

Viktor Subotić

United Nations Development Programme,
UN Eco House,
Montenegro

✉ viktor.subotic@undp.org

Saša Popović

Faculty of Economics,
University of Montenegro,
Montenegro

✉ sasa@t-com.me

ECOLOGICAL CERTIFICATION IN TOURISM SECTOR IN MONTENEGRO – ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES

ЕКОЛОШКА СЕРТИФИКАЦИЈА У СЕКТОРУ ТУРИЗМА У ЦРНОЈ ГОРИ – ПРЕДНОСТИ И ИЗАЗОВИ

Summary: *The aim of this paper is to analyze concept of ecological certification, its advantages and challenges in the context of Montenegrin tourism accommodation sector. Based on EU Eco Label and Travelife certification schemes we tested advantages of greening tourist offer and contribution to the climate change combat in the country. Sample of 40 accommodation facilities are taken into consideration, and being offered series of presentations, direct interviews and incentives. Our results show that 10 out of 40 accommodation facilities are awarded with certificate, while 15 more facilities are in the process of gaining it in 2018. The main challenges we evidenced are as follows: limited human and financial resources to implement certification requirements; low level of understanding of marketing advantages that green certification brings; absence of national and local incentives to support certification implementation and destination safety and security aspects becoming main interest of tourism entrepreneurs.*

Keywords: *sustainable tourism, eco certification, travelife, EU Ecolabel, Montenegro.*

JEL classification: *Q56, Z32*

Резиме: *Циљ овог рада је анализа концепта еколошке сертификације, њених предности и изазова у контексту сектора смјештајног туризма Црне Горе. На основу ЕУ сертификационе шеме еко-знака и сертификата Travelife, тестирали смо предности зелене туристичке понуде и доприноса борби против климатских промјена у земљи. Узорак је обухватио 40 смјештајних капацитета уз низ презентација, директних интервјуа и подстицајних мјера. Наши резултати указују на то да је 40 смјештајних капацитета добило сертификат, а 15 наредних чека на сертификацију у 2018. години. Главни изазови на које смо наишли односе се на ограничене људске и финансијске ресурсе за испуњавање услова сертификације, слабо разумијевање важности предности маркетинга коју са собом носи зелена сертификација, недостатак националних и локалних подстицајних мјера за подршку имплементације сертификата, безбједност и сигурност дестинације што је од прворазредног интереса за туристичке раднике.*

Кључне ријечи: *одрживи туризам, еколошка сертификација, Travelife, Еко знак, Црна Гора.*

ЈЕЛ класификација: *Q56, Z32*

Paper presented at the 7th Scientific Conference with International Participation "Jahorina Business Forum 2018: Sustainable tourism and institutional environment", Jahorina, 23-24th March 2018

1. INTRODUCTION

As one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world, tourism is increasingly recognized as a vital contributor to job and wealth creation, environmental protection, cultural preservation and poverty alleviation. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), well-designed and managed tourism sector can help preserve the natural and cultural heritage assets upon which it depends, empower host communities, generate trade opportunities, and foster peace and intercultural understanding (UNWTO 2017).

Globally, approximately one billion border-crossing trips are being taken every year – which translates into more than two-and-a-half million trips abroad per day (Plüss et al. 2014). It is uncontested that foreign travel provides jobs and perspectives especially in economic fringe regions and developing countries. The tourism sector represents 5% of European Union GDP and accounts for over half a million tourist accommodation sites (Baumgartner 2015).

Often located in pleasant but fragile locations, tourist accommodation can put pressure on water and energy resources and threaten local biodiversity through inappropriate waste management. Tourism related transport is large driver for climate change. The tourism business reacted to this trend and increased their environmental performance in the last two decades constantly.

Ecological certification should provide guiding on this journey and a communication tool to allow environmentally - and climate friendly service providers to stand out from the crowd. By saving money and increasing management abilities in the accommodation a win-win-win situation for the business, the consumer and the environment is created.

There are around 100 different eco certificates in tourism within Europe, Germany alone has more than 20, many of them at regional level. The Austrian Ecolabel for tourism was in 1993 the first national approach, and formed a base for the later developed EU Eco Label for tourism accommodations.

Most of the labels, especially those with higher environmental standards and an independent third-party control are financed by governmental bodies at regional or national level. In most of the cases the ministries responsible for the environment cover the costs for development, quality assurance, etc. for the scheme. The certified units have to cover costs for the assessment and an annual 'label-fee' (Baumgartner 2015).

