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**Article**

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# ECOLOGICAL CERTIFICATION AND LABELLING OF TOURIST SERVICES

Mirela Stefanica\*

**Abstract:** *This work presents an analysis of ecological certification and labelling in the field of tourism.*

*In a tourist company, the certification schemes evaluate the general approach of environmental problems, and impose to the tourist services the observance of pre-established principles and guiding lines concerning the environment. They become for the tourist companies a behavioural standard in the development of their activity. The requirements within such schemes are often flexible and open to interpretation, and generally less controversial than the eco-labelling schemes.*

*As compared to the certification schemes, the eco-labels attributed to the tourist services emphasise the impact over the environment of the services of tourist companies, on the basis of certain European criteria. These criteria refer to the whole life cycle of these tourist services.*

**Keywords:** certification; eco-labelling; tourist services

**JEL Classification:** L83; Q57; Q58

## INTRODUCTION

Ecological certification and labelling are two instruments of application of the environmental policy in tourism industry.

*Certification* of tourist services is a volunteer procedure evaluating, monitoring, and delivering the written assurance that they are in compliance with specific requirements. By certification, a commercial mark or seal is given to the tourist services accomplishing or going beyond these basic standards.

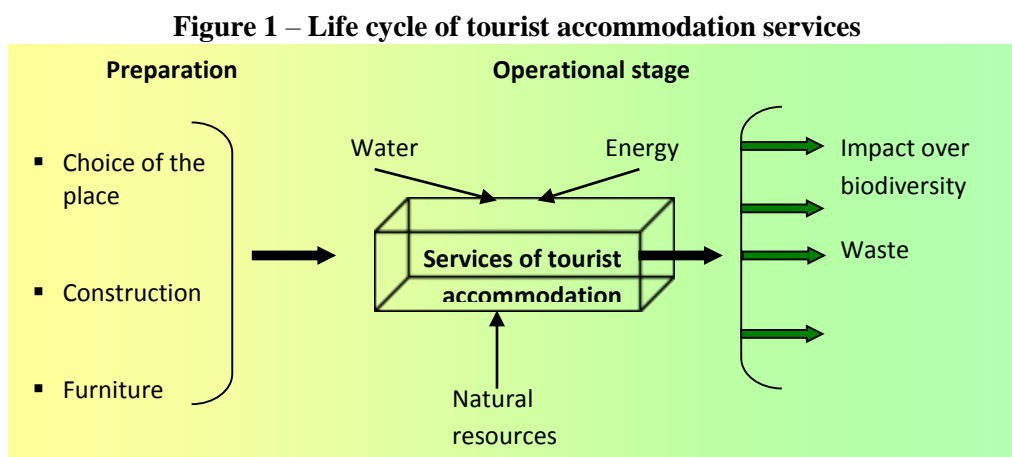
*Ecological labelling or eco-labelling* in tourism describes a scheme by which an eco-label may be given to a tourist service on the basis of its acceptable level of impact over the environment. This acceptable level of impact over the environment could be determined by considering a single criterion referring to the environment or after the realisation of an evaluation of its total impact.

*The European eco-label* is given to the tourist services that are in compliance with certain ecological criteria established in Europe. These criteria have been identified according to complete scientific studies on aspects related to the whole life cycle of tourist services, and they are valid for 3-5 years, being revised regularly in order to take into account the technical progress.

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**Figure 1** presents the life cycle of tourist accommodation services, on the basis of which the criteria for eco-labelling are established.



Source: National Research-Development Institute for Environmental Protection ([www.incdpm.ro/ro/](http://www.incdpm.ro/ro/))

The analysis of the entire life cycle is a method to quantify the impact of a tourist service over the environment, from the conception/preparation stage (including the resources used) to its elimination, destruction or recycling after use. This instrument helps identify and quantify the material and energetic resources consumed, and the emissions and waste generated. It also helps evaluate their potential impact over the environment, and identify the options to reduce this impact. (Banacu, 2004)

The analysis of the life cycle of tourist services means to account for the flows, and it can be applied both to services and to the strategic evaluation of the plans and programs (Macoveanu, 2008).

## 1. THE MAIN ECOLOGICAL CERTIFICATION AND LABELLING PROGRAMS IN TOURISM

There are several certification and eco-labelling programs known world-wide, offering labels or distinctions conceived in order to show that the environmental, socio-cultural and economic practices from the tourist areas meet higher criteria. The most common are presented in **table 1** in Annex section.

