO 14024 standard 'Environmental labels and declarations – Guiding Principles'. These principles include the requirement that 'criteria should be objective, reasonable and verifiable; that interested parties should be given the opportunity to participate and that account should be taken of their comments'. The reliance of this programme on the ISO 14000 series of standards means that it has many similarities to Green Globe 21, but does not incorporate stakeholder analysis as a key criterion.</p> |
|  | <p>Green Certificate – Latvia</p> <p>There are 53 accommodation businesses in the Latvian countryside. Pristine lakes and rivers, flowery meadows, forest grown hills and sandy beaches make up the beautiful variety of landscapes in Latvia. The natural bounty can be enjoyed best in the countryside where attractions of nature combine with the hospitality of rural homes creating a visitor friendly environment. Since 1999 the green certificate has awarded rural tourism establishments in Latvia such as country homes vacation cottages, guesthouses and camping sites combining environmental quality with a high standard of services.</p> |
|  | <p>Steinbock Label - Schwitzerland 15 hotels in 6 Swiss cantons</p> <p>The Steinbock-label allows Swiss hotels and restaurants to show their engagement for all sustainability responsibilities: environment, staff and the entire society as well as economic results. A hotel is distinguished with up to 5 steinbocks. Fifteen hotels in six Swiss cantons have been awarded 3, 4 or 5 steinbocks to date. These hotels encompass both traditional 3* to 5* hotels as well as hotels which are strongly oriented towards ecological issues. All of them - according to the labelled level - care both for the guest's well-being as well as for nature and society.</p> |

Each eco-label has its own additional standards which are considered important to the national or local situation. These may relate to additional legislation, specific environmental risks, local climatic factors or relate to the existing achievements of the tourism product in their operation areas. This tends to ensure that the eco-label is restricted to the better performing tourism practitioners in their area.

Such individual strengths can be seen as justification for the existence of national eco-labels beside international certification programmes. They are more appropriate to local situations, they can consider national standards and strategies when updating their criteria and can more readily develop their scheme for new product groups along the tourism supply chain. They should be more destination specific than international schemes, and thus be in a position to exchange new experiences and maintain their focus on leading the way in sustainable development in tourism practice [30].

Some examples of special strengths and differences:

- Nordic Swan is the only scheme in Europe, which requires numerical limit consumption criteria per overnight, specified, e.g. for accommodation with or without swimming pool (water) or for different levels of altitude (energy, waste, chemicals).
- Das Österreichische Umweltzeichen für Tourismusbetriebe shows high overlap with the EU Flower and requires additional criteria with focus on Austrian agriculture and local products.
- Green Tourism Business Scheme is awarded to the widest range of tourism business types in Europe, including visitor attractions and distilleries. It shows best success in Europe with 15% of the accommodation bed nights certified in Scotland.
- Steinbock Label is the first and only full “sustainability certificate” in Europe with very demanding environmental, social and economic criteria.
- The Green Key certifies tourism businesses in a variety of countries in Europe. The Green Key camping sites are aware of environmental impact and nature preservation, and the Green Key hotels offer high quality services combined with a minimal impact on the environment. From 2004 onwards the Green Key collaborates with the network behind the Blue Flag campaign.
- Legambiente Turismo is fully controlled by the leading independent environmentalist organisation in Italy, called Legambiente. It only starts certification in a region if an agreement of collaboration with local tourism organisations is signed.
- The Milieubarometer shows a unique private public partnership with the Dutch Milieukeur label: businesses reaching the golden level are certified with both eco-labels.
- The EcoLabel Luxembourg is based on a strong public private partnership and offers comprehensive information and training services for applicants.
- El Distintivo in Catalonia as a regional governmental eco-label is highly compatible to the European EMAS, and encourages accommodation businesses to enhance their environmental management.

- Zalais Sertifikats in Latvia reduces the cost for on-site audits by collaborating with classification audits for quality of tourism services.
- Blue Flag International is the best known tourism eco-label in the world. It proved its important role in making the European Bathing Water Directive a success.