Common elements to most tourism certification programs are:

- voluntary enrolment by businesses
- well-defined standards and criteria
- assessment and auditing
- recognition and awarding the use of a logo
- periodic follow up audits to renew the certification
- continual improvement
- transparency
- participatory mechanisms to define standards.

The guidelines and definitions for how to certify, are based on principles established by consensus among the members of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). Most of the members are officially recognized national standards institutes and accreditation bodies from countries large and small, in all regions of the world.

Internationally, the Global Sustainable Tourism (GST) Criteria by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) provide a quality framework and a meta-certification for labels (GST 2018).

Eco certification helps differentiate sustainable tourism businesses from others and recognition of business champions or community leaders. Experiences confirm multiple benefits from introducing ecological certification for business operators, clients/tourists and government/destination. According to the publication by the Center for Ecotourism and Sustainable Development (Bien 2015), these benefits were elaborated as below:

Benefits for businesses

- Undertaking certification process is educational. Many certified businesses have stated that one of the greatest benefits of the certification process was to teach them the elements of sustainability in their operations and focus their attention on the changes they needed to make in their businesses. A better-operating business tends to be more efficient and to attract more clients.
- Reducing operating costs that can be found in almost every type of business certification and it is usually achievable with small investments, especially with newer accommodation facilities, which apply contemporary and innovative solutions as from project design level to day-to-day operations. Cost savings are provided without reducing the quality of service.
- The process of implementing certification of sustainable tourism is often accompanied by easier access to technical assistance and financing for businesses to implement new technology – the business is educated about these technologies, while donors and financial institutions are more likely to offer low-cost financing.
- Eco certification provides marketing advantage to certified businesses, as consumers learn to recognize credible certification brands.
-

Benefits for guests and tourists

- Certification provides tourists with environmentally and socially responsible choices – it helps consumers to know which businesses are truly socially and environmentally responsible and to make choices on this basis.
- Certification in general increases public awareness of responsible business practices and introduces tourists to the environmental and social issues in an area, allowing them to act more respectfully or contribute to solutions.
- Quality guarantee due to ecological management with assured high comfort for guests for staying in the eco-accommodations.

Benefits for governments

- In the extremely competitive sector, ecological certification helps governments protect their market niches as sustainable tourism destinations.
- Certification raises industry standards in health, safety, environment, and social stability.
- Also, it lowers the regulatory costs of environmental protection, namely local or central government invests less in the areas with eco certified accommodations.

The Government of Montenegro sees tourism as a main driver of economic growth and income generation, but also fully realizes the environmental challenges associated with its rapid development and is committed to address them as part of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development until 2030 and Tourism Development Master Plan until 2020. The Government is firmly committed to develop its tourism sector on a sustainable basis, it is putting in place the required policy and regulatory framework to attract large-scale investment in tourism infrastructure, but also to steer them in a more environmentally sustainable way. The Towards Carbon Neutral Tourism (TCNT) Project is built on these commitments and efforts by enhancing the focus of national efforts on minimizing the carbon footprint of tourism and promoting Montenegro as a place for climate conscious tourism and low carbon holiday destination. The project is financed by Global Environment Facility (GEF), implemented jointly by Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism of Montenegro and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Country Office, over the period 2015-2019.

Its ultimate objective is to reduce GHG emissions from Montenegro's tourism sector by promoting country's transition towards a carbon neutral travel & tourism, minimizing energy use and transport in and around new green field development projects, helping tourism industry to identify and implement cost-effective mitigation options in travel and accommodation sectors, as well as introducing carbon offset scheme and other innovative financial mechanisms to compensate for the residual emissions and generate additional revenues for climate mitigation and adaptation actions in tourism.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ecological certification in tourism takes different forms: it can be applied to destination, region, or individual enterprises, further it is usually decision promoted, or in some cases imposed, to opt for regional/national or international certification. In Montenegro, appliance of international certification is perceived as most appropriate one.

In example of Romania (Petrică et al. 2015), the key element of the certification procedure is represented by drawing up a sustained management plan, as a model that can be used by managers or owners of the lodging units that wish to acquire the certification in tourism. Guesthouses that implement the certification in tourism are presented with a series of benefits, such as: it allows customers to identify better those products that can offer amazing experiences related to nature and rural culture; contributes to increasing the level of confidence in Romanian ecotourism products on the international market; becomes a marketing instrument for tour-operators and guesthouses owners; guarantees a higher quality level of services; contributes actively to preserving nature and long-lasting development at a local level; supports local administrations in the protected areas with developing a form of tourism with a minimal impact; provides a platform for shared activities between the entrepreneurial sector and the nature preserving organizations.