All the certification programs of tourist services have six mutual components, as follows:

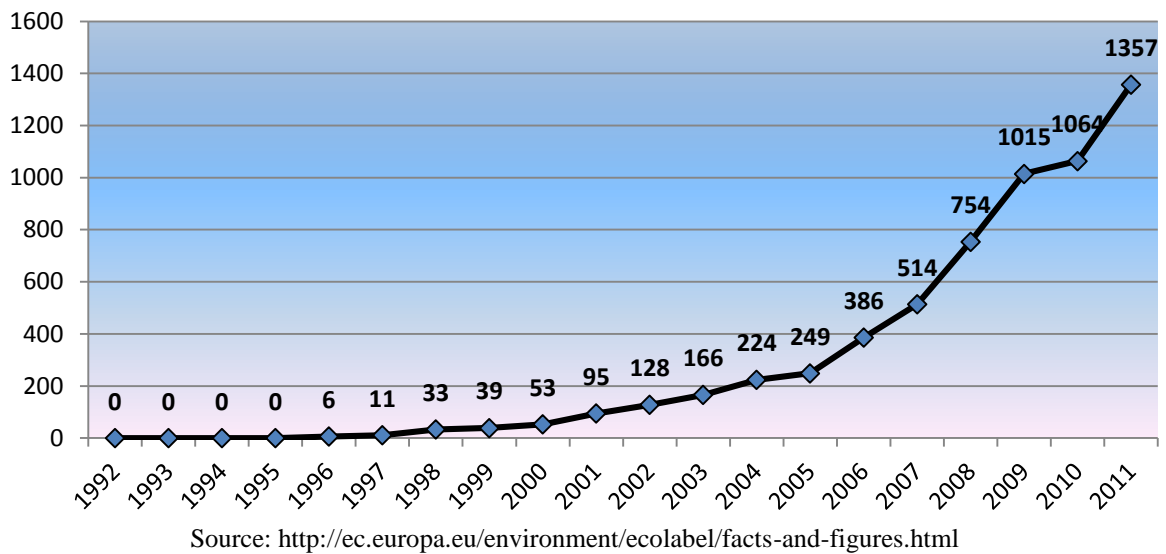
1. *Volunteer participation* - certification programs in tourism industry are strictly volunteer ones.

2. *Logo's* – the programs use specific logo's, seals or marks with the purpose to differentiate tourist services on the sale markets, and to be easier recognised by consumers.
3. *Criteria in compliance with the in force or higher regulations* – the certification programs ask the members to comply at minimum level with the local, national, regional, and international regulations.
4. *Publication of the commitment on sustainable development* – the tourist companies that start the activities necessary for certification sign a comprehensive declaration concerning their commitment on sustainable development, emphasising the issues referring to the air quality, use of waste and of energy, their impact over the conservation of natural resources and over the hosting community.
5. *Evaluation and auditing* – the certification programs offer badges on the basis of evaluations realised by the company itself, by a professional association in the field, or by an independent company as an NGO, or even by the government.
6. *Member quality and fees* – many certification programs register the participants among the members, and require a fee from all the companies that apply for certification. The money is used for the development of the program and to support the activities of advertisement and promotion of the logo and of the certified companies. (Honey, 2002)

## **2. EUROPEAN ECO-LABEL IN NUMBERS AND DATA**

The European eco-label was initiated in 1992. Ever since, the number of products and services which received an eco-label has risen every year. Until the end of 2011, more than 1,300 certifications were given, as we can also see in **figure 2**.

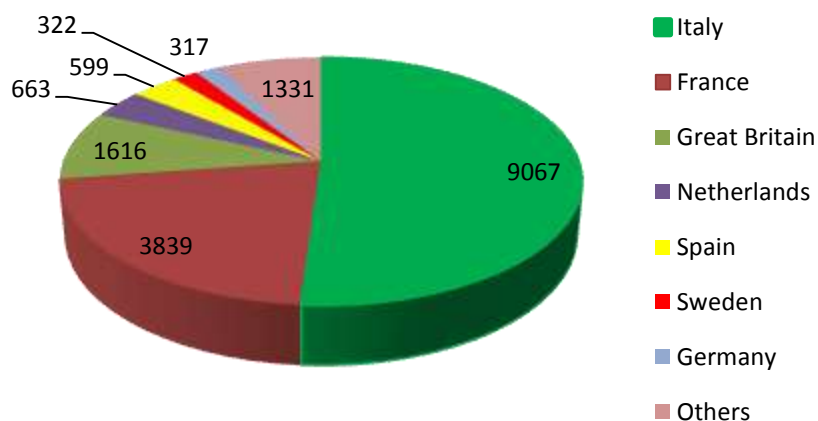
**Figure 2 - Evolution in time of the number of groups of eco-labelled products and services**



