Certification of Quality in Ecotourism

Eco-Destinet Training Material for Trainers of the Trainers

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Contents

1. Introduction

1.1. Why this training material?

This training material is a part of the training package produced in Eco-Destinet initiative *for trainers of ecotourism providers* wishing to apply the labelling standards of the European Ecotourism Labelling Standard EETLS across Europe. EETLS has been created in the Eco-Destinet - or "a Network Developing a European Quality Label for Ecotourism Destinations", which is a project co-funded by the European Commission under the Lifelong Learning Programme.

This training material brings together the different parts of the Eco-Destinet Training Package making suggestions for how trainers in ecotourism could use its different tools and materials when providing training in how to implement EETLS. It also makes references to other relevant training materials e.g. complied to the Eco-Destinet library and to relevant websites.

The whole Eco-Destinet Training Package is available on the website of the project at www.ecoroute.eu. From the same website there is access also to the website of Ecoroute - project on which results Eco-Destinet initiative has been built.

1.2. Why Eco-Destinet and EETLS?

The aim of Eco-Destinet -project has been to find ways to harmonise existing quality labels. It has been based on an integrated concept of ecotourism bringing together the different services offered to the tourist, i.e. accommodation, food, travel and outdoor activities in close contact with nature. Its starting point has been, that although each of these service-components of ecotourism may come under different quality labels, an "umbrella" labelling standard would assure the overall quality of the tourism product and harmonise the existing labels without undermining them. Moreover, a European Ecotourism Labelling Standard would ascertain comparable standards of service to the client, at least in relation to a core group of baseline quality criteria.

Thus the project, in cooperation with existing initiatives related to ecotourism quality labelling, has developed a list of baseline criteria defining the European Ecotourism Labelling Standard (EETLS) and a set of training materials and tools to help in its implementation. The work of Eco-Destinet has also been in close connection to the global initiative launched in 2007 to set minimum standards for sustainable tourism. This initiative is being implemented by the Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism Criteria (http://www.sustainabletourismcriteria.org), a coalition of 31 organisations, initiated by the Rainforest Alliance, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Foundation, and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

1.3. How to use this material?

The initial target group for whose use this material and the whole Eco-Destinet Training Package has been designed for are the trainers of ecotourism providers. However anyone interested in applying EETLS and willing to learn how to implement it is invited to use, evaluate and develop further any part of the Training Package. Eco-Destinet initiative will continue cooperation with the Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism Criteria as well as with existing labels after the project period, and all feedback e.g. of the use of the training material is welcome for taking EETLS further.

The Training Package includes:
- the Handbook on Ecotourism Labelling
- the Blueprint of the European Ecotourism Labelling Standard – EETLS
- the Eco-Destinet Library of Ecotourism Training Material
- the Training of Trainers Material on Certification of Quality in Ecotourism
- the E-learning Course on Certification of Quality in Ecotourism

The Handbook on Ecotourism Labelling describes the principles and state of the art regarding eco- and sustainable tourism labelling in Europe and internationally, presents some relevant international European and national schemes and assesses the compatibility of some existing schemes with the European Ecotourism Labelling Standard (EETLS) developed by the Eco-Destinet project. It is designed for those with a genuine interest in ecotourism and sustainable tourism and who already have a basic knowledge of contemporary issues surrounding these. A basic understanding of certification in tourism and sustainable tourism is also assumed.

You can download a copy at:

http://ecoroute.eu/themedia/File/ECO-DESTINET%20HANDBOOK_FINAL_SEMINAR.pdf

The Blueprint of the European Ecotourism Labelling Standard – EETLS at first summarises its connection to the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) Partnership and to the TIES definition and principles of ecotourism and how these have been interpreted and adapted to reflect specifically the principles and considerations of European ecotourism. For the main part it describes the criteria in detail and in connection to ecotourism services like Outdoor Activities, Accommodation, Restaurants, Tour packages and Visitor Centres.
You can download a copy at:
http://ecoroute.eu/destinet/en/eetls.php?id=3

The Eco-Destinet Library of Ecotourism Training Material has a collection of publications (in print and electronically) from various countries around Europe either in English or in the national languages. The Library will be continuously updated with new material and will keep on being updated well beyond the duration of the project.

Visit the library:

http://destinet.ew.eea.europa.eu/topics/ecotourism/eco-destinet/eco-destinet-library

The Training of Trainers Material on Certification of Quality in Ecotourism is this material at hand combining the different materials and tools for training produced in Eco-Destinet and suggesting some ways of using them in training.

You can download a copy at:

http://ecoroute.eu/destinet/en/learning_package.php?id=6

The E-learning Course on Certification of Quality in Ecotourism offers trainers the possibility to provide training based on the Eco-Destinet products also through distance learning. They may provide it either as a whole e-course or use parts of it as a part of blended learning complementing face-to-face training sessions.

In the following in this training material there will be at first a description of the methodological approach and principles on which the suggested training process is based on. It challenges the trainers using this material to compare and evaluate a bit their own thinking and approach they use when training adult professionals – hopefully both agreeing on the statements and realising something new and useful.

That is followed by a chapter including the actual contents for the training. It is divided to four modules, which step by step assist the trainer in teaching what EETLS is and how it could be implemented. The first three modules include an introduction to its topic, references to training materials and websites relevant to the topic, case examples illustrating the topic and also suggestions for assignments for the trainees. As always, the trainer chooses from the provided material what is relevant to the trainees meeting also objectives of the training. So, depending on the target group and purpose of training, different parts of the material may be used. In the modules 1 and 2 ecotourism and certification in ecotourism are discussed on more general level. These modules have more relevance to trainees who are not yet so familiar with the concept of ecotourism and also certification and quality labels are new issues to them. Module 3 covers the core part of the training material as it introduces and describes EETLS.

Module 4 has most relevance especially to two target groups:

1. all trainers planning and organising ecotourism related training in general, as the examples of implementation may be applied for other contents as well, and especially trainers who provide support when setting up a new label or when certification by a chosen label is the objective

2. persons planning to set up a new quality label or willing to acquire certification, and wanting more information about what kind of training may be needed for achieving that and what kind of demands it sets for them.

At the end of module 4 the two examples of implementation describe EETLS -training in practise as it has been piloted in Eco-Destinet. The Participants` Handbooks of both the seminar and the e-learning course are added to the material as annexes.

2. The educational approach and training methods

It has been assumed in Eco-Destinet, that the contents of its training package will mostly be used in adult training. These adults may be trainers of ecotourism studying themselves EETLS either in training organised for them or self-studying the package for planning and organising training for their own trainees, e.g. ecotourism providers. Again, these trainees are most likely adults, who already have both a study degree on some level and previous work experience, not young students. Therefore the educational thinking behind the Eco-Destinet Training Package reflects a few principles, which are good to keep in mind when working with adult students. The key words describing the approach are *andragogy, self-directed learning, learning as a process, learning by doing and group dynamics*.

The educational approach has been tested and applied in the Summer Academies for rural developers organised by Euracademy Association (see www.euracademy.org). In Eco-Destinet it is piloted in the 4-day seminar and on the e-learning course. Both the suggested learning methods and tasks are chosen in mind, that they best serve adult learners when involving joint reflection, discussion and sharing of experiences. However, these also include opportunities for individual reflection and for formulating personal goals and learning outcomes.

2.1. Descriptions of the educational principles in short

Andragogy is a term Malcolm Knowles (2005) has used for describing the way adults learn[1]. It emphasises the differences between the ways adult people and children learn. Knowles states that adults approach learning as problem-solving and learn best when the topic is of immediate value. Adults need to know why they are learning something and they want to learn experientially. As adults have lots of previous experience and have different reasons for partaking in any educational activity, their expectations of any learning environment vary tremendously. Adults, generally, benefit most from active participation in the learning process and opportunities to process their own experience trough reflection, analysis and critical examination. Instructors and experts are therefore seen more as recourses and facilitators than as lecturers or graders.

Adults can also be seen as self-directed learners. We all have different experiences, and we know different things. Learning styles differ and each adult has his or her way to learn best. On the whole, however, adults can be described as grown-up, independent individuals, who are accustomed to taking care of themselves and their responsibilities. They seek solutions to their problems and use their previous experience and knowledge to perform their tasks. Adults also see things in broader perspectives. These are skills that we partly develop as we grow up and in general all

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[1] Knowles, M. S., Holton, E. F., III, & Swanson, R. A. (2005). The adult learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development (6th edition). Burlington, MA: Elsevier

adults use – also when learning is involved! This implies that much learning is self-directed. Self-directedness is not, however, the same as acting alone, but other people (participants, speakers) involved in the learning process are seen as supporters and sparring partners to reflect ideas with. They are also mirrors that give us feedback and help us to change our thinking process. A self-directed learner doesn't have to learn alone. Adults usually want to learn both alone and with groups with other people.

Some things we learn quickly from model behaviour; let's say for example by watching a model-performance and then trying to do the same ourselves. Also some factual knowledge can be learned instantly; understood and remembered. But when we see learning as a process, it brings to mind the idea that learning takes time and effort because it requires gathering and processing information and transforming it to knowledge. The examples mentioned above can be seen as parts of a learning process: you need to have some previous idea or knowledge of what's on display if you want to understand the new (e.g. the model-performance or how new factual knowledge can be connected to the already existing knowledge) use it and understand it. As children we start to learn, gather experiences, observe the world and try to interpret it -understand and connect different experiences in meaningful and usable ways; i.e construct our knowledge. All this is an ongoing process that never stops - people live and learn all the time as life long learners. Learning is also a comprehensive experience combining reasoning, emotions, imagination, intuition and experiences. Studying is a special learning process, for when we study, we set goals for ourselves and our learning, concentrate on learning the chosen topics and contents and also evaluate how well we have met out goals.

Learning by doing emphasises experiential learning and that we learn by handling the tasks and problems at hand in our everyday life. Learning by doing emphasises also that when we act, we use our personalities, knowledge and capacities to a fuller extent. For learning by doing to be effective, however, it needs to be combined with reflection. So, learning by doing encourages us both to experiment, seek different approaches, make new assumptions and try to find different solutions to the problems at hand, and to reason, reflect on and evaluate our experiences. That way we can construct our knowledge continuously. This is also motivating and even fun!