In another study for Barcelona (Rodríguez et al. 2017), as the third most visited city in Europe, after London and Paris, City Council created the Strategic Plan for the city in 2010. This Plan

was focused on economic, social and environmental sustainability as its main principles. As seen in the objectives and principles, one of the strategic lines was to identify sustainability as a key factor for the sector's competitiveness; which made it understandable that in 2011 Barcelona applied criteria based on destination for certification: Biosphere Destination. This certification was renewed for three more years in 2014.

Based on the evaluation of the Plan and Biosphere Destination certification, relevant stakeholders from tourism industry stated that:

- They do believe in sustainability.
- They do believe in certifications and their importance.
- They do believe that sustainability can be achieved through certifications.
- They do believe that certification actions are long-lasting.
- They believe that this certification will bring sustainability to the city.

However, it is important to bear in mind that tourism sustainability not only applies to the environment as it is commonly thought but also to two other aspects such as the economy and the local population. With over eight million visitors (spending 2 million Euros a day in the city), it can be assumed that the economic pillar of sustainability is somewhat covered. Nevertheless, the third pillar regarding local population is the one that appears to also be failing, as the local population seems not to be satisfied at all with how the city is getting so much tourism, that the essence of the city is being lost. Namely, local population believes that the wealth redistribution and the alleviation of massification has not been achieved. Even more, this massification is making locals dislike tourists and its activities. According to Rodríguez R. A. *et al*, Barcelona has not been able to hold this invasion phenomenon that is taking place in many urban destinations these days.

How the "green message" can reach both tourists and residents was in focus of Gokirmakl *et al.* (2017, 512-515). Media has an important role which affects knowledge of human about eco-labeling. For this reason, by using media in more efficient way, knowledge of human could be improved about eco-labeling. Nowadays, social media are common with young generation, so by especially using social media, awareness of eco-labelling could be improved.

Finally, the desire to obtain the ecological certification or the eco-labelling of the tourist services offered proofs (Stefanica 2012) that the tourism operators are aware that the profitable operation of tourist structures can only be realized in accordance with the minimal requirements of environmental protection. The ecological certification and eco-labelling of tourist services guarantee the fact that they meet extremely high standards from the point of view of life cycle, impact, quality and environmental performance. A tourist unit offering such services proves to the tourists its preoccupation and effort concerning the environmental measures, and also its interest in increasing quality, because tourists would certainly see the environmental performance as «higher quality».

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper follows the structure of TCNT project that facilitates introduction of two international ecological certification schemes in Montenegro - EU Eco Label and Travelife certification.

EU Ecolabel is considered as Europe's official environmental label. This scheme was established in 1992 by an EU Regulation, as of 2003 open for certification of tourism services. It aims to help users and tourists to easily identify products and services which are less damaging to the environment. Putting the EU Ecolabel on more than 500 tourist accommodations at this moment means that it has the following assets: a) limited energy consumption; b) limited water consumption; c) reduced waste production; d) preferring the use of renewable resources; and e) promotes environmental education and communication with employees, guests and partners. EU Eco Label is appropriate for smaller accommodations and campsites, which practice individual and online booking.

Travelife is an internationally recognized certification scheme, spread to more than 1,400 accommodations around the world. The criteria for obtaining the certificate are divided into 4 thematic groups: a) general management; b) environmental protection; c) labor rights, human right and cooperation with local communities and d) conditions in supply chain (vendors and guests). It is important to highlight that leading tour operators such as TUI Travel, Thomas Cook, Neckermann

increase demands for reaching i.e. Travelife certificate. Members of Travelife community have wide support through promotion at global platforms, such as booking.com and Expedia.

Our approach includes offering of the several service lines to interested hoteliers:

- Advisory services to managers and responsible staff of the tourism accommodations to align with the listed certificate criteria; including technical visits, providing of the forms and templates and best practices;
- Co-financing of the certification process costs, covering auditing costs, while awarded accommodation facilities will have to pay annual fees (2 years for Travelife and up to 5 years for EU Ecolabel);
- Marketing, networking and promotional support through local and national tourism promotional entities, events, traditional and social media.