Consequently, for 10 years, the eco-labelled products and services have registered a rather shy rising trend. It was after 2006 that significant development took place, reaching at the beginning of 2012 the number of 1357 categories of eco-labelled products and services.

At present, the logo of the European eco-label can be found on over 17,000 products and services.

**Figure 3 – Situation of eco-labels received by country**



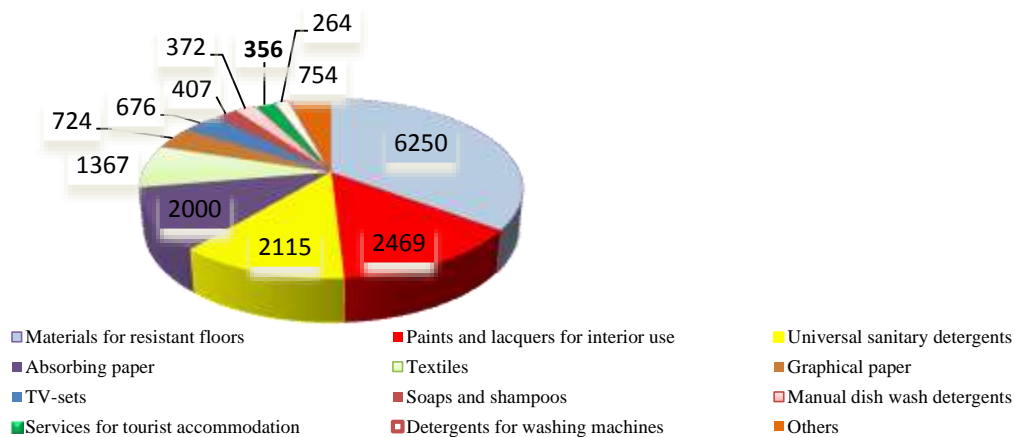
Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecolabel/facts-and-figures.html>

We can see that Italy has a significantly greater number of eco-labels received as compared to the other countries, with 9067 eco-labelled products and services. An important number of eco-labelled products and services are also found in France (3839) and in Great

Britain (1616). In the top of the countries with a great number of eco-labelled products and services are also Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Germany. Romania has twelve eco-labels, attributed to certain products and services (personal computers and laptops, interior paints and tourist accommodation services).

The European eco-label is attributed at present to an extensive range of products and services, all non-food and non-medical, presented in **figure 4**.

**Figure 4 – The main groups of eco-labelled products and services**



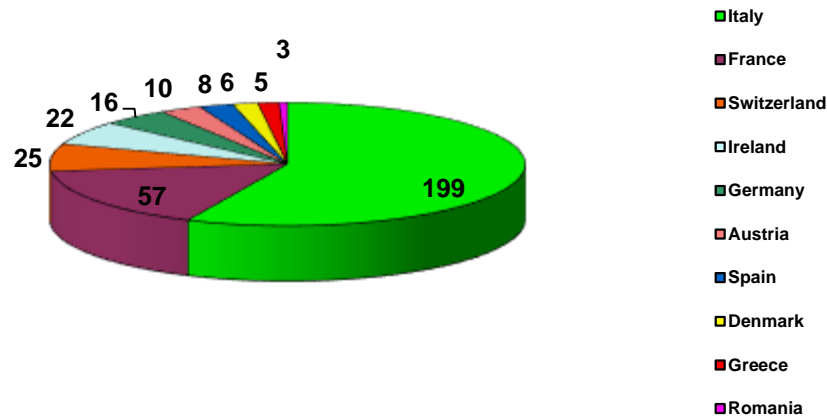
Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecolabel/facts-and-figures.html>

We can see that the biggest group of products with a European eco-label is represented by the materials for resistant floors, with a total of 35% of the eco-labelled products. Also, from the number of eco-labelled products, absorbing paper and universal sanitary detergents are over 10% each, while the paints and lacquers for interior use represent almost 14%. At the same time, there are hundreds of products like TV-sets, soaps, shampoos, or detergents that have been eco-labelled.