People are social by nature and work better when they solve problems together, set goals together and try to achieve those together. But it is not self-evident that any group of people will work together efficiently and harmonically. In fact, even when everyone in a group seems to be in accordance about the common tasks and goals, there may be difficulties in their capacity to work as a team. For this to be successful we need to be aware of that when we work in groups, there are particular kinds of challenges, which have to do with the group setting itself. This is what group dynamics is about. A simple, but helpful, way to think about groups, is the FIRO-model (Fundamental Interpersonal Relationship Orientation), developed by Schutz (1958)[2]. He suggested that there are three dimensions to account for all interpersonal phenomena:

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[2] Schutz, W.C. (1958). *FIRO: A Three Dimensional Theory of Interpersonal Behavior.* New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

1. Inclusion - the need to socialise, to be in the company of, or in contact with, people
2. Control - the need to influence, make decisions, direct, have power over, have impact on
3. Openness - the need to share one's inner thoughts and feelings.

Corresponding to these three interpersonal behavioural needs are three other needs that affect our feelings when interacting with others: significance (we all need to feel worthwhile, important, meaningful), competence, (we also all need to feel strong, intelligent, capable) and likeability (and we need to feel that we are good, attractive, likeable).

The interesting thing is that these dimensions can be traced in how groups develop and the FIRO model is often drawn on in leadership trainings. In the beginning of any new group, the focus will be on inclusion, and most participants tend to be generous and welcoming, but also rather superficial in their communication with one another. At the back of one mind the central question may be: is this a group that I want to belong to? The next stage, that groups tend to go through, is dominated by the control dimension. Then the participants become more aware of their need for control, and the generous atmosphere may be changed into one of more conflict. During this stage the group will handle issues of hierarchy and structure, and the participants will strive to get a position they feel at home in. If the group succeeds in handling the control stage, then a well working team can develop, and the questions of openness come into focus. Within the group, openness will dominate, and the group will be able to accept that some participants will be nearer to each other that to others. In relation to other groups, however, the risk is that group members become more closed, and that the group can become rather arrogant and suspicious towards other groups. The FIRO model can be used to understand what happens in groups, both in short term settings (such as a small group discussion session) and over longer time (in training that last for a longer time).

2.2. Eco-Destinet pilots as examples of Blended Learning

In addition to the educational principles described above *blended learning* is another key word that needs to be added to the vocabulary of Eco-Destinet educational approach as it is included to the both Eco-Destinet pilots and it supports all the key ideas of the educational approach of the project. .

As defined by Graham "Blended Learning is an approach to blend different learning methods, techniques and resources and apply and deliver them in an interactive meaningful learning environment." When adopting this approach, it should allow learners to have easy access to different learning resources and be able to apply their knowledge and skills under the supervision and support of the trainer. Training may include e.g. a mix of face-to-face, computer, cellular or I-phones, TV or any other electronic media mediated instruction. (Graham 2005)[3]

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[3] Graham, C. R. (2005). "Blended learning systems: Definition, current trends, and future directions" in Bonk, C. J.; Graham, C. R. Handbook of blended learning: Global perspectives, local designs. San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer.

Blended Learning supports different learning styles, as it encourages the learners to choose activities that suite their own pace, learning styles and even the time and place. As addressed also in the concepts of andragogy and self-directed learning, with Blended Learning learners can be more independent and self-reliance in their own learning, take decisions, think creatively and critically, investigate and explore as well as solve problems they face in learning and real life. In Blended Learning trainers are also learning themselves and as mentioned before they are more resource persons and providers and supporters of capacity building rather than lecturers or graders.

Practical examples of Blended Learning in Eco-Destinet are its 4-day seminar and e-learning course, which both are targeted to both the ecotourism trainers themselves and through them to their trainees of ecotourism. In the seminar the methods used are: setting up common objectives on an Open Forum, expert lectures, discussion workshops followed by plenaries, presentations of case studies of the participants, study visits and reporting them, panel discussion and evaluation workshop. This allows interaction and exchange of experience as well as personal reflection. The structure of the seminar starts from the theory and leads to the practice when on the study visits EETLS and its criteria are evaluated based on local examples. All the material produced and gathered in Eco-Destinet is available to the participants, and even though the e-learning course is not used for studying during the seminar, it is introduced to the participants and they are be invited to the course as mentors as the e-course is organised after the seminar.

On the e-learning course again all the materials of Eco-Destinet are easily accessible to the participants complemented with materials from the seminar. It is structured according to the contents of the Training of the Trainers material including individual study and tasks, pair and group work and discussion and evaluation of the course and the Eco-Destinet materials. The course is tutored by the Eco-Destinet partners and mentored by the participants of the Eco-Destinet seminar adding their opinions and experiences to the course. Small-scale video conferencing or use of skype is applied and some of the lecturers of the seminar participate to these sessions. Through the tasks of the course the participants are also invited to find and use resources outside Eco-Destinet and suggest relevant additions to that.

3. Training topics and modules

The four Training Modules of Eco-Destinet aim to assist the trainer in teaching what EETLS is and how it could be implemented. Each module includes a common structure with the main topic divided to sub-topics according to the Eco-Destinet Training Materials including also references to other suggested training materials with short introductions to their contents. Also when possible case studies are included to help illustrating the topics of the modules and some ideas for assignments for the trainees relating to the topics are given.

This way the trainer will be assisted in planning the training but also lead to explore a wider selection of materials and to decide him/herself which parts of the referred materials and assignments are relevant to the trainees in question. All the referred material is available either from the Eco-Destinet library or from the given websites.

3.1. Module 1: What is Ecotourism?

The objectives of this module are to give the trainee a basic understanding of how ecotourism has been defined and to make the trainee aware of the differences in how ecotourism has been understood, what makes ecotourism important, and what aspects have been included to its realm. There are three sub-topics:
1. the importance of ecotourism and sustainable tourism
2. the concept of ecotourism
3. elements of ecotourism

In the beginning of Eco-Destinet Handbook of Ecotourism Labelling Criteria and Good Practise in Europe **the importance of ecotourism and sustainable tourism** is described in its foreword and e.g. how the ecotourism movement has helped communities worldwide to preserve their natural environment and sustain their ways of living while also being supported economically through tourism activities. It is also mentioned, that ecotourists have gained through visiting unspoiled natural places and experiencing host cultures in a responsible manner as well as scientists, research institutes and NGOs have, when they have through ecotourism business and related organisations found a new supporter and a donor for their research and conservation activities.[4]

A bit later in the Eco-Destinet Handbook it is discussed how interest in ecotourism has arisen from both increasing demand for authentic tourist experiences and increasing interest in environmental conservation. As ecotourism occupies a specialist niche within tourism, it includes forms of tourism that are consistent with natural, cultural and community values and that promote cultural and environmental interaction in authentic natural settings. Ecotourism is thus at the leading edge of the overall 'greening' of tourism in which environmental aspects are a high priority.

As major benefits from encouraging ecotourism is seen that it integrates tourism and conservation providing also an economic incentive for environmental protection. Also

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[4] Eco-Destinet Handbook of Ecotourism Labelling Criteria and Good Practise in Europe:
http://ecoroute.eu/themedia/File/ECO-DESTINET%20HANDBOOK_FINAL_SEMINAR.pdf

beneficial is the value of increasing awareness and appreciation of the relationship between natural settings and the diverse range of cultural perspectives of the community.

A key challenge is stated to be ensuring balance so that the ecotourism industry can be commercially viable, ecologically sustainable and culturally responsible.

The concept of ecotourism has been defined in the Eco-Destinet Handbook with at first a reference to the early definitions since 1965 and discussing in short also the varied ways in which ecotourism has been described. The importance of two more recent definitions are emphasised as they also reflect the way ecotourism is understood in Eco-Destinet:

1. World Ecotourism Summit in Québec in 2002[5] recognised that "ecotourism embraces the principles of sustainable tourism, concerning the economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism. It also embraces the following specific principles, which distinguish it from the wider concept of sustainable tourism:

- Contributes actively to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage,
- Includes local and indigenous communities in its planning, development and operation, and contributing to their well-being,
- Interprets the natural and cultural heritage of the destination to visitors,
- Lends itself better to independent travellers, as well as to organized tours for small size groups."

2. Ecotourism definition by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)[6] is inclusive of the World Ecotourism Summit ecotourism description: "Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people". TIES also includes the following set of principles for ecotourism:
- Minimize impact
- Build an environmental and cultural awareness and respect
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts
- Provide direct benefits for conservation
- Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people
- Raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climate"

TIES is in the process of renewing this Code of Conduct to include principles outlining commitment to reducing carbon footprint. "[7]

Elements of ecotourism are also discussed in the Eco-Destinet Handbook. It describes in short the natural environment, ecological and cultural sustainability, contribution to conservation, education and interpretation, provision of local benefits and participation, visitor satisfaction and responsible marketing

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[5] World Ecotourism Summit, Quebec City, Canada, 19-22 May 2002, FINAL REPORT
 http://www.gdrc.org/uem/eco-tour/Final-Report-WES-Eng.pdf

[6] http://www.ecotourism.org/site/c.orLQKXPCLmF/b.4835303/k.C64B/What_is_Ecotourism.htm

[7] Oslo statement on ecotourism: http://www.iipt.org/pdf/OsloStatementEcotourism0807.pdf

3.1.1. For further reading:

Ecoroute Training Material For training service providers, experts and trainers
http://www.ecoroute.eu/brochures/training%20of%20service%20providers.pdf
- · Them aim of compiling the training material has been to put together essential knowledge of ecotourism and labelling of ecotourism. The material includes the basic facts for e.g. service providers to study and work with to get an insight into labelling of ecotourism products. It summarizes topics such as ecotourism, sustainability and describes in more detail the Swedish labelling process and criteria known as Nature's Best.

