

Umbrella Label for booking Sustainable Tourism Services

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I. PROBLEM

In autumn 2017, stakeholders in Germany launched the green label “Grünes Blatt” for sustainable travel services. The label helps booking a sustainable holiday for consumers after consultation with a travel agency and offers a comparison system in the booking engine “Bistro Portal”. The project ‘Green Travel Transformation GTT’ in the Bistro Portal, which is mostly used in Germany, enables travel agencies to see and book hotels with a sustainability certification for the first time. Members of this project are stakeholders like DER Touristik and Thomas Cook, Futouris e.V. and universities like LEUPHANA Universität Lüneburg, supported by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research in Berlin.

II. SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Definition

Sustainable travel and tourism is on the rise: tourist demand is growing, travel industry suppliers are developing sustainable programs and governments are creating new policies to encourage sustainable practices in tourism. But what does “sustainable tourism” really mean?

Sustainable tourism is the concept of visiting a place as a tourist and trying to make only a positive impact on the environment, society and economy. Sustainable tourism intends for people to respect the people on the holiday location, their culture, customs and the socio-economic system of the destination¹. According to the World Tourism Organization UNWTO, sustainable tourism is “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors,

¹ <http://traveltips.usatoday.com/meaning-sustainable-tourism-2297.html>

the industry, the environment and host communities”.² Thus, sustainable tourism should:

Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.

Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their living and created cultural heritage, as well as their traditional values and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.

Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment, income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, contributing as well to poverty alleviation.³

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.⁴

2. United Nations International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development

The United Nations General Assembly declared 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development⁵, highlighting the potential of tourism to advance the universal 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁶ UNWTO’s five pillars regarding the UN’s International Year 2017 of Sustainable Tourism for Development are:

- (1) inclusive and sustainable economic growth;
- (2) social inclusiveness, employment, and poverty reduction;
- (3) resource efficiency, environmental protection, and climate change adaptation and mitigation; (4) respect for cultural values, diversity, and heritage; and
- (5) mutual understanding, peace, and security.

Translating this concept into developing a sustainable tourism or sustainable destination is more complicated, while it’s even more difficult to find sustainable products in the market place.

² <http://sdt.unwto.org/content/about-us-5>

³ <http://sdt.unwto.org/content/about-us-5>

⁴ *Making Tourism More Sustainable – A Guide for Policy Makers*, UNEP and UNWTO, 2005, p.11-12

⁵ <http://media.unwto.org/press-release/2017-01-03/2017-international-year-sustainable-tourism-development>

⁶ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

3. Intention of the article

The intention of this article is not developing sustainable tourism services, such as sustainable transportation to the destination or green hotel accommodations by hotel companies. This paper will show a solution for the traveller to find and book sustainable tourist services in the marketplace of travel agencies or internet booking machines. In addition to traditional distribution chains, the Internet has become an increasingly important medium through which travel services are offered or sold to the traveller.

4. Stakeholders in tourism

Stakeholders of sustainable tourism play an important role in continuing this new form of tourism. This can include organizations, as well as individuals. "A stakeholder in the tourism industry is deemed to be anyone who is affected positively or negatively by the new developments, and as a result it reduces potential conflicts between the tourists and the host community by involving the latter in shaping the way in which tourism develops.⁷ Some of the most important stakeholders for travellers looking to book sustainable tourist services in green tourism are transport companies responsible for the carriage of travellers, hotels for accommodation, rental of cars, travel organisers for packages and retailers which offer or sell travel services.

III. INTEREST IN SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL OFFERS

1. Traders of green economy

Studies of the "Reiseanalyse" of FUR Forschungsgemeinschaft Urlaub und Reisen e.V 2017⁸, as well as representative population surveys previously performed by Leuphana University, showed that 71.2 percent of German holiday-makers are highly interested in sustainable travel offers. However, only 32.9 percent act on this interest in the booking process, since adequate information is not available.⁹

⁷ Aas, C.; Ladkin, A.; Fletcher, J. (2005). „Stakeholder collaboration and heritage management“. *Annals of Tourism Research*. 32 (1): 28–48

⁸ The Reiseanalyse is an annually conducted multi-client survey, influenced and commissioned by its clients, national and international DMOs, tour operators, associations and publishing houses. The Reiseanalyse provides a representative overview of the holiday travel behaviour of the German-speaking population in Germany as well as time series data. http://www.fur.de/fileadmin/user_upload/RA_2017/RA2017_Erste_Ergebnisse_DE.pdf

⁹ FUR Forschungsgemeinschaft Urlaub und Reisen e.V. (2014): Abschlussbericht zu dem Forschungsvorhaben: Nachfrage für Nachhaltigen Tourismus im Rahmen der Reiseanalyse. Veröffentlicht unter: www.fur.de/fileadmin/user_upload/externe_Inhalte/Publikationen/20140912_RA14_BMU_Nachhaltige-Nachfrage_Bericht.pdf, 21.1.2016.