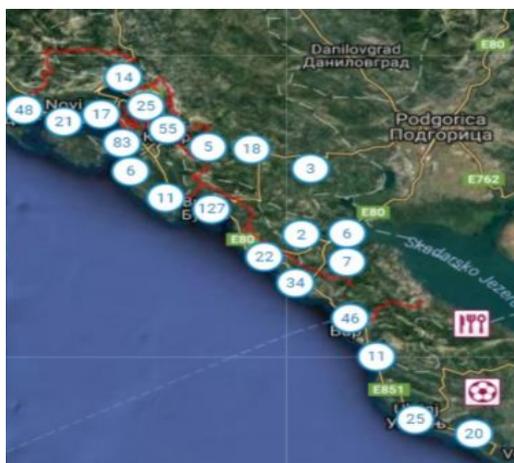
4. RESULTS

Initial activities in introduction of ecological certification for tourism accommodation sector in Montenegro included desktop research, series of interviews with national stakeholders and interviews with sample of 10 managers of hotels in coastal area of Montenegro, where, according to Statistical Yearbook (MONSTAT 2016), more than 90% of overnight stays were registered in 2015. The on-site visits showed that most of hotels are aligned with contemporary building solutions, which allow primarily energy savings. These measures are implemented without official introduction of eco-friendly business operating model, with intention to decrease variable costs. Namely, hotels install renewable energy sources, mostly solar energy equipment. Moreover, hotels confirmed caring of environment through number of advices on usage of water, sheets and towels policies, promoting complementary eco-tourism offer and cooperation with local community, mostly food and beverages supply. However, level of knowledge and understanding of ecological certification was low. At the same time, the readiness to work in achieving ecological certification was confirmed.

Based on the initial research' findings, it was recommended that international schemes EU Eco Label and Travelife will be piloted as of 2016, versus development of national-wide certification scheme, which is lacking recognition at tourism market. It is important to mention that relevant regulation on EU Eco Label was transposed in the Law on Environment adopted in 2016 by defining "Ecological sign", that can be issued to the Montenegrin products and services upon EU membership.

Second stage was to work on formal introduction and advocacy of the aforementioned certificate schemes, through number of presentations and direct interviews with interested accommodations' owners and managers. The activities started in March 2016, in 6 coastal municipalities (Herceg Novi, Tivat, Kotor, Budva, Bar and Ulcinj) and Cetinje, in central region of the country. The invitees were 200 registered accommodations with 3, 4 and 5 stars. The source for invitees was Central Tourism Register, held by National Tourism Organization of Montenegro.

Figure 1: Distribution of accommodation facilities in coastal area and Cetinje

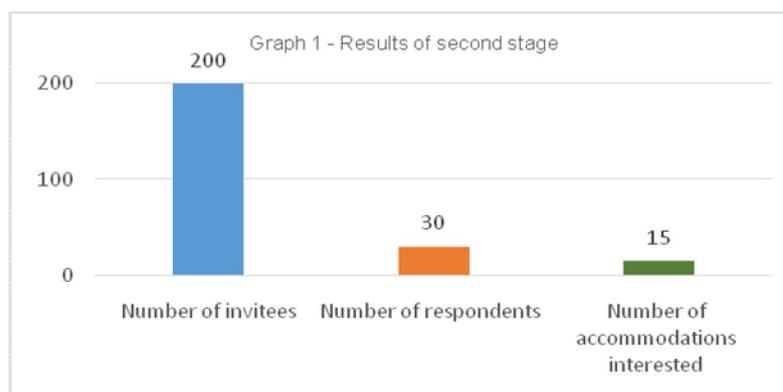


Source: NTO CG 2017

Further, targeted presentation was held on Travelife certification scheme. The presentation was organized in cooperation with Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism, with speakers from TUI Travel Group and Travelife certification body. All activities were supported with significant media presence.

Even with indirect support of the national and local tourism organizations, out of 200 invited representatives from accommodation sector, only 15% responded (30 accommodations) and expressed interest for direct cooperation and obtaining the certificate. Due to the upcoming summer tourism season, the direct support phase was postponed for autumn 2016.

Graph 1. Results of second stage of research



Source: Research conducted within Towards Carbon Neutral Tourism Project

Based on the results of the second stage of the research, direct support phase was initiated. This phase included visit to each of the 30 facilities, presentation of the criteria for selected ecological certificate, identification of the improvements measures and financial framework. Namely, all interested accommodations were freed from costs of advisory services, then necessary templates for documents that confirm sustainability of work were provided, as well as auditing services, which significantly reduced the financial implications of the certification process.