Guidelines for community-based ecotourism development. 2001. WWF International.
http://assets.panda.org/downloads/guidelinesen.pdf
- · These guidelines identify some general principles, and highlight some practical considerations for community-based ecotourism.

Making tourism more sustainable - A Guide for Policy Makers. 2005
United Nations Environment Programme. Division of Technology, Industry and Economics
http://www.unep.fr/scp/publications/details.asp?id=DTI/0592/PA
- · The Guide defines what sustainability means in tourism, what are the effective approaches for developing strategies and policies for more sustainable tourism, and the tools that would make the policies work on the ground. It shows clearly that there is no 'one-fits-all' solution to address the question of sustainability in tourism development. It does, however, highlight one key universal message: to succeed in making tourism more sustainable it is crucial to work hand in hand with all relevant stakeholders, within and outside government.

Red Card for Tourism? 10 Principles and challenges for a sustainable tourism development in the 21st Century. 2002. Working Group on Tourism & Development.
http://www.tourism-watch.de/fix/26/rio10en.pdf
- · Tourism NGOs from Germany, Austria and Switzerland present ten principles and challenges designed to serve as a basis for discussion and to suggest new initiatives for sustainable development of tourism.

Sustainable Tourism: A Local Authority Perspective. 1999. International Council on Local Environmental Initiatives. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Commission on Sustainable Development
http://huwu.org/esa/sustdev/csd/iclei.pdf
- · A truly legitimate and practical discussion on sustainable tourism must take place in and with the communities that are being influenced by tourist industry development. It must create accountability of the tourism industry to locally-defined development visions. This paper provides an general call for the tourism industry, through both its local and transnational agents, to join and support the Local Agenda 21 processes in communities where tourism is a fundamental development force.

Agenda for sustainable and competitive European tourism. 2007. Communication from the Commission. Commission of the European Communities.
http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/tourism/docs/communications/com2007_062101_en.pdf

- The purpose of the agenda is to support creating the right balance between the welfare of tourists, the needs of the natural and cultural environment and the development and competitiveness of destinations and businesses requires an integrated and holistic policy approach where all stakeholders share the same objectives.

Guide for Sustainable Tourism Best Practices. Centre for Ecotourism and Sustainable Development.
http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/tourism.cfm?id=guide
- The Guide for Sustainable Tourism Best Practices is a tool to help community-based organizations and small and medium-sized tourism businesses take specific actions to operate in a more sustainable way. The guide was developed with input from a wide range of stakeholders. You can use it to develop internal policies and codes of conduct, to meet certification requirements, or to educate your clients.

3.1.2. Case studies illustrating ecotourism

Sustainable Development of Ecotourism - A Compilation of Good Practices in SMEs. 2003. WTO.
http://www.wtoelibrary.org/content/v65m80/?p=669e9cfe086e47fb8aecc0920894a175&pi= 15

This compilation contains 65 case studies received from 47 countries about exemplary practices in small ecotourism businesses (SMEs). The cases provide rich details on methodologies and business approaches applied successfully by a wide range of ecotourism companies; they provide a valuable well of information that can serve for generating ideas and adapting sustainable ecotourism practices to the specific local conditions elsewhere. The experiences presented in this book come directly from the field, from the people who have developed these initiatives and who are daily in charge of these business ventures. They reflect well the complexity of small businesses, the great challenges and opportunities they face, and the endless creativity that this business allows for.

A green model for eco-tourism: Case study ITC-Welcomgroup hotels. 2005. World Business Council for Sustainable Development.
http://www.wbcsd.org/DocRoot/7JhMaFAIvPBtU7hoJFuT/itc_gsc_full_case_final_web.pdf

The WGBI hotel has created a new "green model" to operate in an eco-responsible manner and to create an eco-tourism model for its island. This model can eventually be replicated, with regional nuances, by the Welcomgroup chain and the entire industry. The WGBI's new green model for hotel operations concentrates on its four-R's strategy: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Rethink systems, procedures and policies for the hotel. The hotel addresses the issues by adopting internal and external strategies.

			Case studies of Ecotourism		
Title	Country	Description	Learning Points	Source	Contact
Aksyt Ammat: A lesson in innovative marketing, human capital and networking	Finland	A small guesthouse in North Karelia, run by two women. The owners have successfully utilized E.U funding. Marketing is done with the cooperation of the local cottage association.	§ Effective use of E.U funding § Marketing as niece in Germany (few Finnish products, single women travelers) § Innovation in marketing green products § Network with local businesses to find common solutions and exchange business § Pool local intellectual and financial resources § Food, marketed as green product § Partly employs students from a local tourism college	Eco-Destinet Library: Perspectives on international best practice Green Tourism, Scottish Enterprise, 2004	http://www.aksytammat.fi/
Larsbo Gard: A lesson in quality and use of accreditation labels	Sweden	A small family operated farm in Garelborgs. The farm practices agritourism and nature based activities. The farm is member of two nature-based labels. They conserve an area of open medow and keep track on the biodiversity	§ Market through two nature based labels (Swedish Natures Best and Danish Green Key) § Use of farm grown products and seasonal food § Encourage other local business to become accredited § Work in cooperation with other accredited tourism providers § Strong interpretation component § Tourists involved in everyday farm activities and conservation of open meadow	Eco-Destinet Library: Perspectives on international best practice Green Tourism, Scottish Enterprise, 2004	http://www.larsbogard.nu/
Bush and Beyond: A lesson of hearts and minds	New Zealand	A small ecotourism tours company that operates near the Kahurangi National Park. The business is committed in conservation values and its clientele is mostly ecotourists. Skeptical about accreditation systems and its value.	§ Operate in conservation first – profit second mode, and successfully (11+ years of operation) § Marketing targeted to ecotourists § Conservation Policy § Strong education and interpretation element § Direct financial support to conservation § Ecotourists take part in conservation activities § Skeptical about the practical use of accreditation systems	Eco-Destinet Library: Perspectives on international best practice Green Tourism, Scottish Enterprise, 2004	http://www.naturetreks.co.nz/
O' Reillys: Lessons in product diversity	Australia	Operating since 1930 near Lamington National Park, its one of the most successful nature based business in Australia. Offer a diverse range of nature based tourism products	§ Diverse range of nature based services to increase length of stay and appeal to broader clientele § Frequent introduction of new products for tourists to visit again	Eco-Destinet Library: Perspectives on international best practice Green Tourism, Scottish Enterprise, 2004	http://www.oreillys.com.au/ecotourism/

		and services.	§ Products have a "fun" element that sometimes is missing from nature based tourism § Tie in with wider agency and local authority nature based initiatives § Informative and fun web-site § Certified by major certification systems		
Millia Cretan Settlement: A lesson of sustainability	Greece	A small ecotourism business that has revived an abandoned mediaeval Cretan settlement in the Mountains of Kissamos province. They offer a wide range of services, with respect to local culture and environment	§ Owners avoided to encourage infrastructure developments in order to safeguard the surrounding area from spawning tourism development (roads, power lines, water pipes) § Autonomous water, power, sewage and communication. Sustainable operation. § Use of local and homegrown products § Promotion of local cuisine and local cultural heritage § Guest houses reconstructed using old materials and local techniques § Word of mouth marketing that has led to international recognition	Interview with owners in 2006, Euracademy Association 6th Summer Academy, Vassilis Tsipidis	http://www.milia.gr/english.html
National Park of Dadia-Lefkimi-Soufli, Ecotourism Initiative: A lesson on local communities revival through conservation and tourism - Part I	Greece	The Ecotourism initiative of the National Park of Dadia-Lefkimi-Soufli was first set by WWF Greece and consists of a hostel and visitors center. The main attraction is the feeding place for vultures. Nowadays the facilities are run by a municipal enterprise with the support of WWF-Greece.	§ Initial project started by a conservation NGO (WWF) with state and EU support. § Conservation and protection of vulture species as the main ecotourism attraction § Conservationists are involved in all aspects of ecotourism development § Through the National Park locals realized the economic value of a protected area § Initial excitement and birth of some community initiatives in ecotourism have not given raise to new developments. § State and regional authorities have not been able to cope on time with various legislative issues on park protection and management. § Action plans are being implemented to sparkle new development dynamics with the active participation of local stakeholders	Euracademy Association 7th Summer Academy, Beatriz Carcamo Aboitiz	http://www.ecoclub.com/dadia/
Carpathian Large Carnivore	Romania	The Carpathian Large Carnivore Project, was	§ Consultation with the community before the	Eco-Destinet Library: Guidelines for	http://www.clcp.ro/

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Project: A lesson on local communities revival through conservation and tourism - Part II		an integrated management project combining research, management, rural development and education. The project developed a tourism programme to demonstrate to locals that large carnivores have an economic value through tourism	§ initiation of the project § Training of local people as guides and tour service providers § Work together with individuals in the community to develop tourism services cautiously, with expansion based on success achieved § Combine conservation activities with outdoor tourism activities § Establishment of the Zarnesti Ecotourism Association with the participation of local stakeholders to take the project forward § Build contact with international tour operators	community-based ecotourism Development, WWF International,2001	
Discovery Initiatives: A lesson on sustainable tour operators – North Mongolia Conservation Project	U.K	Discovery Initiatives is a U.K based tour operator with strict principles on supporting conservation. It works in partnership with conservation agencies and local communities to support wildlife conservation and community initiatives. The case study presented derives from the support to the North Mongolia Conservation Project –Lake Hovsgol National Park	§ Cooperation with state and regional administration, and local stakeholders § Direct economic benefit to local population through tourism inflow and employment opportunities § Favour the employment of locals § Close collaboration with park authorities for minimum impact of tourism inflow (respect park regulation, small groups of up to six, visit areas of low impact to locals etc) § Identify specific visitor experience that reflect the real value of the site § Part of park fees directed to conservation activities of Mongolia University § Design of tour programmes together with local authorities and key individuals	Eco-Destinet Library: Sustainable tourism and Natura 2000 - Guidelines, initiatives and good practices in Europe, Environment DG -European Commission	http://www.discoveryinitiatives.co.uk