2. Tourists

A large and growing number of tourists would like their holiday to be ecologically and socially responsible. Sustainability has become more important for tourists, but there is a lack of information for those interested in sustainable holidays and regarding which environmentally and socially acceptable offers have the biggest potential.¹⁰ The Agenda 2013 shows how in tourism there's a big gap between intentions and reality. Although a large number of travel offers present good alternatives to the “faster, more often, further” options, with climate-friendly trips to sustainably designed holiday resorts and accommodations, the travellers keep making mostly unsustainable decisions. In recent surveys, the proportion of those who care about environmentally friendly or socially responsible tourism is regularly over 60 percent. Nevertheless, sustainability was the key decision criterion for only two percent of respondents.¹¹ So in the past not many tourists have looked at relevant labels. For travellers, these criteria are only of secondary or tertiary importance after the destination and the price.

On the other hand, you can find surveys about the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), noting how sustainability certification is more important for Europeans, with 40 percent considering them to be “very important”. Younger consumers – those aged below 24 – can also be swayed by a resort having official certification, as 65 percent say it is “important” or “very important”.¹² Nevertheless, it is difficult for the traveller to find and book sustainable tourist services in the tourism market. An important reason for this was the lack of available information both in private research, for example on the Internet, and for travel agents in travel agencies.

III. SUSTAINABLE CERTIFICATION

1. Need

Being certified is a main criterion for a tourism product or service with high social and environmental standards. As public concern grows about sustainable tourism, certification will provide holiday makers with a credible solution. Travel

¹⁰ Module topic of Reiseanalyse 2014, <http://www.fur.de/ra/en-ra2018/previous-modules/>.

¹¹ https://www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de/fileadmin/mediapool/2_Downloads/Fachinformationen/Profil/Profil20-de-v07-Web.pdf

¹² <https://www.gstcouncil.org/stop-think-discuss-survey-finds-65-24-swayed-resort-official-certification/>

providers for the carriage of travellers or accommodation should display their label of certification in the market to promote the booking of their sustainable business. Tour organiser and traders are seeking a valid confirmation that sustainability practices are in place. With increasing frequency, travel companies are looking for tourism services that are not only certified as sustainable, but certified as sustainable by an accredited certification body like the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC).

2. Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) serves as the international neutral body for fostering increased knowledge and understanding of sustainable tourism practices, promoting the adoption of universal sustainable tourism principles and building demand for sustainable travel¹³. It has a number of programmes, including the stipulation of international standards for accreditation organisations that would be responsible for inspecting a tourism product, and certifying them as a sustainable company. In 2008, the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria were launched as a means to promote sustainable tourism through actionable principles that encompassed the three main aspects of sustainability:

- maximizing social and economic benefits for the local community,
- enhancing cultural heritage,
- reducing negative impacts to the environment.

So the German TUI Group, one of the world's largest travel providers, shows preference in their global selection of hotels for those that are certified as sustainable. To learn about this, see TUI Group's annual sustainability report.¹⁴ There you can find the Sustainability Strategy 2015-2020 "Better Holidays, Better World" of TUI. There are more than 130 labels worldwide, organized according to the global initiative GSCT.

3. Pre-contractual information in Regulation (EC) No 2006/2204

There is no stated obligation for a pre-contractual information of the traveller in Regulation (EC) No 2006/2204, about package travel and linked travel arrangements. The tour-operator and the retailer shall provide the traveller with

¹³ <https://www.gstcouncil.org/about/about-us/>

¹⁴ <https://www.tuigroup.com/en-en/sustainability/reporting-downloads>.

the information about the location and, where applicable, the tourist category of the accommodation (Art. 5 No 1 lit a iii). But this tourist category mentioned in the Regulation is not similar to green labels of private organisations in the field of tourism.

4. Certification in Germany

In Germany there is no official classification or label by the Federal Countries or by the Federal Government in Berlin. Therefore, there is a “jungle” of sustainable tourism labels. To make the confusion even more evident, the labels also differ in the selection of criteria and their examination. Some institutions focus on ecological standards, but don't include social aspects. Some companies are inspected locally, while other certifiers only check the websites. Here you can find six certificates of the ranking of the Federal German Association “Die Verbraucher Initiative e. V.”¹⁵

(1) TOURCERT

The non-profit GmbH TourCert was founded in 2009. TourCert certified more than 140 companies and organizations in Europe. Not only sustainability aspects within accommodations are assessed, seeing as the label also includes leisure activities and educational campaigns in the region.¹⁶

(2) BIOHOTELS

The label of the association BioHotels certifies more than 100 hotels in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Greece and Slovenia. As the name implies, it ensures that food and drinks are sourced as locally as possible and come from certified organic farming. A yearly check is performed to see whether these accommodations still meet the sustainability requirements.¹⁷

(3) GREENGLOBE

This environmental label has certified hostels in around 50 countries and shown its commitment to sustainability since 1994. If a company complies with more than 51% of the criteria, it will get the label. Members are helped so they can improve in the areas of economic, social and environmental sustainability.¹⁸

¹⁵ <https://utopia.de/ratgeber/umweltsiegel-und-oeko-zertifikate-in-der-reisebranche/>

¹⁶ <http://www.tourcert.org/>

¹⁷ <https://www.biohotels.info/>

¹⁸ <http://greenglobe.com/de/>

(4) GREEN PEARLS

The company Green Pearls GmbH has been providing orientation in sustainable tourism since 2012. The site lists over 100 sustainable accommodations worldwide.¹⁹

(5) EUROPEAN ECOLABEL

Since 1992, the European Ecolabel has certified hostels and camping sites with a particularly high level of environmental commitment.²⁰ The label owner is the European Commission. However, the environmental label is awarded by national authorities. It will check, among other things, whether the accommodation has an environmental concept and an appropriate action plan. In addition, at least 50 percent of the electricity should be generated from renewable energy sources. In Germany, twelve hotels carry this label.