As we can see in **figure 4**, the services for tourist accommodation were registering at the beginning of 2012 only 2%, which means that 356 tourist services were eco-labelled. At present, this number is much bigger; only in Italy at the end of 2012 there were 199 tourist accommodation structures with eco-labels.

In **figures 5 and 6** we present the situation of eco-labelled tourist accommodation and camping services in Europe, at the end of 2012.

**Figure 5 – Situation of eco-labelled tourist accommodation services in Europe (2012)**



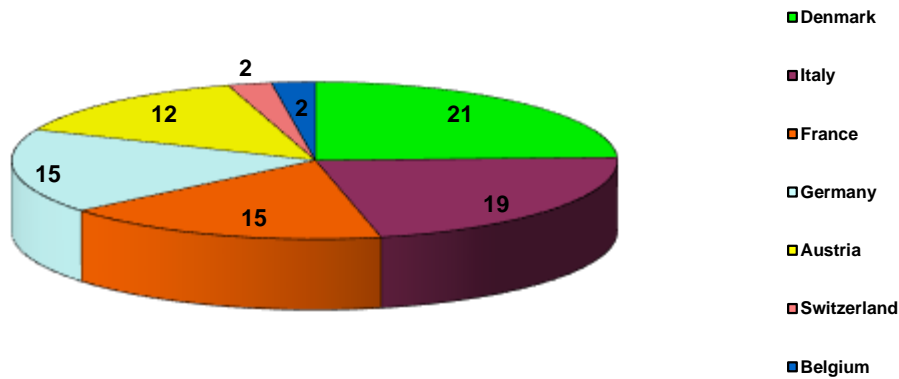
Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/ecat/> - processed data

As we can see in **figure 5**, Italy is the country with the most eco-labelled tourist accommodation services (199), followed by France (57), Switzerland (25), and Ireland (22).

In Romania, from the twelve eco-labels obtained, three were attributed to tourist accommodation services. Consequently, at the end of 2012, there were two hotels with eco-labels: Saturn Hotel, from Saturn resort, which obtained an eco-label in the summer of 2008, Crown Plaza Hotel in Bucharest, eco-labelled at the end of October 2009, and Piatra Soimului Villa in Sinaia resort, which received a European eco-label in 2011.

In what concerns the number of eco-labels offered for camping services, the situation is presented in **figure 6**.

**Figure 6 - Situation of eco-labelled camping services (2012)**



Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/ecat/> - processed data

We can see that the number of eco-labelled camping services is rather low, most of the services being in Denmark and Italy. In Romania there is no eco-labelled camping service at the moment.

## CONCLUSIONS

Lately, there is a growing number of persons interested in environmental protection and in the sustainable management of resources. Therefore, the ecological practices became common for many operators in the field of tourism.

The desire itself to obtain the ecological certification or the eco-labelling of the tourist services offered proves that the tourism operators are aware that the profitable operation of tourist structures can only be realised in accordance with the minimal requirements of environmental protection.

As we already noticed, the ecological certification and eco-labelling of tourist services guarantee the fact that they meet extremely high standards from the point of view of life cycle, impact, quality and environmental performance.

A tourist unit offering such services proves to the tourists its preoccupation and effort concerning the environmental measures, and also its interest in increasing quality, because tourists would certainly see the environmental performance as «higher quality».



At the same time, obtaining the ecological certification or eco-labelling of tourist services can be an important element in relation with the competition, contributing to the increase of the prestige of the tourist unit.

In conclusion, we must highlight that each tourist unit should realise its role in environmental protection, should take the responsibility and also encourage tourists to do the same.







