

## Eco-labels in tourism and hospitality industry

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Ecolabelling is a voluntary method of environmental performance certification and labelling that is practised around the world.

At the end of the last century only environmentally oriented tourists could hear or learn something about ecological labels like Green globe or Heritage Environmental Rating Programme. After decades of specific behavior patterns of tourists the current trend is returning from the mass to the individual both environmentally friendly tourism, where new eco-labels come into play.

Good environmental performance is encouraged by integrating the participants in sustainable development, which eventually leads to the establishment of various voluntary initiatives and environmental protection programs. Of all the environmental programs (eco-labels, environmental protection programs, rewards and recognition system of environmental management, standards - codes of conduct, obligations and companies publications) the most effective are eco-labels and environmental awards. In contrast to "green" symbols, or claim statements developed by manufacturers and service providers, the most credible labels are awarded by an impartial third party for specific products or services that have been independently determined to meet transparent environmental leadership criteria, based on life-cycle considerations (ISO 14001). The environmental protection programs are meaningful only when present in an appropriate manner to all market participants, especially customers. Label which ensures the quality or promised commitment to environmental protection shows that the product is environmentally, culturally and socially oriented. Labels have become extremely powerful symbols with a significant contribution to the establishment of tourist services and spending on both sides of the spectrum of the market - supply and demand (Mensah, 2014). This process is still in development, given that more than half of the existing eco-labels are under the age of ten. Financial and human resources and adequate administrative and organizational structures are necessary for successful operation of eco-labels.

It is important that the growing environmental awareness of the population demands a radical change in business mentality. International standards for the enforcement of environmental protection provide companies with resources for effective environmental management system, which can be associated with other management requirements.

Eco-labels provide objective information about the impact of products or services on the environment. In tourism, eco-labels are labels that confirm the impact on

the environment (similar to that of industrial products) for tourism product, organization or destination. They are also indicators of environmental quality, examining the ecological level of the tourism product or destination (Sibila Leba, 2006).

Eco-labels in the tourism sector are the result of verification of compliance with certain environmental regulations and confirm that the tourist company, facility, product, process, service or management system meets certain environmental standards and criteria. Eco-label is not the same as a reward for environmental protection, which “recognizes the leading cases to help the tourism industry to protect natural and cultural heritage of our planet” (UNWTO). Awards for environmental protection are usually periodic (such as the annual award ceremony), while the eco-labels are valid at all times when certain criteria are met.

Providers of tourist services (hotels, restaurants, transport companies) decide to introduce measures to protect the environment in their operations for several reasons. First, of course, to avoid interventions due to pollution caused by mass tourism. It is also important to become recognizable on the market and this would result in a economic effects. By obtaining a eco-label following specific positive effects can be achieved, whether it is for a destination or accommodation (hotel, restaurant, or even a vehicle): enhancing the reputation and joint offer of individual operators and tourist destinations, strengthening of market position, better risk management, better asset management, better human resources development, positive effects on other sectors related to tourism and lower operating costs (Strick & Fenich, 2013).

The sum of all positive factors arising from environmentally-oriented activities is reflected in the economic efficiency of companies, but usually in the medium or long term. Owners, managers, government and tourists need reliable information about products and services in the tourism sector. Eco-labels, awards and declarations are the way to ensure compliance with quality for a variety of tourism products and services.

In general, there are three levels of eco-labels in tourism and hospitality: for mass tourism, for sustainable tourism and for ecotourism. The first type of eco-labels is



Figure 1. Examples of logos of some eco-labels that can be found in the tourism and hospitality industry

the most general and the least strict. In most cases, it only draws attention to the environmental impact and energy consumption and waste. Eco-labels for sustainable tourism symbolizes natural environment, socio-cultural and economic criteria (eg. Blue Flag on the beaches). Appropriate labels for eco-tourism involve meeting the highest level of criteria and taking into account only the products and services that have been declared as ecological.

Organizations related to the environment are usually non-profit, but they have to compensate for their costs. Applicants pay the costs of the application depending on the size, type of tourist accommodation (hotels, hostels, country houses, B&B, mountain lodge), number of rooms or similar criteria.

Some of good examples of eco-labels applicable in tourism and hospitality industry are: *Green Globe*, *Viabono*, *EU Ecolabel*, *Energy Star*, *Green Key*, *Eco Camping*, *Nordic Ecolabel*, *Green Seal*, etc.



ISO 14001 series of standards

Mensah, I. (2014). Different Shades of Green: Environmental Management in Hotels in Accra, *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 16/5, pp. 450-461.

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