All together the VISIT eco-labels demonstrate their high value for sustainable tourism development in Europe by:

- showing best practice in the various countries and product groups, raising the awareness of and gaining recognition by consumers;
- giving orientation to governments on issues with legislation including the opportunities or requirements to improve;
- greening the tourism supply chain and making connections to green activities in the destination;
- fostering the demand for eco-labelled and environmentally-friendly products, i.e. organic food;
- contributing with their certified services to sustainable development in their destinations (see chapter “Destinations”) [29].

The steps that have been taken so far by the VISIT initiative to build a more sustainable tourism industry in Europe are encouraging, but not yet sufficient. There are many difficulties, and the most challenging are how to:

- increase the number of certified sustainable tourism products;
- raise consumer awareness and demand for these products;
- reduce duplication of efforts and resources in the field of sustainable tourism.

It is likely that further developments will lead to the creation of a global forum and accreditation body for sustainable tourism certificates (between 2005 and 2010), which can investigate, recognise and promote tourism certification schemes world wide. The new Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council (STSC) initiative is a promising approach, which could fulfil much of these objectives [30].

CONCLUSIONS

As more regions and countries develop their tourism industry, it produces significant impacts on natural resources, consumption patterns, pollution and social systems. The need for sustainable/responsible planning and management is imperative for the industry to survive as a whole. The concept of sustainable tourism has developed - it means the tourism that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future. The international travel and tourism industry has been one of the prime proponents of the value of voluntary initiatives in reducing the negative and enhancing the positive impacts associated with its own activities. A wide range of voluntary initiatives has emerged from the sector, among which are Environmental Management Systems and Tourism Certification programmes.

The purpose of EMS is to provide organizations with a tool for a uniform, systematic, and structured way to achieve effective environmental management by stipulating the implementation of environmental goals, policies, responsibilities and audits. Generally, an EMS provides each facility with guidelines for operations such as an environmental policy and procedures that describe activities, as well as personnel designated with responsibility for environmental issues. Each facility typically undergoes auditing and review of operations. Most commonly used standards for EMS - both ISO 14001 and EMAS - are essentially the formal conformance standards, i.e. they are concerned with whether an organisation's management procedures are consistent with its environmental policy. It is not concerned with performance issues such as whether such systems actually protect the environment.

Although it is entirely reasonable to have doubts about specific managerial environmental and auditing systems, it seems clear that such systems have (and will continue to have) an important role to play in environmental protection. The jury is clearly out on the success or failure of the creation and implementation of standards for environmental management systems. What is clear from the evidence is that the standards themselves will not lead to environmental improvement, because they are not designed to do so. That said, they may have a useful function in getting the managers to focus on the environmental impacts their organizations are making, and in the process of gaining certification actually produce some tangible reduction in pollution. What is clear is that the self-monitoring approach of the standards may not lead to a more economically effective monitoring system than the command and control approach. The difference between the two approaches is something that economists might explore in the future.

Certification schemes highlight sustainable tourism products. They have a dual function of helping tourism suppliers to raise their sustainability standards, and providing market mechanisms to increase trade gained from having the brand of the eco-label. Tourism certification programmes (Green Globe, NEAP, Eco-flower and many others) generally provide a logo to those companies that exceed (or claim to exceed) a baseline standard.

Although the growing interest in sustainable tourism and the parallel evolution of a range of tourism certification programmes is a positive development, the number of different programmes has caused confusion amongst consumers, businesses and destination managers alike: an approval mark or endorsement logo can look exactly like a marketing claim or packaging symbol. There are lots of tourism certification schemes with different logos and criteria for its granting. The European VISIT (Voluntary Initiative for Sustainability in Tourism) initiative has been designed to demonstrate how tourism eco-labels in Europe can collaborate and move the tourism market towards sustainability.

