

## VISIT workshop

in collaboration with ECOTRANS

### How to strengthen the European labels on Sustainable Tourism in the travel and tourism market?

18 January 2008, Stuttgart, Germany

**Participants:**

Name	First Name	Organisation	Country
1. Augustin	Anita	Ecotrans	Germany
2. Baumgartner	Christian	NFI	Austria
3. Bermann	Ellen	TOI / IVV	Italy
4. Biedenkapp	Anke	Stattreisen Hannover	Germany
5. Blumer	Andrei	Association of Ecotourism Romania	Romania
6. Burian	Michael	ECEAT Association International	Czech Republic
7. Busch	Stephan	ASR	Germany
8. Canova	Lorenzo	ACTA	Italy
9. Couvee	Annelie	VISIT, Ecolabel Luxemburg	Luxembourg
10. Diwok	Dagmar	ACTA, EU-Ecolabel	EU
11. Eckardt	Sven	Sutour, Consult EMAS	Germany
12. Feldman	Alina	Turism Consult	Romania
13. Fichtl	Otto	VKI	Austria
14. Fisgus	Hannelore	BR (journalist)	Germany
15. Fotiou	Stefanos	UNEP	France
16. Conti	Francesca	ACTA	Italy
17. Fritz	Barbara	AGEG	Germany
18. Hamele	Herbert	Ecotrans	Germany
19. Hammerl	Marion	GNF, Bodensee-Stiftung	Germany
20. Karammel	Susy	GTZ	Germany
21. Reiner	Karl	ÖAR, NETS	Austria
22. Kusters	Naut	ECEAT-Projects	Netherlands
23. Zimmer	Peter	ADAC	Germany
24. Pfefferlein	Norbert	ASR	Germany
25. Probost	Simone	forumandersreisen	Germany
26. Schmidt	Christian	ADAC	Germany
27. Schumm	Alfred	WWF	Germany
28. Stramtu	Alexandre	-	Romania
29. Van Hee	Marlon	ECEAT-projects	Netherlands
30. Walter	Marco	Ecocamping	Germany
31. Ziemele	Asnate	Lauku Ceļotājs	Latvia



## **1. Introduction**

Herbert Hamele (ECOTRANS) welcomed everybody and introduced Annelie Couvée (Chair woman VISIT) and the speakers to the audience.

The participants introduced themselves with their main initiatives: all together the form a long European/international list of voluntary initiatives for sustainable tourism development.

Some are experienced since more than 20 years, other only start as a new initiative. All want to contribute to more sustainable tourism in their countries of operation. International exchange and networking is needed to learn from each other, to avoid to reinvent the wheel, to concentrate on own core tasks, competences and interest.

The success of their work widely depends on the acceptance by the other decision makers in the tourism sector: suppliers, destinations, intermediaries, NGO, administrations – and consumers.

Beside legislation “Sustainable Tourism certification” is an important voluntary instrument for making environmentally and socially compatible tourism a success. The credibility of “sustainability” certificates is key. The VISIT Association of eco-labels for tourism in Europe with its common basic standard and its work was founded to co-ordinate the necessary efforts in Europe.

In collaboration with ECOTRANS (European network for sustainable tourism development) VISIT had invited the speakers and participants to discuss:

### **How to strengthen the European labels on Sustainable Tourism in the travel and tourism market?**

**Stefanos Fotiou, Sustainable Tourism Programme Officer at UNEP, Paris**

Stephanos Fitiou presented key challenges for sustainable tourism certification and the approach of the international initiative for “Baseline Criteria for Sustainable Tourism”.

There are too many labels and certificates world wide, the number is still growing. Only few are known by the consumers who are interested and take care for the environment. Perhaps the consumers even would be ready to pay a bit more for highly sustainable tourism products. In any case the visibility of the certificates must increase. There is no need for a single global Sustainable Tourism label, but in order to avoid confusion due to many different criteria lists etc. some harmonisation is needed amongst the many small certificates. Therefore the international Sustainable Tourism Criteria initiative recently developed and published a draft set of international baseline criteria on [www.sustainablecriteria.org](http://www.sustainablecriteria.org) These criteria shall be further discussed and presented as final version in October 2008. They shall give guidance to certificates, tourism businesses, tour operators, consumers and help to better reach the market, e.g. the existing certificates can compare their own criteria with the global baseline criteria and can use the results for marketing.