Case studies linked to Ecotourism Principles

Name, location, country and website	Business Type	Contribution Environment Protection and Nature Conservation	Contribution Welfare Local Population	Awareness Raising/ Education/Interpretation
Ökomodell Achental, 83259 Schleching/ Germany; www.oekomodell.de	Packages, Accommodation, Transport, Catering, Activities	Interreg Programme: nature protection, renewable energies; visitor leading through sensitive areas; observation of protected habitats	Involvement of producers, retailers, schools; sustainable development through tourism; certified local produce ("Qualität Achental"); agrotourism for farmers' benefits (get the label "Kulturlandschaft Achental")	Information; education for farmers in „Agrotourism"; Information of guests and locals (i.e. In schools and kindergarden); environmental education for all ages; co- operation with stakeholders and interest groups
Community Action Treks, Keswick, Cumbria, CA12 4RN/ UK; www.catreks.com	Activities, Packages	Combined experience of running treks and climbing expeditions means truly specialisation in these areas („Trekkers Code" for responsible behaviour)	Fundraising arm of the UK charity *Community Action Nepal*; contribute to the funding and construction work, fund projects like schools, health posts, clean water supplies and income generating schemes, strenghtening women's groups	Trekkers Code for responsible behaviour on tours
Kingfisher Bay Resort, Urangan Hervey Bay, Queensland 4655/ Australia; www.kingfisherbay.com	Packages, Accommodation, Transport, Catering, Activities	Energy saving building design has been calculated to save 480,000 kW hours of electricity each year; landscaping mirrors native vegetation; brings birds and wildlife; poo farm (worm compost); recycling sytem; monitoring, researching and improving of the Resort activities	Local tour guides; Junior Eco Rangers – programme (learning sessions for children)	Collaborative partnership with the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) to establish a Fraser Island Research and Education Centre

Turtle Island, Fiji; http://www.turtlefiji.com/	Destination	No towering high-rises or tennis courts; no airfields or shopping malls; no televisions or billboards; reforestation program, over 500,000 trees, 100,000 of which are Mahogany, have been planted on the island in the last 28 years; organic garden provides the island with fresh fruits and vegetables, herbs, and spices	Founded a School (*Evanson Learning Centre (ELC)*)	Staff teaches to guests: musical heritage, explain the sea life and coral, demonstrate the medicinal uses of trees and plants found in the forest, and train you to windsurf or take guests fishing
The Greenbox, Counties Sligo, Leitrim and Fermanagh/ Ireland ; www.greenbox.ie	Packages, Accommodation, Transport, Catering, Activities	Own eco-label for all products; 'The Green Guide' (practical resource for marketing your business as well as a handy guide for locals & tourists looking for 'green' accommodation, events, food and activities)	Cross border – project; promotion of local cultural values; network membership for full involvement in decision- making etc.	Various Learning Centres (i.e. The Organic Centre) and Centres for LifeLong Learning (i.e. Ard Nahoo Health Farm Education for Health); partner with RESPONSIBLE TOURISM SKILLNET (training and networking support to enterprises within the eco-tourism sector)
Andaman Discoveries, Kura Kuraburi District Phang Nga Province, 82150/ Thailand; http://www.andamandiscoveries.com/	Packages	Support of the *Ban Talae Nok Community Centre; the Ban Talae Nok Waste Management*; Mangrove Restoration projects; Orchid Conservation; Nature Trails	Volunteering; supporting projects for tsunami relief; Adult Education; Teaching English; Handicrafts - Income Generating Projects; provide financial support for primary and secondary school education	Educational and Study Tours with interactive workshops/ community service projects (i.e. organizing sport camps for children, helping on a youth environmental project, beach clearance, mangrove restoration as well as coastal and marine monitoring); Youth Education Youth ACT - Action Conservation Training

The Cottage Lodge, Brockenhurst SO42 7SH/ South England (UK); http://www.cottagelodge.co.uk/	Accommodation, Catering	All the ingredients of the cooked breakfast come from within the Forest area (lowering food mileage); use Fair Trade; encourage wildlife into the garden; room is cleaned with environmentally friendly products; low energy light bulbs; energy from renewable resources; insulation of the building; collect run off water; recycling; towel policy; reduce portion packs; promoting public transport	Support local New Forest Marque products; strong networking and co-operation ambition with other tourism providers in the area	Environment Policy and information (videos, texts) about the area and (New Forest is an AONB), activities and other offerings on the website
Alpine Pearls, 5453 Werfenweng/ Austria; http://www.alpine-pearls.com/home.php	Packages, Accommodation, Transport, Catering, Activities	All locations are easily accessible the "softly mobile" way; comprehensive timetable and travel information; encourage guests to use public transport for arrival	The „Pearls" conserve the esthetic character and local beauty of Alpine villages; many co-operation partners; members have to fullfill certain criteria in the fields of culinary art, folk culture, architecture and eduction; common & democratic decision-making	„Pearls" co-operate all across the Alps and offer eco-friendly tourism; electric bicycle FLYER; on the website: information about "Neutral climate holidays" and criteria for environment- friendliness

3.1.3. Suggestion for an assignment for trainees

The objective of the assignment is to deepen the individual understanding of the trainees of what is meant by ecotourism and support them in critically evaluating if offers labelled ecotourism really meet its requirements.

The basic assignment is the same but by using different methods it may be used in different connections for different types of trainees either as an individual task, a pair work or a group assignment. As the backgrounds of the trainees vary as well as their knowledge and experience of ecotourism, the assignment allows them complete it according to their starting level applying it to their own context.

The assignment is to study a) an ecotourism service or b) ecotourism initiative they either know or are interested in and analyse how it represents the principles and ideals of sustainable and especially ecotourism.

They should start by looking for information and additional material about the service/initiative e.g. from literature and websites or interviewing in person, by phone or by email persons with relevant knowledge. Based on this background information they should produce a short introductory description of the objective of their analyses.

With the help of the materials given in module 1 and provided by the trainer, they should next analyse how the principles of ecotourism and sustainable tourism are implemented in the service (e.g. an ecotourism business) or initiative and evaluate how well the principles are put into action. In the analyses the aspects of any particular interest should be highlighted: what should or could be improved, what is implemented in and excellent way etc. The analyses should be finalised with conclusions of the trainees and with a summary of what they think they learnt from completing the task and what kind of questions arose from it.

It is possible to complete the task by writing a case study or an essay about the topic. It maybe illustrated by videos and photos or made a presentation based completely on these as long as the objectives of the assignment are achieved. When working in pairs and groups the responsibilities for completing the task need to be divided equally ensuring, that everybody in the group also study the materials and contribute to the analyses. When utilising video, photos or other media and creating multimedia presentations, there is a slight danger that the contents to be learnt are replaced by the use of the different tools.

3.2. Module 2: Certification in Ecotourism and Introduction of the Existing Labels

The objectives of the module are to provide the trainees and overall picture of the ways certification of quality has developed in connection to ecotourism, pay attention to the wide range of quality labels and differences between them and introduce the global initiative for bringing the varied labels together and creating common criteria for sustainable tourism. The sub-topics are:

1. Certification and accreditation in the context of ecotourism
2. Diversity of tourism and diversity of eco-labels in Europe
3. The market share challenge
4. The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) Partnership

In the foreword of the Eco-Destinet Handbook[8] the benefits and challenges of certification are summarised in short. Variety of certificates is good as they have different geographical coverage and criteria and in most cases they reflect local challenges and local needs. So it is appropriate to have different sub-national, national, European and international certificates. However, these should also reflect global principles, made out by good or bad practice, applicable to all destinations and *be easily recognised by tourists*. Reinventing the wheel has happened a lot in the past and therefore a universal set of standards for ecotourism will help labels and the tourism market to *communicate with each other and with tourists*, and *become a framework of co-operation and quality assurance*. Through introduction of codes of conduct, certification initiatives, labels and standards it is possible to *give tourists the reassurance* that their chosen holiday activity complies with ecotourism principles and is sustainable to them and their hosts.

Certification and accreditation in the context of ecotourism are defined in the Eco-Destinet Handbook according to Honey and Rome (2001)[9] and also a strategic review of Ecotourism Accreditation and Certification is presented by Fergus Tyler Maclaren, director of the UN initiative International Year of Ecotourism[10]. He refers to two methodological types of certification programs within the travel and tourism industry:

1) process-based using internally created environment management systems (EMS) tailored to a particular business

2) performance-based using externally set environmental and often socio-cultural and economic criteria or benchmarks against which a business is judged.

The suitability of these two approaches is discussed in short with a summary of five components the certification programs stemming from either of them all share: voluntary enrolment, logo, complying with or improving upon regulations, assessment and auditing and membership and fees.

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[8] Eco-Destinet Handbook of Ecotourism Labelling Criteria and Good Practise in Europe
http://ecoroute.eu/themedia/File/ECO-DESTINET%20HANDBOOK_FINAL_SEMINAR.pdf

[9] Honey, M. & Rome, A. (2001) Protecting Paradise: Certification Programs for Sustainable Tourism and Ecotourism, Washington, Institute for Policy Studies, October 2001

[10] http://www.unwto.org/sustainable/IYE/Regional_Activites/Brazil/cases/TIES.htm

It is also discussed, that According to a report on tourism certification produced by Synergy for WWF-UK[11], certification schemes for environmentally and socially responsible tourism can be misleading to consumers and often fail to guarantee high standards of environmental practice. Also the proliferation of over 100 different instruments worldwide offering logos and labels has made it difficult for the tourist to distinguish exactly what is being certified. And yet less than one per cent of businesses have joined up to these schemes. The failure to establish clear brand recognition amongst these different efforts could seriously undermine the potential of certification to legitimize sustainable tourism.

Diversity of tourism and diversity of eco-labels in Europe are described in the Eco-Destinet Handbook according to VISIT Handbook[12] based on a task the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) commissioned to ECOTRANS for carrying carry out a global study on voluntary initiatives for sustainable tourism. More than 100 eco-labels, awards and self-committing initiatives were studied and the conclusion made, that many eco-labels are struggling to survive and meet the promises they made to their certified businesses in terms of significant cost savings and increased consumer demand. Europe has far more "green" certification programmes than any other region of the world and the diversity of tourism in Europe presents enormous challenges for certification initiatives.

