



Figure 2: The Players in Tourism Ecolabels (Font, 2001: 201).

3. Ecolabelling Prospects and Problems

The early literature on sustainable tourism, certification, and labelling, appears to range from prospects to problems. Similarly, Tippet et al. (2020) provides a more up-to-date report for tourism enterprises citing various pros and cons of ecolabelling (see Table 1.).

Table 1: Arguments for and Against Business Ecolabelling and Support in Literature for the Arguments. Adapted From Tippet (et al. 2020:25)

Arguments for and against business ecolabelling.	Support in literature for the arguments (Low, Some, High)
Business arguments for	
Cost reduction	High
Marketing advantages	Some
Communicates environmental credentials	Some
Higher prices	Low
Business arguments against	
Costs of certification, recertification, and yearly fee	Some
Sustainability reasons for	
Process advantages	High
Tourists develop positive attitudes to sustainability	Some
Openness of processes and impacts	High
Sustainability reasons against	
Omits transport	High

Arguments for and against business ecolabelling.	Support in literature for the arguments (Low, Some, High)
Favours big enterprises	High
Ecolabel schemes are distractors to sustainability	Some
Greenwashing of products and businesses	Some

Tippett et al., (Ibid) regard ecolabels as a pathway for sustainable development but identify a specific need for smaller enterprises with limited time and resources to identify the right ecolabels to use. In fact, Tippett et al., (Ibid:9) provide a useful table reviewing some of the main ecolabels in terms of their suitability for different types of tourism enterprises. (See Appendix table 2).

This paper goes a step further by providing a conceptual model of the certification process in order that all tourism enterprises can improve their decision-making. The model builds on prior research on measuring social and environmental impact in Mallorca (Moon and Batle, 2018, Batle et al., 2018 on social innovation, Moon et al., 2020 review of seven hotels with the UNWTO guidelines, and Moon and Bace’s, 2020, development of a circular model for green financing. The new model aligns with the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (2023) sustainable development guidelines, and the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC, 2023).

4. New Dynamic Conceptual Model

The new conceptual model (Figure 3) of the sustainable tourism certification process places the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the heart of the model. This means that the certification and labelling process for all tourist enterprises is based on the SDGs and serves as a constant reinforcer of progress against targets. The certification process is thus removed as far as possible from claims of ‘greenwashing’ and is based on a business case appropriate for each enterprise and renewed in a circular process. The end point is thus not certification. The certification and labelling process is an offshoot of the progress towards targets. The new model supports the global assurance standard for sustainability reporting (GSTC, 2023) but in a way that makes the process more accessible to smaller tourist enterprises as well as large ones. This is similar to the development of AA1000 (AccountAbility, 2023) - the ‘process’ standard aimed at all organisations and not just large organisations.



Figure 3: Conceptual framework of Sustainable Tourism Certification Based on Circular Economy Principles: Author Devised

5. Conclusions

The myriad array of tourism sustainability certifications and labels shows diversity in the industry but can be confusing to tourism enterprises and tourists. The global sustainable tourism assurance framework (GSTC) provides some level of assurance over providers of certification and labelling. However, smaller tourism enterprises may not have the time nor resources to review and apply UN or national policies and guidelines on sustainable development. The main priority of smaller tourism enterprise is likely to be commercial success. Thus, a simpler model based on recognising the importance of the SDGs to all tourism enterprises, as presented

here, is a useful practical development which regards the certification and labelling process as an offshoot of the circular business model applied to tourism organisations.

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Appendix 1: Ecolabel Calendar of Events: Font (2002:199)