Details are shown in the attached powerpoint presentation.

### **Herbert Hamеле, president of ECOTRANS, Saarbrücken**

Herbert Hamеле presents an international overview of about 70 existing eco-certificates for tourism services world wide and the VISIT approach in Europe. The VISIT initiative in 2001-2004 had laid the base for collaboration between eco-labels for tourism in Europe. The VISIT Association's mission is to help the many certificates to raise their effectiveness and - altogether - to raise the market share of certified tourism products e.g. from 1 to 5 %. This target requires collaboration with the tour operators, travel agencies, consumers associations, information services to the consumers. The raise of Attention-Interest-Desire-Action (AIDA) for sustainable tourism at all relevant stakeholder is the permanent challenge along the tourism information chain.

Details are shown in the attached powerpoint presentation.

In the light of this context key questions are:

- What do the intermediaries to the consumers expect from eco-certificates for tourism services?
- How can they help to make Sustainable tourism certification a success?

### **Stephan Busch, president of the German association of medium –sized travel agencies and tourism companies ASR, Berlin**

Stephan Busch presents ASR as the leading association in Germany with 3500 medium sized businesses. Their tour operators offer special products apart from the “big players” mass market products. Sustainable tourism so far is a very niche product and travel agencies are not yet to sell these product. It is impossible for consumers, tour operators and travel agencies to know the existence and the content of the many different labels as shown by ECOTRANS. And it is impossible to sell “sustainable tourism” products certified by eco-labels with very different levels of qualities or with very different lacks of quality fields expected by the customers. The key challenge for ASR is to make the labels sellable. To achieve this ASR expects from the certificates that they harmonize their standards where possible. The definition of “sustainable tourism” as presented by UNEP and a register of existing eco-labels is necessary. the DestiNet portal is already a good information source, but there should be more details: what do these ecolabels have in common, what are their differences, how far do they comply with e.g. the international baseline criteria (UNEP, etc.), what are their main strengths, etc. If there is a clear set of strengths which can be communicated and understood by the consumer then the “high sustainability level” of the product is sellable for tour operators as special quality. “Sustainable tourism” is nice for business, but tour operators will always ask first ‘what is in it for me?’ In the end there has to be a win-win situation, the problem of too many and too different criteria is to be solved.

### **Peter Zimmer, director of the tourist information department of the German automobile club ADAC, München, member of the European Automobile Clubs association**

Peter Zimmer presents the German automobile club ADAC: with 16 mil. members the biggest organization of this type in Europe. ADAC informs them by a great variety of maps, guides, booklets etc. 80 staff members select and prepare the tourist information at ADAC, e.g. 14.000 sites and attractions in Europe must constantly be updated. There is an open mind on supporting “sustainable tourism” initiatives and to include information in the ADAC material. ADAC has the responsibility and the strengths to give to their members always reliable and good/useful information.

Therefore ADAC expects from the eco-certificates that they say ‘which information is most relevant?’, and from independent sources “Which information is OK?”. A set of common criteria at the many different eco-labels in Europe would be very helpful. It would be good if the VISIT ecolabels would identify their overlap with the international baseline criteria

(presented by Stefanos Fotiou), the outcome could be “10 strengths of our certified tourism services”. A third party should independently check the reliability of these Eco-labels and provide the necessary information to ADAC. The DestiNet portal could be used as commonly shared information platform.

ADAC can support tourism eco-labels by communicating e.g.