A short list of questions to be answered when developing an eco-label are:
· Which product groups to select?
· Which services to include?
· Which criteria should be mandatory or optional?
· What is the balance between processes (environmental management systems) and performance criteria?
· How to attract applicants?
· How to train and advise them?
· How to verify and guarantee the compliance of the applicants with the required criteria?
· How to reach tour operators and individual consumers to generate a demand for the sustainable products?

Every tourism eco-label initiative has to face a diverse range of products and issues when defining the product group and developing the criteria for a certification scheme. The ideal eco-label requires a set of criteria for "better environmental performance", which goes beyond what is required by law (national or regional), and is achievable by a significant proportion of the target group of tourism providers in order to provide a real "better choice" to the consumer.

The discussion of diversity issues continue in the Eco-Destinet Handbook when the focus is shifted to **the market share challenge.** According to a report by the Voluntary Initiative for Sustainability in Tourism (VISIT)[13] it says that in 2003 tourism eco-labels as a whole certified 4000 accommodation suppliers, which represent less than 1% of the market share and only a few schemes, for example in Scotland or Denmark can offer a choice of 10% or more. Though there is significant evidence that many of the participants in these

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[11] Synergy (2000) Tourism certification: an analysis of Green Globe 21 and other certification programs. Godalming: WWF UK.
[12] http://pub.world-tourism.org:81/epages/Store.sf/?ObjectPath=/Shops/Infoshop/Products/1232/SubProducts/1232-1

[13] Source: http://www.ecotrans.org/visit/docs/pdf/visit_en.pdf

eco-labels do achieve ecologically sustainable results and justifiably expect the consumers to patronise the services that have received an eco-label, the evidence indicates that many eco-labelling programmes have not been very effective in publicising their programmes to consumers. Not much has changed since 2004 when the VISIT report was published. There are currently more than 30 certification initiatives in Europe of which a handful cover ecotourism, and the market share has still not exceeded 1%.

As a shared global initiative that will help to answer also the challenges discussed in the module, **the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) Partnership[14]** is introduced in the Eco-Destinet Handbook. It was formed in the summer of 2007 by the Rainforest Alliance, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Foundation, and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Its objective is to work together to foster increased understanding of sustainable tourism practises and the adoption of universal sustainable tourism practises. GSTC criteria are part of the response from the tourism community to the global challenges of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals[15]. The goals of this initiative can be summarised to clearly define sustainable tourism using the criteria as the framework, build consumer confidence, promote efficiency and fight green-washing.

The GSTC Partnership developed the criteria organized around the four pillars of sustainable tourism:
1. Effective sustainable planning
2. Maximize social and economic benefits to the local community
3. Reduce negative impacts to cultural heritage
4. Reduce negative impacts to environmental heritage.

The way the criteria were developed is described in short in the Eco-Destinet Handbook. Some of the expected uses of the criteria are listed:

- Serve as basic guidelines for businesses of all sizes to become more sustainable, and help businesses choose sustainable tourism programs that fulfil these global criteria
- Serve as guidance for travel agencies in choosing suppliers and sustainable tourism programs
- Help consumers identify sound sustainable tourism programs and businesses
- Serve as a common denominator for media to recognize sustainable tourism providers
- Help certification and other voluntary programs ensure that their standards meet a broadly-accepted baseline
- Offer governmental, non-governmental and private sector programs a starting point for developing sustainable tourism requirements
- Serve as baseline guidelines for education and training bodies such as hotel schools and universities.[16]

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[14] http://www.sustainabletourismcriteria.org/

[15] http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/

[16] http://www.sustainabletourismcriteria.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=58&Itemid=188

The criteria indicate what should be done, not how to do it or whether the goal has been achieved. This role is fulfilled by performance indicators, associated educational materials, and access to tools for implementation, all of which are an indispensable complement to the GSTC. The criteria were officially launched at the World Conservation Congress in Barcelona, Spain on the 6th of October 2008[17].

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[17] http://www.iucn.org/congress_08/

3.2.1. For further reading:

PAN Parks Principles and criteria. 2000.
http://www.panparks.org/Introduction/Verification/Principles
- · Describes all basic Principles, Criteria and Indicators PAN Parks must meet as stated in the document

Quality Criteria for Nature's Best – a quality labelling system for Swedish ecotourism.
http://ekoturism.perlin.nu/illustrationer/fil_20050123225732.pdf

Ecoroute Training Material For training service providers, experts and trainers
http://www.ecoroute.eu/brochures/training%20of%20service%20providers.pdf
- · The material summarizes topics such as ecotourism, sustainability and describes in more detail the Swedish labelling process and criteria known as *Nature's Best*.

Guideline for the Green Key Criteria
http://www.thegreenkey.org/pdf/Guideline-with%20criteria.pdf

European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas. 2007.
http://www.european-charter.org/Documents/charter_full_text.pdf

A Simple User's Guide to Certification for Sustainable Tourism and Ecotourism. 2006 Centre for Ecotourism and Sustainable Development.
http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/tourism/documents/users_guide.pdf
- · This guide to certification, developed in collaboration with the International Ecotourism Society (TIES), is designed for those who have heard about certifying sustainable tourism and want to understand how it works or how to begin the process.

Practical Steps for Funding Certification of Tourism Businesses. Centre for Ecotourism and Sustainable Development.
http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/tourism/documents/funding.pdf
- · This handbook, developed in collaboration with the International Ecotourism Society (TIES), is intended to provide those tourism businesses seeking certification, particularly small businesses, an overview of funding mechanisms and possible sources to help underwrite the costs of undertaking sustainable tourism certification.

Financing Tourism Certification Programs. Centre for Ecotourism and Sustainable Development.
http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/tourism/documents/financing.pdf
- · Achieving financial stability has been a central challenge for many 'green' certification programs, in tourism as well as in other industries. In this handbook, the Centre for Ecotourism and Sustainable Development and the International Ecotourism Society outline steps and offers recommendations for making tourism certification programs financially viable.

Implementing Monitoring and Evaluation Systems for Impact: A Guide for Tourism Certifiers and Their Clients. 2006. International Ecotourism Society.
http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/tourism/documents/me_sys4impact_tourcert_en.pdf

- · The guide explains how to develop and utilize a successful Monitoring and Evaluation system.

The VISIT initiative: Tourism eco-labelling in Europe – moving the market towards sustainability. 2004.
http://www.ecotrans.org/visit/docs/pdf/visit_en.pdf

- · The European VISIT (Voluntary Initiative for Sustainability in Tourism) initiative has been designed to demonstrate how tourism eco-labels in Europe can collaborate and move the tourism market towards sustainability. This publication should help the reader to gain a better understanding of this joint initiative, and identify the opportunities and mutual benefits of collaboration.

3.2.2. Case studies illustrating certification of quality labels

1. The Action Plan for the implementation of the EETLS by Eco-Romania

The Association of Ecotourism in Romania (AER) considered of critical importance to create an Ecotourism Certification System as a mechanism for putting into practice the basic principles of ecotourism, in order to ensure nature conservation and sustainable development of local communities through tourism. This is an important step in the wider context given that since March 2003 the World Tourism Organization has recommended governments to support the initiatives that promote the certification in sustainable tourism.

The Ecotourism Certification System developed by AER has adapted the international experience to the Romanian context. It is based on the Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Programme promoted by the Australian Ecotourism Association (NEAP is the first accreditation system in ecotourism) and on Nature's Best developed by the Swedish Ecotourism Association (the first accreditation system in ecotourism in the northern hemisphere).

The Ecotourism Certification System addresses three different categories of applicants:

§   ecotourism programmes / tours provided by tour-operators or guides (i.e. eco-tours of maximum 15 participants),

§   small-scale accommodation structures in rural and natural areas (eco-lodges and guesthouses of maximum 25 rooms),

§   eco-destinations (one or several communities within natural areas).

AER has identified a series of benefits that can be brought by implementing the Ecotourism Certification System, such as:

§   helps clients to better identify those products that can offer awesome nature and rural culture experiences,

§   raises the level of trust in the Romanian ecotourism product on the international tourist market,

§   becomes a marketing tool for tour-operators and destinations,

§   enhances the quality of the ecotourism services,

§   contributes actively to nature conservation and leads to sustainable local development,

§   supports local administrations of protected areas for development of low impact tourism,

§   offers a platform for common activities between the business sector and nature conservation entities.

AER is no implementing the EETLS its Ecotourism Certification System. For this reason AER has developed an action plan, which includes the necessary steps for introducing new criteria. The process has a strong consultation element with Romanian stakeholders.

Description of the activities undertaken:

1. Comparison of Eco-Romania certification system and EETLS – identified the gaps. The comparison was based on the GSTC and on the Comparison table developed within the project. Several criteria were identified which are not included in the Eco-Romania certification system.

2. The GSTC criteria were discussed within the AER certification department and a final comparison between GSTC and Eco-Romania criteria was prepared. According to this debate the following issues arose: the AER criteria can be improved especially by including the first GTS criteria into our criteria (especially those criteria which can be applied to the company, related to the sustainable management approaches).

3. Presentation of EETLS/GSTC to AER members. One meeting was organized with AER members (guesthouse owners, tour-operators, conservation NGOs, private individuals) to discuss the GSTC and future EETLS. The meeting was held in Magura village, Piatra Craiului National Park, at an ecotourist pension. The participants agreed that the Eco-Romania certification system has to be improved by including one new principle, based on the GTS criteria.

The GSTC criteria are:

Demonstrate effective sustainable management

· A.1. The Company has implemented a long-term sustainability management system that is suitable to its reality and scale, and that considers environmental, socio-cultural, quality, health, and safety issues.

· A.2. The Company is in compliance with all relevant international or local legislation and regulations (including, among others, health, safety, labour, and environmental aspects).

· A.3. The personnel receive training regarding their role in the management of environmental, socio-cultural, health, and safety practices.