Environmental or sustainability management systems underpin all of the mainstream tourism certification systems. These have common, well-defined and tested elements that have evolved over the last decade as international companies in all sectors have sought to implement targeted programmes to tackle environmental impacts. However, while, for example, ISO 14001 does not pertain to encompass sustainability (as it is said to be only a conformance standard), some tourism certification programmes do. Performance is clearly much harder to encompass within a certification programme than process, particularly one that aspires to have international applicability across a range of situations. Targets that imply sustainability may be difficult to define – no one has yet come up with a satisfactory methodology for defining tourism carrying capacity – and they may alienate businesses that seek gradual improvement.

Significant progress has been made by many tourism certification programmes and EMS over the last decade. The wide range of stakeholders that have been involved in the development of these initiatives, those individuals and organisations that have developed and promoted them, and those businesses that have invested in them, have played a significant role in taking some of the necessary steps towards a more sustainable tourism industry.

Sustainable tourism is currently a vision, rather than a reality. It is a vision that has varying components for the many stakeholders involved in tourism development. EMSs and Certification schemes are not the panacea or perfect solution for unsustainable business. However, recent experience shows that proactive businesses are beginning to realise the many and hidden benefits associated with rethinking their core product to take account of the society and environment in which they operate. Thus they will be able to ensure that they stay in business, and that the destinations in which they operate will also prosper in the long term.

ANNEX 1. TOOLS DEVELOPED TO HELP THE TOURISM INDUSTRY IMPROVE ITS ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE [21].

Codes of conduct:

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| <u>First developed</u> | Late 1970s/early 1980s |
| <u>Main emphasis</u> | Visitor behaviour, changing environmental and social impacts of tourism businesses |
| <u>Sectoral relevance</u> | Predominantly focussed on visitor management and on responsible environmental management for all aspects of the industry |
| <u>Examples</u> | WTTC Code for Environmentally Responsible Tourism Businesses, Annapurna Conservation Area Visitor Guidelines |
| <u>Strengths</u> | Raise awareness throughout the industry Generic applicability to all sectors/activities <u>Flexibility</u> – applicable to most environments and types of tourism development. |
| <u>Weaknesses</u> | No monitoring mechanism |

Manuals/Tools

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| <u>First developed</u> | 1980s |
| <u>Main emphasis</u> | Promoting eco-efficiency |
| <u>Sectoral relevance</u> | Business in general Predominantly focused on hotel sector or visitor management in specific destination types |
| <u>Examples</u> | Environmental Action Pack – IHEI Pollution Solutions Best Practice Ecotourism – A guide to energy and waste minimisation – Office of National Tourism, Australia The International Ecotourism Society’s guidelines for tourists and operators |
| <u>Strengths</u> | Accessibility - most manuals are available at a very low entry cost for all businesses. Simplicity - most are written in simple, non-technical language and can be implemented as easily by an enthusiastic but inexperienced member of staff as by a busy general manager. Low cost of action - Most rely on low or no cost actions. Ability to dictate the pace of change – Manuals enable businesses to implement environmental programmes at their own pace and in the way which best suits their business needs. They do not enforce actions which may managers perceive as irrelevant to their particular business. Lead by example - Most manuals include some reference to good practice and these examples can inspire businesses. |

Potential reach to activities of all travel and tourism businesses – The low entry cost combined with the charitable status of many of the originating organisations for these tools mean that they can have global reach throughout all layers of the travel and tourism industry.

Weaknesses

Short shelf life - With the exception of periodicals such as *Green Hotelier* organisations are unable to find resources to update.

Generic applicability – Most manuals have global or national relevance. They: are unable to address some of the specific issues that are important at a destination level; recommend suites of technologies that are not universally available or applicable; and can on occasion raise potential conflict between health and safety and environmental considerations.

Language – Most manuals are produced in English.

No technical support - Most manuals are provided to participants with no follow-up mechanism or help line for technical queries. This leaves most in a position to refer only to simple and effective cost saving mechanisms, but unable to provide more detailed guidance on integrated environmental or sustainable development solutions. Combinations of technologies are often cheaper to install and deliver significantly higher benefits than single solutions and so cost saving opportunities may be lost through this approach.