- “10 pluses ” of a certified hotel in the Alps or the Mediterranean
- the special strengths of a destination in Scandinavia or Eastern Europe
- tips for finding highly sustainable tourism services in their destinations
- tips for climate and nature friendly travelling

The consumers are already aware of environmental and social problems, for this reason ADAC would be interested to “test” such positive arguments as added value in their brochures etc.

### **Ellen Bermann, Sustainable Tourism Manager at the Ventaglio Group, Mailand, member of the International Tour Operators Initiative (TOI)**

Ellen Bermann presents the Ventaglio Group, N° 2 tour operator in Italy and member of the TOI since 2001. The strategic position and role of the international tour operators focuses on the 3 main target groups:

- Supply Chain
- Customers (Travel agents and tourists)
- Destinations

International tour operators expect from ST certificates that they

- strengthen the concept of “sustainability = quality”
- help to integrate their sustainability qualities long term into the international quality schemes (above all the 5\* (star) system for hotels)
- target also big players: e.g. hotel associations and hotel groups
- minimize the cost for certification were possible, without reducing their credibility
- do better marketing and communication
  - “Sustainable Tourism does it better !”
  - Enhance the role of the consumer
  - better knowledge
  - visibility of the schemes and their certified products

Viaggi del Ventaglio can contribute to making European ST certification a success by

- contributing to communication towards customers
- harmonising the own guidelines (Checklists, etc.)
- training product managers
- sound product development
- influencing suppliers
  - information
  - integration of criteria into contracts
  - preferential contracting

But it is very hard and difficult to introduce “sustainable tourism” in the tourism companies.

## **Discussion**

Annelie Couvée thanks all speakers for their interesting and useful words for VISIT.

At the following discussion UNEP made clear the “sustainable tourism criteria” as baseline will not be communicated by UNEP as THE global standard. To set real standards is rather a national task. But the criteria shall be seen and used as guidelines, which shall be followed and specified on national level where appropriate. ADAC underlined that nevertheless a strong international orientation and guidance / leadership is necessary to bring the concept of sustainable tourism from a niche to the mainstream market. E.g. financial instruments of the World Bank or funding organisations shall be linked to sustainable development plans, criteria and measurable indicators.

## **Conclusions**

### **Annelie Couvée, VISIT, EcoLabel Luxemburg and Herbert Hamele, ECOTRANS**

The presentations and discussion can be summarized with following conclusions and challenges or tasks for VISIT and others:

- The European certificates shall harmonize their criteria where possible.
- The international “sustainable tourism criteria” shall be used as guidance for identifying and defining a common set of baseline criteria.
- VISIT shall contribute to this process and
  - Revise its standard for the operation of eco-labels (VISIT common basic standard)
  - Complete it with a set of recommended baseline criteria for the certified tourism services
- VISIT shall contribute to the further development and the testing of the Sustainable Tourism Criteria and communicate the results to UNEP
- VISIT shall find a way for independent accreditation of its members
- VISIT shall communicate its revised standard to all certificates and other voluntary initiatives for sustainable tourism in Europe and to the tourism intermediaries which are willing to support sustainable tourism development (ADAC, ASR, TOI, etc.)
- The public DestiNet portal shall be used as commonly shared platform for the dissemination and exchange of information about Sustainable Tourism certification
- ADAC, ASR and TOI are willing to collaborate with eco-certificates which fulfill their needs for a reliable and clear set of “sustainability strengths” of certified tourism services or destinations
- With this approach VISIT can offer to its members clear benefits:
  - Guidance for the definition and specification of Sustainable Tourism objectives and criteria (UNEP)
  - Guidance to independent and recognized accreditation (STSC as most promising initiative)
  - Use of a commonly shared information portal (DestiNet)
  - Pilot collaboration and excellent marketing opportunities with leading intermediaries to the consumers (ASR, TOI, ADAC, other)

The VISIT Association will consider these results as far as possible in their working program 2008-2009.

Annelie Couvée and Herbert Hamele thanked the speakers and all participants for their contributions.

## **Appendices**

- ppt presentation by Stefanos Fotiou
- ppt presentation by Herbert Hamele