4. The AER general assembly and Board agreed that it was a good opportunity to introduce the new criteria. The first step toward embracing sustainable business practices entails creating a sustainability management system (SMS) which includes transparent, documented policies and procedures, implementation and communication plans. A well written sustainability policy will define and clearly communicate organizational goals and objectives as they relate to the business' environmental, socio-cultural, and economic performance. The primary purpose of the sustainability management plan is to guide decision-making, management, and the daily operations of the business in a sustainable manner.

5. During December 2008 and January 2009 AER developed the new criteria according to the Romanian context. One new principle and 3 new criteria were developed and included into the factsheet (see Annex 1). A model for sustainable management plan was also produced.

6.	The new criteria were the subject of a debate on the internet for the member of AER Board. Feedback and proposals to improve the system were sent by AER members. By the end of January the system was agreed on and included into the Eco-Romania factsheet.

7.	Application of the new criteria. The certification campaign will start in April 2009, and we estimate to have more than 20 services certified in 2009 who will also embrace the new criteria.

3.2.3. Suggestion for an assignment for trainees

The objective of the assignment is to familiarise the trainees with some certification schemes in ecotourism, to help them to understand both the challenges and possibilities of certification to ecotourism businesses and invite them to evaluate the importance of initiatives like GSTC for ecotourism.

The basic assignment is the same but by using different methods it may be used in different connections for different types of trainees either as an individual task, a pair work or a group assignment. As the backgrounds of the trainees vary, as well as their knowledge and experience of ecotourism, the assignment allows them complete it according to their starting level applying it to their own context.

The assignment is to study what ecotourism certification schemes are implemented in the home countries of the trainees and to what extend, learn to know in more detail one of the quality labels implemented or of interest to the trainee and describe the challenges and benefits for the ecotourism services committing themselves to the certificate. The criteria of the certificate should also be set against the GSTC and its compatibility described in short from the perspective of sustainable tourism.

The trainees should start by looking for information about the certification schemes applied in their home countries and produce a description of the state-of-the-art: which schemes are applied, to what extend, in what kind of services and businesses, how well developed the certification systems are and which are the bodies involved in maintaining the eco-labels, awarding the certificates and evaluating the service providers. If there are not national certification schemes but such are planned, those plans should also be described in short.

The next step is to choose one of the certificates, study its criteria and compare it against the criteria for sustainable tourism of GSTC pointing out the stronger and weaker aspects with suggestions for how to further develop the criteria to meet better GSTC.

The analyses should be finalised with conclusions of the trainees and with a summary of what they think they learnt from completing the task and what kind of questions arose from it.

In addition to the materials provided in the material of the module, the country and eco-label specific ones will most likely be found from internet or by request from the ecotourism bodies of the country, ministries and other authorities and from the bodies responsible of the certificates. In addition to internet and printed materials interviews, phone calls and email contacts may be in need.

The most likely form of presenting the results is a written report or e.g a power point presentation, but any other type of presentation is possible e.g. in a seminar or workshop type of situation with a combination of materials and tools (results of the analyses illustrated e.g. with charts, statistics, leaflets, posters, photos, related websites etc).

When working in pairs and groups the responsibilities for completing the task need to be divided equally ensuring, that everybody in the group also study the materials and contribute to the analyses. When utilising video, photos or other media and creating

multimedia presentations, there is a slight danger that the contents to be learnt are replaced by the use of the different tools.

3.3. Module 3: Introduction and implementation of the European Ecotourism Labelling Standard

The objectives of the module are to describe to the trainees how and for what purpose EETLS was created, how it seems to comply to the current certificates and through introducing blueprint of the criteria invite the trainees to test and evaluate it themselves.
The sub-topics are:
1. What does eco-tourism mean for individual tourism service providers and tour operators
2. The European Ecotourism Labelling Standards (EETLS)
3. The EETLS Development
4. How do current certificates reflect the principles and criteria of eco-tourism?

At the end of Eco-Destinet Handbook[18] the concept and development of the EETLS is introduced. It also presents an assessment of selected ecotourism labels and certificates against the draft EETLS criteria to highlight the need for European ecotourism baseline criteria and to identify the extent to which current certificates already comply with EETLS.

At first it is discussed in the Eco-Destinet Handbook **what does eco-tourism mean for individual tourism service providers and tour operators**. It is pointed out, that ecotourism possesses challenges for businesses, since by definition it sets restrictions on tourism company operations and activities but it can also be seen as a major opportunity. derived from the three elements: i) managing the business, ii) tourists and iii) the impact on the local environment. If each action is analysed separately it is possible to devise a number of statements that provide a schematic for viable, well-run businesses managed in a responsible and sustainable manner.

As described in the Eco-Destinet Handbook **The European Ecotourism Labelling Standards (EETLS)** are developed as a part of the Eco-Destinet initiative. The EETLS criteria are based on the criteria developed by the GSTC partnership for sustainable tourism described in module 2. The Eco-Destinet team interpreted and adapted these to reflect specifically the principles and considerations of European ecotourism.

The scope of developing a standard for European ecotourism derives from the need to harmonise existing eco-tourism initiatives and strengthen their position in the tourism market. The harmonisation effort is based on an integrated concept for European ecotourism, which brings together the different services offered to the tourist, i.e. accommodation, food, travel and nature-based outdoor activities. Although each of the service-components of ecotourism may come under different quality labels, an "umbrella" labelling standard would assure the baseline quality of the tourism product and harmonise existing labels while recognising their specific experiences and background. Therefore a European Ecotourism Labelling Standard (EETLS) based on the European and global experience on the theme, would assure comparable standards of service to the client

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[18] Eco-Destinet Handbook of Ecotourism Labelling Criteria and Good Practise in Europe: http://ecoroute.eu/themedia/File/ECO-DESTINET%20HANDBOOK_FINAL_SEMINAR.pdf

across Europe (and potentially worldwide), at least in relation to a core group of baseline quality criteria.

The EETLS Development by Eco-Destinet is based on the fact, that ecotourism is by definition a form of sustainable tourism. Therefore the <u>GSTC</u> (see module 2) provides a solid basis for interpreting ecotourism through sets of criteria. The <u>TIES definition and principles</u> of ecotourism (see module 1) provides a useful tool for interpretation of GSTC criteria in the context of ecotourism. Using the GSTC criteria and the TIES definition to determine ecotourism standards has clear advantages especially since they were derived from extensive consultation and collective work; they are expected to be adopted widely and used as a reference for the tourism industry worldwide.

The EETLS shares all of the GSTC criteria as all are highly applicable to ecotourism. Currently the EETLS is made up of 40 specific criteria divided into the <u>four pillars of sustainable tourism according to the GSTC</u>:
- A. Effective sustainability planning
- B. Maximize social and economic benefits to the local community
- C. Reduce negative impacts to cultural heritage
- D. Reduce negative impacts to environmental heritage.

A basic comparison of the three tools (TIES definition, GSTC pillars and EETLS criteria) is introduced in the Eco-Destinet Handbook illustrating the similarities of GSTC and EETLS.

The definition is used to set the context of the EETLS. As the EETLS shares the same criteria description of GSTC, this ensures high compatibility with GSTC and communication with the public on what is sustainable tourism is made less complicated.

It is stated, however, in the Eco-Destinet Handbook, that there are several differences between a sustainable tourism system and an ecotourism one, especially when focusing on European ecotourism. In order to the GSTC more fully reflect the nature of the ecotourism industry the Eco-Destinet partnership has <u>specified each criterion according to the specialised needs of the sector.</u> Each specification takes into consideration the rationale of the criterion in terms of European ecotourism and highlights issues that should be addressed. The criterion is applicable to:
- Outdoor Activities
- Accommodation
- Restaurants
- Tour packages
- Visitor Centres

The specification is then interpreted through a set of <u>sub-criteria</u> and recommended <u>indicators</u>. The sub-criteria and the indicators are collections of good practise from current European and worldwide ecotourism and eco-labelling initiatives. This ensures that the EETLS complies with the wide spectrum of current initiatives and that the development work also benefits from experience and knowledge gained through relevant work undertaken previously. The sub-criteria and indicators of EETLS have also been created in order to ensure that an ecotourism company complies with the restrictions implied by the ecotourism definition. And example of the use of the sub-criteria is provided in the Eco-Destinet Handbook.

More detailed description of the complete EETLS is in its blueprint[19] available from the Eco-Destinet website.

For finding out **how current certificates reflect the principles and criteria of eco-tourism** an assessment was made of some ecotourism labels when developing EETLS. There are many certification schemes in Europe and worldwide, which are either targeted specifically at ecotourism or comply more broadly with the principles of ecotourism. These initiatives have hundreds of certified businesses and these certificates have very specific criteria. Through the research carried out during the development of the EETLS an assessment was made in order to identify whether current ecotourism labels comply with the GSTC and the draft EETLS and if so, to what extent. It as found out that the compliance of all ecotourism specific certification systems with the draft EETLS runs at more than 65 percent. This is an encouraging level as it translates into a certification system that caters for almost all EETLS criteria, although not to the same depth. In contrast most certification systems that are developed for sustainable tourism fall below 40-50% of compatibility with EETLS.

It is worth noting, that there are quality systems that themselves include many criteria addressing a particular EETLS criterion, but which have very few criteria addressing some other ETTLS criteria of equally paramount importance for European ecotourism. This demonstrates the importance of EETLS, since with its *holistic approach*; it can identify gaps in current European certification initiatives and make specific recommendations for improvements, while also acknowledging the need for national or regional specific criteria and indicators to safeguard ecotourism development based on local needs. In the Eco-Destinet Handbook the results of the assessment of the labels are described in more detail.

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[19] http://ecoroute.eu/destinet/en/eetls.php?id=3

3.3.1. Suggestion for an assignment for trainees

The objective of the assignment is to make the trainees think how to implement EETLS in practise by applying the criteria and to evaluate its usability in connection to their own work or activities.

The basic assignment is the same but by using different methods it may be used in different connections for different types of trainees either as an individual task, a pair work or a group assignment. As the backgrounds of the trainees vary as well as their knowledge and experience of ecotourism, the assignment allows them complete it according to their starting level applying it to their own context.