Date	Event/ Action	Outcome
1985	First Blue Flags awarded	FEEE starts expansion campaign, currently over 1800 beaches and 600 marinas
1998	Green Globe Standard launched	Companies sign up to principles and use logo
December 1998	UNEP publishes milestone report on tourism ecolabels	Supports development of ecolabels as self-regulation methods
April 1999	WTO concerned with quality and reliability of ecolabels, certification systems, awards	WTO proposes at UN-CSD-7 to investigate their effectiveness
March 2000	ITB (Berlin) ecolabelling panel, organised by ECOTRANS	Little enthusiasm for single European ecolabel
May 2000	Green Globe 21 associates with CRC Sustainable Tourism (Australia)	Strengthen image, increase scientific/ academic background
Throughout 2000	Green Globe increases world-wide alliances	PATA Green Leaf, Caribbean Alliance for Sustainable Tourism and Green Key
August 2000	WWF published critical report of Green Globe 21	Green Globe forced to publicly respond and take action
September 2000	FEMATOUR report to the EC Ecolabelling board	European hotels do not support single label. Campsites and hostels to be targeted
November 2000	Mohonk workshop, funded by the Ford Foundation	Principles of Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism Certification tabled as possible agreement by participants
November 2000	Rainforest Alliance	RA openly proposes the Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council
January 2001	First e-conference on ecotourism certification	Allowed open participation, but not managed.
March 2001	First book on ecolabels published (edited by Font & Buckley)	Creates theoretical body of knowledge and baseline data
April 2001	GG21 benchmarking CD-ROM	Development of sector specific benchmarks in a user-friendly format
May 2001	Rainforest Alliance offers to the WTO to be in the Advisory Board for the Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council	WTO accepts the offer, proposal strengthened
May 2001	WTO seminar on Certification systems and standards in tourism seminar	Latin American and Caribbean WTO member governments request WTO to take a leading role in setting international standards
June 2001	Second e-conference on ecotourism certification	Follow up planned, aiming to reach agreements
June 2001	ECO-LAB proposal to EC's LIFE	ECOTRANS will benchmark environmental indicators for ecolabels, and strengthen co-operation between labels
July 2001	WTO commissioned inventory of ecolabels and codes of practice in tourism	Over 500 identified, 130 studied in depth to draw conclusions.
July 2001	Rainforest Alliance commissions a feasibility study of the Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council	15 month research period will generate discussion and interest in the topic. Outcomes unknown.
August 2001	Tour Operators Initiative for Sustainable Tourism commissions a report on the value of ecolabels to tour operators	Certification accepted as one method to inform supply chain management for tour operators, but not sufficiently widespread to be the only method.

Appendix 2: Suitability of Ecolabels for Different Types of Tourism Enterprises. Tippet et al. (Ibid:9)

	Scope		Cost		Other Characteristics			Areas of Tourism Covered													
	Europe/Global	Limited	Minimum 3 Year Cost (Euros)	Months to achieve	Based on:	Awarding Body	3 rd Party Verified	Businesses Certified	Accommodation	Activities	Attractions	Events	Food & Drink	Marinas	Other Tourism Bus	Supply Chain	Tour Operators	Tourism Offices	Tourism Shops	Transport	
EMAS	Eur		Var.	12	ISO	Gov.	Yes	3694	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
ISO 14001:2015	Glob		Var.	NI	ISO	NP	Yes	300000	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Earthcheck	Glob		5100*	6-12	GSTC	FP	Yes	NI	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Biosphere	Eur		600*	1	GSTC	NP	Yes	216	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Green Globe	Glob		1950*	3-6	ISO	FP	Yes	132	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
National Park Partnership Programme		DE	150*	3-6	Other	Gov.	Yes ^a	1400	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Green Tourism		UK	591*	Var.	NI	NP	Yes	2415	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Ecotourism Norway		NO	585*	3-12	Other	Gov.	No ^b	15	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Eco-Lighthouse		NO	828*	2-3	NI	NP	Yes	5300	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
The Green Key	Glob		1500*	Var.	GSTC	NP	Yes	3100	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Nordic Swan		NO,DK	9000	3-6	ISO	Gov.	Yes	25000	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Tourcert	Glob		6800	8	ISO+	FP	Yes	340	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Certified Green Hotel		DE	7500*	1	NI	FP	Yes	107	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Dehoga		DE	715*	NI	NI	FP	Yes	120	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Global Sustainable Tourism Council	Glob		Var.	NI	GSTC	NP	Yes	>5000	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
NEPCon	Glob		6640	4-6	GSTC	NP	Yes	90	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
EU Ecolabel	Eur		1400*	2	ISO	Gov.	Yes	77358	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Green Sign		DE,NE	2370*	1.5	ISO+	FP	Yes	225	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Travelife	Glob		960*	1	GSTC	FP	Yes	975	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Green Table		DE	240	0.5	NI	NP	Yes	90	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x