Do not help businesses set benchmarks or quantify performance - Although one or two of the more recent manuals do set performance benchmarks, few are able to provide performance benchmarks to help businesses assess how well they are performing and where the greatest potential improvements lie.

No mechanism for measuring success - Most manuals provide no overall framework within which success can be viewed and tracked. It is, therefore difficult to assess the extent to which businesses are making improvements within a consistent framework.

Focus on eco-efficiency – Most focus on techno-fixes and environmental aspects of tourism.

Award programmes and competitions

First developed

1980s

Main emphasis

Larger tourism businesses

Eco and nature based tourism

Sectoral relevance

All sectors, focusing on destinations and accommodation sector

Examples

BA ETC Tourism for Tomorrow Awards

IH&RA/AMEX Award

Strengths

Evolve over time – Most competitions and award programmes focus on specific topics of interest in different years.

Create awareness among consumers – In some cases, the public relations value far exceeds public exposure to certification logos or technical manuals.

Create competition within the industry – Competitions and award schemes are very effective at both creating awareness of sustainable development issues and also creating competition between businesses to adopt better environmental/sustainability principles.

Weaknesses

Judging process– With some notable exceptions, award programmes do not have transparent systems for assessing the quality of entries or for auditing those businesses that send in entries.

Recognise only the efforts of the best – The achievement of winners often look complex and do not, therefore, encourage confidence among businesses with less commitment to make progress.

Focus on ecotourism – Many award programmes focus on small scale and specialist ecotourism projects, making environmental and sustainable issues seem rather remote to mainstream tourism operations.

Focus on larger businesses – Because of the time and expense required to develop applications for awards, many smaller businesses are excluded from submitting applications.

No mechanism for monitoring performance – Most award programmes provide a snap shot of a businesses performance, but do not examine the way in which businesses progress over time.

Certification programmes

First developed

1992?

Main emphasis

Environmental efficiency

Sectoral relevance

Hotels and accommodation providers

Destinations

Increasingly tour operators

Examples

Green Globe 21 (Global)

Blue Flag (Global)

Green Tourism Business Scheme (Scotland)

Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Programme (Australia)

Certification for Sustainable Tourism (Costa Rica)

Strengths

Third party verification plays a key role in many programmes.

A technical advice function or network of consultants is a key component

An annual review or reporting procedure which ensure that the momentum continues among those companies that display the logo is common to most.

Demonstrate commitment to consumers through the award of a logo. Detailed written guidance is provided to help companies assess the status of their programmes

Quantifiable data from which performance improvements can be assessed is usually collated

Most review their criteria on an annual or biannual cycle, thus enabling them to evolve over time

Most claim input from stakeholders

Weaknesses

Focus mainly on the environmental aspects of tourism and specifically on the brown environmental aspects

Expense – unless supported by Government, most programmes are expensive and exclude the smaller operators

Significant time input - Most certification programmes require the collation of a substantial volume of data that requires at least some specialist knowledge. Both the volume and technical nature of information required are likely to be a deterrent to the smaller companies or those with limited environmental interest

Focus on ecotourism or other niche markets – The greatest improvements in the tourism industry will be brought about by influencing change through the mass tourism market. It is this aspect of the industry that has both the greatest footprint and – relatively – the greatest opportunity to improve. Low yields also make it a prime target for programmes that can deliver cost savings in the first instance at least.

Focus on hospitality or hotel businesses – Most schemes focus on the operations of the larger international hotel companies that comprise only a tiny percentage of the total population of tourism businesses.

Marketing effort is limited - Most programmes have a limited budget and have not focussed on raising consumer awareness.

Focus on management processes rather than actual performance. As a result, a company that is relatively polluting, but has an excellent environmental management system in place could qualify for a logo where one that produces relatively low levels of emission, but does not have a formal management system would not.