The assignment is to with the help of the Eco-Destinet Handbook and EETLS Blueprint use the criteria for evaluating it against a case example of an ecotourism service or business – keeping in mind that EETLS is applicable to outdoor activities, accommodation, restaurants, tour packages and visitor centres.

The case service/business chosen may be one the trainee or trainees know already (e.g. the one analysed for module 1, their own business or one they work for), which speeds up completing the task, or unfamiliar to them. If the objective of the study is not known from before, the assignment needs to be started by learning to know the business, its history and plans for the future. In any case, even if the ecotourism business in question is familiar, more detailed information about the business may be needed and best ways to acquire it are to visit it, maybe participate to its everyday activities and interview persons involved in running the business – as well as their customers. In addition to "field research" also "desk research" from written materials and internet may be needed and useful.

Before starting to collect data for the analyses and evaluation, the EETLS criteria needs to be studied carefully to be able to observe the business in connection to all important aspects and to be able to recognise the needed information.

The trainees should start by looking for basic information and additional material about the service/business of their interest e.g. from literature and websites or interviewing face-to-face, by phone or by email persons with relevant knowledge. Based on this information they should produce a short introductive description of the objective of their analyses, give it background and make visible its connections to its surroundings.

After the first phase the service or business needs to be set against EETLS criteria and evaluated step by step. In the analyses the aspects of interest should be highlighted: which criteria are fulfilled well, which ones have room for improvement and which ones are not met at all. Also the applicability and usefulness of EETLS should be evaluated. The analyses should be finalised with conclusions of the trainees and with a summary of what they think they learnt from completing the task and what kind of questions arose from it.

The forms for reporting the results of the analyses may be e.g. writing a case study or an essay about the topic illustrated with videos and photos etc. It might be useful to have the report in such a form, that it may be sent also to the service or business that has been analysed as a feedback of what they are doing.

When working in pairs and groups the responsibilities for completing the task need to be divided equally ensuring, that everybody in the group also study the materials and contribute to the analyses. When utilising video, photos or other media and creating multimedia presentations, there is a slight danger that the contents to be learnt are replaced by the use of the different tools.

3.4. Module 4: Training for Ecotourism

The objective of the module is to describe to trainers (and everybody else interested) how training for ecotourism and setting up a label has been planned and organised in three examples.

The first example describes how Nature's Best[20] quality label is certified and the two other examples illustrate EETLS -training in practise piloted in Eco-Destinet in the form of a 4-day seminar and an e-course. The Participants` Handbooks of both the seminar and the e-learning course are included as annexes.

3.4.1. Implementation example 1: Eco-route project training materials for trainers of the trainers and service providers in connection to certification by Nature's Best quality label

In the Ecoroute project[21] two training packages were developed for the application, monitoring and certification of the quality assurance criteria in ecotourism. The first addressed the trainers[22] and the second the service providers[23] of ecotourism-related activities and services. The latter may also be used in training of the trainers as it is the basic documentation of the Nature's Best system and what the system requires from service providers.

The material targeted for the *trainers of the trainers* starts with a short introduction of how to promote and implement ecotourism explaining also the process of promoting and labelling ecotourism. The objective of the materials is described as to "organize transmission of ecotourism know how to service providers. It focuses on how to promote ecotourism in areas where natural and cultural heritage is suitable for sustainable tourism. It uses the Nature's Best concept from Sweden, which has proven to be a practical tool to create quality labelled ecotourism products." It is also referred to, that when used this material will support organising training in ecotourism when aiming to introduce a labelling system similar to Nature's Best.

The introduction is followed by three content chapters:
1. Informing service providers and other stakeholders of ecotourism and the labelling system
2. Lectures and workshop for Nature's Best applying service providers – a 3-day seminar
3. Certification procedures, approval and marketing

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[20] http://www.naturensbasta.se/index.asp?cookies=True

[21] http://www.ecoroute.eu/en/index.php?id=1

[22] http://www.ecoroute.eu/brochures/training%20of%20trainers.pdf

[23] http://www.ecoroute.eu/brochures/training%20of%20service%20providers.pdf

It is stressed how important it is to sell in the concept of ecotourism and labelling to a region when taking the first steps towards creating ecotourism service providers. Local authorities, people working with tourism and nature and culture preservation together with interested service providers must be made aware of each other and how to coordinate efforts. That is because many of the labelling criteria involve coordination with authorities and society as a whole. Also the service providers need to see the direct and indirect benefits of ecotourism for their business. These discussions may be included to a half-a-day seminar with the objective to motivate decision makers to invest time and money in a labelling system and to interest service providers in creating eco tourism products. In the material some topics are suggested.

Next the 3-day seminar for Nature's Best applying service providers is introduced with its structure and topics. The objective of the seminar is to give the service providers the basic information how within Natures' Best the service provider can be labelled. The course is also mandatory for certification. It is possible to organise the course in many ways and the work conditions for service providers as well as educational structures need to be taken into consideration. Different tourist seasons and work loads affect how service providers can follow teaching programmes. Also different trainers have their own ways to get information and knowledge across to service providers.

Following the 3-day course many service providers value a more subjective instruction and guidance. For this purpose a one-day course for a group of service providers is introduced with the thought, that after studying one day together each service provider will continue by him/herself and receive individual support. This model of training combining group instruction and supported individual work has proved to produce good applications for certification.

The third training session introduced in the material is one-hour info for such service providers, who want to know how the application process works. The facts that need to be addressed by trainers are introduced. This information can be given also in connection to any of the already mentioned courses.

The objective of the second Ecoroute material, *training material for service providers, experts and trainers* has been to compile essential knowledge of ecotourism and labelling of ecotourism. The material includes the basic facts for the service providers to study and work with to get an insight into labelling of ecotourism products. It summarizes topics such as ecotourism, sustainability and describes in more detail the Swedish labelling process and criteria known as Nature's Best. It is also the core material to be used when teaching trainers what ecotourism and labelling is in addition to the material described earlier in this module.

The training material includes definitions of sustainable tourism and ecotourism, description of Nature's Best quality label and its basic and special criteria in detail, shows models of service provider plans and agreements and introduces best practice and companies to visit within Nature's Best.

3.4.2. Implementation example 2: a 4-day seminar

In Eco-Destinet a 4-day seminar on "Certification of Quality in Ecotourism – The European Ecotourism Labelling Standard" was organised as a pilot in S. Antonio di Mavignola, Italy from the 21st to the 26th of June 2009.

The seminar was organised with three **objectives**:
1. to discuss the European Ecotourism Labelling Standard (EETLS) and its prospect for implementation around Europe
2. to provide an insight to participants on the EETLS and request their input and support for its further implementation
3. to provide training of trainers on Ecotourism Certification needs based on an integrated approach on the ecotourism products

The **target group** of the seminar included ecotourism organisations, protected area managers, ecotourism labels, environmental NGOs, academics, local and regional authorities, development agencies and social partners from all over Europe working in the field of ecotourism and sustainable tourism.

The course was designed for 30 participants and about 10-15 members of staff including the lecturers, organisers and other support staff. Participants were **recruited** by the Eco-Destinet partners through their networks with distributing the 2-page announcement of the Seminar in PDF by email and by directly contacting and informing key persons by phone or when meeting them etc. Recruiting participants was started a couple of months before the Seminar but it had been disseminated to some part in previous dissemination activities of the project as well. When applying to the Seminar the trainees were asked to send their CVs for giving the organisers a better understanding of their background. They were also asked to describe why they were interested in participating to the Seminar and what they expected from it.

As soon as the first draft for the contents and structure for the Seminar were designed, the **expert speakers** were contacted and informed about the event and their tasks. In the pilot most speakers came within the partnership but especially in the theme of training for ecotourism external experts were invited to speak. Organisers, moderators and other support staff were provided by the project partners and the organisation responsible of the Seminar.

As the main theme was ecotourism the organisers wanted the **location** of the Seminar to be relevant to it and chose to organise the Seminar in S. Antonio di Mavignola, which is a village of the municipality of Pinzolo, Trento Province, Trentino, in the heart of the National Park of Adamello Brenta. The park had joined the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (www.pnab.it), and the municipality itself (www.comune.pinzolo.tn.it) had recently agreed to a Strategic Plan for Sustainable Development. In addition the area offers attractive natural and agricultural environments and rural experiences, which were relevant for the contents and schedule of the Seminar as it included also study visits with study tasks.

The main **topics** of the seminar were Ecotourism in Europe and Ecotourism Labels, The European Ecotourism Labelling Standard, Criteria and Indicators for Ecotourism Components and Training for Ecotourism Quality.

The first day included an Open Forum session for introducing the participants and giving them a change to voice their expectations for the seminar. That was followed by three lectures and a workshop on the current status of Ecotourism in the participants' countries. The second day was devoted to the EETLS with two lectures on the theme, plus an introduction on the follow up to the seminar training activities (e-course). The third day included study visits in separate groups to neighbouring areas of ecotourism interest and a plenary session in the evening of the group reports. The last day was devoted on the training needs regarding Ecotourism certification including a lecture on the theme, and discussions on the future implementation of EETLS around Europe. At the end of the Seminar Award of Diplomas was followed by a cultural evening.

Each day was a combination of different **methods** and use of **materials** with emphasis on discussion and networking allowing the participants to use their experiences and knowledge for the benefit of both themselves and all others participating. The differences in the backgrounds of participants and other involved created both challenges and especially opportunities to learn and realise new ways of thinking and approaching the themes of the Seminar.

Training materials used consisted of the materials provided by the lecturers, products of Eco-Destinet project (the Handbook on Ecotourism Labelling Criteria and Good Practice in Europe, the Blueprint of the European Ecotourism Labelling Standard – EETLS, the Training of Trainers Material on Certification of Quality in Ecotourism and the e-Course) and those collected to the Eco-Destinet library.

Short, about 40 minute lectures by expert speaker introduced the main topics creating a common base for the workshops, in which the topics were discussed further with the help of given discussion questions and on the bases of the assignments the trainees had been asked to complete before the Seminar. After the workshops there were also plenary sessions for summarising and concluding the discussions in the workshops. One of the workshops at the and of the Seminar was for evaluating the Seminar and the products of Eco-Destinet project allowing the participants to give feedback more systematically than had been possible during the Seminar, even though giving continuous feedback was encouraged by the organisers.