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## ANNEX

**Table 1 - Certification and eco-labelling programs in tourism**

Name	Explanation
 <u><a href="#">ECOTEL</a></u> <i>International</i>	<p>Since 1994, ECOTEL has defined the concept of ecological responsibility in tourism industry. This certification helps establishing a reference indicator concerning environmental performance, and also a modality for independently checking the hotels with environmental problems.</p> <p><b>Source:</b> <a href="http://www.ecotels.com">www.ecotels.com</a> – accessed on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013</p>
 <u><a href="#">Green Globe 21</a></u> <i>International</i>	<p>It is a reference indicator and a global certification program facilitating travels and sustainable tourism for consumers, companies and communities. It is elaborated on the basis of Agenda 21 and the Principles concerning Sustainable Development.</p> <p><b>Source:</b> <a href="http://www.greenglobe21.com">www.greenglobe21.com</a> – accessed on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013</p>
 <u><a href="#">Blue Flag Campaign</a></u> <i>International</i>	<p>Since 1987, Blue Flag has symbolised high environmental standards concerning the quality of bathing water, beach cleanliness, and waste storage, offering the tourists up-to-date information, environmental education and commitment in what concerns the preservation of coast ecosystems.</p> <p><b>Source:</b> <a href="http://www.blueflag.org">www.blueflag.org</a> – accessed on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013</p>
 <u><a href="#">VISIT</a></u> <i>Europa</i>	<p>It is a European initiative concerning the promotion of eco-labelling and of the development of sustainable tourism. It has a double meaning: invitation addressed to the consumers, and also to the service providers in tourism.</p> <p><b>Source:</b> <a href="http://www.yourvisit.info">www.yourvisit.info</a> – accessed on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013</p>
 <u><a href="#">PAN Parks</a></u> <i>Europa</i>	<p>It guarantees the protection of the natural European capital, certifying the parks by the independent experts in compliance with the basic principles (social, cultural, economic and environmental), criteria and PAN Park indicators.</p> <p><b>Source:</b> <a href="http://www.panparks.org">www.panparks.org</a> – accessed on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013</p>
 <u><a href="#">The Swan</a></u> <i>Danemarca, Islanda, Finlanda, Norvegia and Suedia</i>	<p>Since 1999, this label has guaranteed that the products and services wearing this label meet extremely high standards from the point of view of the life cycle, impact, quality and environmental performance.</p> <p><b>Source:</b> <a href="http://www.svanen.nu">www.svanen.nu</a> – accessed on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013</p>
 <u><a href="#">The Green Key</a></u> <i>Danemarca, Estonia, Groenlanda and Suedia</i>	<p>Since 1994, Green Key has conferred a diploma to the responsible providers of tourist services who meet a broad list of criteria referring to the environment, including those related to the environmental policies of the company, or of the action plans in this field. Since 2001, the first Green Key diplomas have been granted to the establishments in Estonia, Greenland and Sweden.</p> <p><b>Source:</b> <a href="http://www.green-key.org">www.green-key.org</a> - accessed on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2013</p>
 <u><a href="#">La Clef Verte</a></u> <i>Franta</i>	<p>Since 1999, La Clef Verte has granted its label to the camping places that adopt practices concerning responsible management, maintain biodiversity, and preserve the resources, guaranteeing that they observe the environment.</p> <p><b>Source:</b> <a href="http://www.laclefverte.org">www.laclefverte.org</a> - accessed on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2013</p>
 <u><a href="#">Legambiente Turismo</a></u> <i>Italia</i>	<p>This certification system, “Ecological places recommended for visiting”, was initiated in 1997 in Riccione resort. The granting criteria include the quality of regional cuisine from the point of view of natural ingredients used, or modalities by which tourists are helped to get accustomed to the specific of local culture and natural environment in the area.</p> <p><b>Source:</b> <a href="http://www.legambienteturismo.it">www.legambienteturismo.it</a> - accessed on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2013</p>

 <p><b><u>Milieubarometer</u></b> <i>Olanda</i></p>	<p>Since 1998, three different categories of eco-labels have been granted to those who develop activities in the field of tourism, concerning environmental quality. <b>Source:</b> <a href="http://www.milieubarometer.com">www.milieubarometer.com</a> – accessed on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2013</p>
 <p><b><u>Hiiumaa Green Label</u></b> <i>Estonia</i></p>	<p>It characterises an accommodation facility or unit providing food services, managed in a sustainable manner, and it requires the guests to act accordingly. <b>Source:</b> <a href="http://www.bka.hiiumaaluodus.ee/roh%20mark/greenlab.html">www.bka.hiiumaaluodus.ee/roh mark/greenlab.html</a> – accessed on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2013</p>
 <p><b><u>The Green Certificate</u></b> <i>Letonia</i></p>	<p>It represents an eco-label characterising from the point of view of environmental quality the tourist establishments protecting nature, natural environment, rational use of water and energy resources, ecological practices and waste collection management. <b>Source:</b> <a href="http://www.eco.celotajs.lv">www.eco.celotajs.lv</a> – accessed on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2013</p>