EMERGING TOOLS

Indicators and benchmarking

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| <u>First developed</u> | Post 1992 |
| <u>Main emphasis</u> | Measuring progress towards sustainable development. Relative ease of measuring environmental as opposed to social criteria means that these predominate. |
| <u>Sectoral relevance</u> | Destinations Hotels Technical operations of tour operators |
| <u>Examples</u> | WTO indicators of sustainable tourism IHEI/WWF-UK benchmarking initiative with hotels English Tourism Council indicators of sustainable tourism in the UK. |
| <u>Strengths</u> | Provide a quantifiable assessment of progress towards sustainable tourism within an individual unit or across a whole destination Transparent and methodological process Allows an individual business to compare its performance year-on-year and to plan for continual improvements. |
| <u>Weaknesses</u> | Technical nature of data required may exclude smaller operators Lack of technical support and lack of third party verification Lack of a single focal point from which to collate data at a centralised level. |

Lifecycle assessments

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| <u>First developed</u> | 1990? |
| <u>Main emphasis</u> | Tourism destinations |
| <u>Sectoral relevance</u> | Too early to state |
| <u>Examples</u> | British Airways Holidays work in St Lucia |
| <u>Strengths</u> | Focus on impacts of all tourism activity Quantify relevant importance of different impacts Destination specific |
| <u>Weaknesses</u> | Complex and difficult to implement Not fully developed or tested. |

ANNEX 2. THE 21 KEY CRITERIA FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CERTIFICATION [29].

1. Is voluntary in nature.
2. Maintains a publicly available list of products, which have been awarded the label.
3. Contributes to sustainable tourism development through the verification of tourism products through their performance.
4. Contribute to maintaining and enhancing service quality in tourism in Europe.
5. Recognises other eco-labels meeting the VISIT Standard.
6. Has considered product life cycle issues when setting product related criteria.
7. Requires attainable levels and gives consideration to relative impacts (“per unit”), through measurement, scoring and availability.
8. Is based on sound scientific, engineering, management economic environmental and social principles. The criteria are derived from data that support the claim of sustainable tourism good or best practice (i.e. environmental, economic and social benefit and/or efficiency).
9. Takes into account, during the process of establishing the criteria, relevant local, regional and global environmental issues, available technology, and economic and social issues whilst avoiding compromising service quality.
10. Reviews the criteria and product functional requirements within a predefined period.
11. Requires the declaration and compliance of the product to environmental and other relevant legislation as a pre-condition for the applicant to be awarded and to maintain the label.
12. Has selected product criteria, which may relate to impacts on the environment and natural resources or emissions to the environment. Such performance criteria shall be expressed in absolute (numbers) or relative (%) figures and measure units (e.g. kWh, litre, volume, weight per product, room, bed, overnight stay, m²) and may also recommend the exclusion or use of special materials or substances with proven negative or positive impacts respectively.
13. Requires criteria which are relevant in its area of operation and relevant for the specific product group and relate to the impact of the area and product group in relation to sustainable tourism.
14. Shall have management criteria which complement other Environmental Management Systems and include a commitment, suitably informed staff, training, public information and monitoring and measuring procedures.
15. Is accountable to its stakeholders in terms of the labels its development and operation: product categories, product criteria, period of validity of criteria and award, testing and

verification methods, certification and award procedures, compliance verification, complaints procedure.

16. Legally protects the eco-label (i.e. the certification mark/logotype) in order to prevent unauthorized use and to maintain public confidence in its brand and or initiative.

17. Is open to all potential applicants of the predefined product group in the area of operation. All applicants who fulfill the ecolabels conditions and criteria are entitled to be granted a license and authorized to use the label.

18. Guarantees that all the elements in the ecolabels conditions and criteria and the product function characteristics are verifiable by the eco-labeling body.

19. Has a verification methodology, which guarantees a high level of reliability. This includes on-site verifications occur as a minimum at least once every three years or certification period which ever is the lesser.

20. Has a set of terms and conditions relating to the overall operation of the programme which control the awarding of the licence and the use of the label.

21. Issues its certification based upon criteria that apply to the site for a predefined period of not more than three years.

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