Study Visits by car in small groups to the surroundings of the seminar location were organised to serve many purposes. At first they gave an opportunity for the trainees to test and evaluate EETLS in practise, as they were asked to evaluate the palaces they visited by using the criteria as much as possible. The visits also made it possible for the trainees to learn to know each other a bit better at least in their Study Visit groups, discuss and share experiences and learn together and from each other. They also had an opportunity to learn to know the region and the ecotourism destinations and businesses visited a bit better and hopefully take back home some ideas to implement in their own work.

The Seminar ended to Panel Discussions, in which the Quality Label representatives discussed together about their experience of EETLS and the ways how to start implementing it in cooperation with other initiatives and the interested labels. All

participants were invited to participate to the discussion and this way to ensure dissemination of EETLS and taking of the next steps with it.

As **assignments** for the participants to prepare before coming to the Seminar, there were three tasks: writing a presentation of ecotourism in their own countries, writing a case study of an ecotourism service they know and for the last preparing for a Pan European experience exchange.

The presentations of ecotourism were presented and discussed in the first workshop for giving an opportunity to the trainees to learn to know more about the present state of ecotourism in European countries and help them understand the different settings to which certification of quality should be applied to. That assignment was also chosen to encourage the participants to use their voice and start discussing forming at the same time mutual understanding of ecotourism and its possibilities and challenges in the different parts of Europe. One objective was to guide the participants to update their knowledge of ecotourism in their own country and analyse and evaluate it a bit for being able to introduce it to other participants.

The purpose of the case studies was at first to make the trainees study and analyse a service they maybe knew very well, but perhaps never have evaluated more systematically. So when presented in the EETLS –workshop these descriptions served also again as a part of introducing ecotourism in different countries but especially they created a pool of practical examples to which it was possible to start applying EETLS criteria. As the concept of EETLS and the criteria were completely new tools for most of the trainees starting to test and apply it to cases they knew was good preparation for the Study Visits and applying EETLS during them to new businesses. In best case some feedback was brought back home to the services described in the cases on bases of the discussions in the workshop and analysing it through EETLS.

The last task, preparing for a Pan European experience exchange, included invitations to bring typical national delicacies for all to taste during the International Dinner organised on the first night of the Seminar, to perform music and songs, games and stories from home in the evenings and during spare time and also to bring booklets, brochures, maps or other material illustrating case studies, work, region and country of the participants.

The seminar took place in a local House of the (National) Park, but the accommodation of participants was organised in the local hotels, b&b´s and agrotourism accommodations. For the seminar a lecturing hall was needed with some smaller rooms for workshops and other group work with adequate equipment. In addition cars and interpreters were needed for the study visits.

Important for the participants were the practical instructions and information given for making their travel and stay comfortable. An example of this is the Handbook for the Participants of the Seminar included here as annex 1.

3.4.3. Implementation example 3: e-learning course

Following the 4-day Seminar Eco-Destinet project piloted a 5-week e-learning course on the same topic - "Certification of Quality in Ecotourism – The European Ecotourism Labelling Standard" - based on the same contents and structure.

The e-course was organised with three **objectives**:
4. to discuss the European Ecotourism Labelling Standard (EETLS) and its prospect for implementation around Europe
5. to provide an insight to participants on the EETLS and request their input and support for its further implementation
6. to provide training of trainers on Ecotourism Certification needs based on an integrated approach on the ecotourism products

The **target group** of the e-course was the same as for the Seminar including ecotourism organisations, protected area managers, ecotourism labels, environmental NGOs, academics, local and regional authorities, development agencies and social partners from all over Europe working in the field of ecotourism and sustainable tourism.

It was estimated that even 50 participants could take part to the e-course, but even though with distance learning issues like auditoriums, class rooms, accommodation and catering demands and costs etc. are not so relevant and the number of participants is practically unlimited because of the media of study, it is better also in e-learning to have a smaller group of trainees. As the communication is intermediated by internet, the course platform, discussion groups, emails and other "social media" there is always a bigger challenge for the participants to learn to know and trust each other and communicate without any face to face meetings and discussion. Therefore the target number of 30 participants seemed quite adequate.

The e-course was introduced to the participants of the Seminar with requests for them to function as mentors on the e-course and also to **recruit** participants to the e-course amongst their colleagues and networks, especially persons who would have liked to participate to the Seminar but were not able to do so. The first announcement of the e-course was also disseminated by the Eco-Destinet partners through their networks in PDF form by email and other contacts. When applying to the course the trainees were asked to send their CVs for giving the organisers a better understanding of their background. They were also asked to describe why they were interested in participating to the e-course and what they expected from it.

The course was **constructed** on Moodle -platform, which is quite popular and well known in many organisations in Europe and easy to use by both the trainers and trainees. It was structures according to the contents of the Training Material for Trainers of the Trainers in such a way, that Chapters 1 and 2 were studied during the first week of the course, of Chapter 3 the modules 1 and 2 during the second week, module 3 during the third week and module 4 and the implementation examples during the fourth week. The fifth and last week was for evaluating the course and its contents and materials and also for discussing how the trainees might start implementing EETLS. During week five it was also possible to catch up with assignments that might have been delayed in order to receive the diploma.

The e-course was **lead by** two of Eco-Destinet project partners with previous experience of organising and running e-courses. They also tutored trainees together with three other partners. A good number of the Seminar participants were interested in participating to the course as mentors. All the expert speakers of the Seminar also at least visited the course and commented the discussion on the forums of their topics. Some of them followed the course more intensively and were a valuable additional resource for the participants in addition to their peer mentors.

As soon as the trainees were accepted to the course they were sent the course-IDs and passwords for logging-in to the course. They were also sent the Handbook for the participants of the e-course (annex 2) with practical information, schedule of the course and short descriptions of the assignments to be completed during the course for receiving the course diploma. In the very beginning of the course the participants were asked to log-in and write a short greeting and introduction of themselves to the discussion forum assigned for that purpose. The CVs of the participants were also uploaded to the same section. They were also asked to write in short what they expected from the course and why they wanted to study it.

After that easy warm up the chapters 1 and 2 were studied during the first week and by the end of the week participants we asked to write to a new discussion forum their thoughts about the importance of initiatives like Eco-Destinet and EETLS form their perspective as well as comment the principles on which the educational approach of Eco-Destinet was based. As all the participants had some kind of connection to ecotourism, the first task made them think the development needs and ways or quality in ecotourism. As for the second, even though not all of the participants were trainers or would ever teach people themselves, all of the have and probably also will participate to adult education and also some of them will be buying or organising training for their customers, and in that sense reflecting adult learning through their own experiences might help them change, improve or evaluate the training they themselves are involved with.

For the second week the first and second training modules were at hand and the topics were ecotourism and certification of quality. In addition to studying the materials of the modules also through the web-links provided in that section, the participants needed to read comments on the discussion forum of the previous week and give feedback to at least three persons. Naturally more feedback and continuing the discussions were recommendable. By the end of the week their task was also to write a description of ecotourism and certification of quality in their own country and analyse its challenges and possibilities in reference to the contents of modules 1 and 2. With this analyse the participants got both the opportunity to update their own knowledge of ecotourism and certification in their countries and present it to participants from other countries.

During week 3 the participants needed to comment at least three descriptions of ecotourism and certification of quality and study materials of module 3. A few example cases of ecotourism services from different countries were provided as well and the participants had to sign up for a small group based on the case they preferred to analyse. The task of the week was to analyse and evaluate the chosen case according to EETLS criteria and make suggestions for improving the introduced case service. The analysis was to be made at first by each participant individually picking up the main points and then representing those on

the discussion forum for the other members of the small group. During week 4 this task was continued as the members discussed their case in the small group and produced a summary of their analyses by the end of that week.

During week 4 also the materials of module 4 needed to be studied and the task based on it was to either describe and evaluate the personal experiences of participants of training for ecotourism - especially in connection to quality of services - and/or to make suggestions for what kind of training would be needed (topics, duration, target groups, materials etc) according to their experience or understanding.

During week 5 the last assignments were completed and the participants were asked to give feedback both anonymously and on the open discussion form about the e-course and the Eco-Destinet materials as well as the potential of EETLS to become a useful practical tool for them. Participants were also asked to evaluate their own performance and the value of the course for them.

Studying on an e-learning course is often challenging even though it escapes some of the demands of time and space allowing the student to adapt studies to other aspects of life. On this course the time was limited, though, and there were quite strict deadlines to keep for being able to complete the course. Then again, with such a tight schedule the interest and motivation are easier to keep up than if the course has more flexible schedule or it can be studied over a longer period of time. Distance learning in all its forms, including e-learning, always demands good motivation and self-discipline. Also e-learning still is not a self-evident way of studying to most adults yet. To support learning on the Eco-Destinet e-course both tutors and mentors were used on their part to support the participants and to remind them of the study tasks of the week, to encourage them to keep up with the course and to contribute their experience and knowledge to animate the discussions. Most of the tutoring outside Moodle was made through email either to the whole group or to individual participants, but also video-conferencing from PC through e.g. skype was tested both by individuals and groups.

As face-to-face communication was not possible to combine to the course, elements of variety, interaction and use of multiple resources were tried to achieve through the combination of varied learning elements described above. Also the assignments were planned to suit to different types or participants with different educational background and work experience. All the tasks include both individual and group reflection and allow the participants to express themselves from their own perspective yet in accordance to the objectives of the course and demanding them to apply the materials of the course and try to achieve or understanding among different opinions.

The Eco-Destinet e-course is available by request to all interested in using it as a part of training in ecotourism, especially EETLS.
For further information contact: info-euracademy@euracademy.org.

Annex 1: Handbook for the participants of the 4-day seminar

Download your copy from:

http://ecoroute.eu/themedia/File/EcoDestinet%20Seminar_Handbook.pdf

Annex 2: Handbook for the participants of the e- learning course