(6) GREENSIGN

The GreenSign certificate is sponsored by the “Institute for Sustainable Development in the Hotel Industry” (InfraCert GmbH) and awarded since 2013/2014.²¹ Hotels are classified according to ecological, social and economic requirements in five certification levels. The GreenSign seal is valid for 3 years. There are currently more than 100 certified hotels in Germany and abroad.

IV. LABEL OF THE PROJECT GREEN TRAVEL TRANSFORMATION

1. Seven labels in one

The new label “Grünes Blatt” is not a certificate. It is simply a sign which enables travel agencies for the first time to see and book hotels with a sustainability certification²². Working like an umbrella, the new label covers seven labels – Green Key²³, Travellife²⁴, Green Globe, Green Sign, Biosphere Responsible Tourism²⁵, Viabono²⁶ and Rainforest Alliance²⁷.

¹⁹ <https://www.greenpearls.com/de>

²⁰ <http://www.eu-ecolabel.de/>

²¹ <http://www.greensign.de/>

²² <http://www.fww.de/green-travel-transformation-oeko-reisen-kommen-an-den-counter/393/178528/18082>

²³ <http://www.greenkey.global/>

²⁴ <https://www.travelife.info/>

²⁵ <https://biospheretourism.com/>

²⁶ <https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/umwelttipps-fuer-den-alltag/siegelkunde/viabono-zertifikat/>

²⁷ <https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/>



Abb.: Label "Grünes Blatt"

The new label has been developed by the project team comprising Futouris e.V.²⁸, travel bridge, Planet4People²⁹ and Fraunhofer Umsicht³⁰ within the project 'Green Travel Transformation' supported by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research.

"For the industry, this is an innovation", says Hasso von Düring, Chairman of Futouris e.V. and Managing Director of Touristik, Lufthansa City Center. "Travel agencies were not able to directly identify sustainable travel offers in the information and booking system. Within the project 'Green Travel Transformation' we strive to increase the provision of sustainable travel offers throughout the industry in cooperation with the entire project team. Together with the additional project partners, including the DRV (German Travel Association)³¹, Studiosus, Gebeco and Inatour, we also plan to strengthen additional sustainable products besides hotels to continuously increase sustainable travel bookings." Other tour organizers will follow.

2. Bistro Portal by Traveltainment

Lufthansa City Center and DER Touristik (DER Reisebüro, Derpart and the member agencies of DTPS) will introduce the new label in their travel agencies and will make sustainable hotel offers visible in a pilot testing phase. The Futouris

²⁸ <http://www.futouris.org/projekte/green-travel-transformation/>

²⁹ <http://planet4people.com/index.php/en/>

³⁰ <https://www.umsicht.fraunhofer.de/>

³¹ <https://www.driv.de/fachthemen/nachhaltigkeit/futouris.html>

members will be supported by the company travel bridge, which records and updates in a database hotel offers with a sustainability certification by recognised organisations from all over the world. In cooperation with GIATA, these hotel offers can be imported via an automated interface in various systems of travel agencies and tour operators. Initially, these hotel offers will be visible in the widely used 'Bistro Portal' by Traveltainment³². Travel agents can find detailed information about the certified hotels on the portal www.greentravelindex.com.³³ Green Travel Index combines in a database that is constantly updated the sustainable hotels certified by recognized organizations worldwide. Currently, the Green Travel Index platform, which feeds from this database, includes more than 4400 offers.

Through the new labelling – a signature and the title “sustainably certified” – travel agents will be able to instantly identify hotels that have been awarded a sustainability certification by a recognised organisation. This allows travel agents at the counter and those using the booking platform “Bridge” to meet with precision the existing demand for sustainable travel offers and offer adequate hotels with an added value in terms of sustainability in the future.

3. Labelling in travel brochures

Apart from the electronic labelling in Bistro, Thomas Cook will be the first tour operator to introduce the signature in its travel brochures, which will be published by the end of October for the summer season of 2018. With this action, Thomas Cook highlights all hotels with a recognised sustainability certification that can be booked via the tour operator brands Neckermann Reisen, Thomas Cook Signature, Thomas Cook Signature Finest Selection and Öger Tours.

In addition to the introduction of the label in the system, the project team is currently developing an extensive training programme to promote the sales of sustainable travel offers in close cooperation with the DRV. By means of this qualification, stationary travel agencies can strengthen their position as competent partners when it comes to booking a sustainable holiday.

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³² <http://www.traveltainment.de/>

³³ www.greentravelindex.com

³⁴ https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernst_Führich