In practice, the hotel with 50 beds that applies for EU Eco Label was supported with 900 EUR, including 500 EUR for advisory services for criteria alignment and 400 EUR for auditor's fee. The hotel, once being awarded with certificate would need to pay 300 EUR for registration, and annual certification fee of 290 EUR. The validity period for EU Eco Label is 5 years.

In the case of Travelife certification, hotel up to 160 beds would get incentive for auditing costs of 350 EUR, while 2-years membership fee of 450 EUR has to be paid by the hotel.

Table 1. EU Eco Label official price list

Category	Advisory support	Audit Review	Registration Fee (one-time payment)	Annual fee for using the label (5 years)	Total costs for the first year
Accommodation facilities with up to 20 beds	€ 500	€ 300	€ 200	€ 175	€ 375
Accommodation facilities with 21-100 beds	€ 500	€ 400	€ 300	€ 290	€ 590
Accommodation facilities with 101-200 beds	€ 600	€ 600	€ 450	€ 440	€ 890
Accommodation facilities with more than 200 beds	€ 600	€ 600	€ 590	€ 650	€ 1240

Source: European Commission 2013

In the first and second column of Table 1 financial incentives allocated for tourism accommodations are presented.

Table 2. Travelife official price list

Hotel category (number of beds)	Certification costs	Membership fee	Total costs for 2 years
<160	€ 350	€ 450	€ 800
>160	€ 650	€ 750	€ 1,400

Source: Travel Life 2017

In the first column of Table 2 financial incentives allocated for tourism accommodations are presented.

During 2017, 10 accommodations received EU Eco Label and Travelife certification - EU Eco Labelled hotels: Kalamper in Bar, Residence, M Club and Slovenska plaza in Budva and Palata Venezia in Ulcinj, as well as apartments Val Maslina, Utjeha and Kod Slavka in Bar and Bogdanovic in Kotor. Hotel Lighthouse in Herceg Novi is first Travelife Gold hotel in Montenegro.

Additional 5 hotels and apartments in Central and Northern regions of Montenegro started certification alignment and it is expected that they will be awarded with certificate in the first half of 2018. It is important to mention that these facilities were attracted through media outlets that followed the second stage of our research.

Due to the elaborated challenges of relatively low interest of accommodation sector to enter certification process, there was evident need to establish stronger cooperation with national entities. Namely, it could be stated that project based support was perceived by the tourism industry as an isolated effort rather than official approach to green tourism offer and increased competitiveness. Simultaneously, the tourism entrepreneurs perceived allocation of financial resources for certification rather as additional burden than investment for future. In initial elaboration, it was stated that in many countries, tourism industry is freed from certification costs, through different green incentive programmes, led from local or regional authorities, or through state financial support.

These facts were presented to the Municipality of Budva, as the biggest single destination in Montenegro, which is dominantly recognized for its rather uncontrolled building development and overurbanization. Being aware of such an image - which still does not affect its central position in Montenegrin tourism and wider Adriatic region; the municipality leaders were ready to shift current branding towards sustainability practices. Namely, keeping similar approach in development and advertising can bring benefits in medium term, but this would become unsustainable in longer term. Municipality involved Tourism Organization of Budva, as local enterprise with high annual income, realized based on the tourism tax in development of cooperation framework.

This initiative led to the establishment of Incentive support programme for “first come-first served” 10 accommodation facilities. The agreement was reached to incentivize interested hoteliers with covering 1) for EU Eco Label registration costs and year 1 membership fee and 2) for Travelife 2-years membership fee.

Table 3. Overview of the fees for certification, structured by type

Category	Advisory support	Audit Review	Registration Fee Incentives provided by Municipality of Budva	Annual fee for using the label Incentives provided by Municipality of Budva
Accommodation facilities with up to 20 beds	€ 500	€ 300	€ 200	€ 175
Accommodation facilities with 21-100 beds	€ 500	€ 400	€ 300	€ 290
Accommodation facilities with 101-200 beds	€ 600	€ 600	€ 450	€ 440
Accommodation facilities with more than 200 beds	€ 600	€ 600	€ 590	€ 650

Source: Research conducted within Towards Carbon Neutral Tourism Project

Table 3 shows that a hotel with 50 beds that applies for EU Eco Label will be supported with 900 EUR, including 500 EUR for advisory services for criteria alignment and 400 EUR for auditor's fee. Once being awarded with certificate, the hotel will be freed of payment of 300 EUR for

registration, and annual certification fee for year 1 of 290 EUR. Actual expenditure will be as of year 2, i.e. annual membership fee of 290 EUR, over 4-years period.

Table 4. Overview of the certification fees and membership fees

Hotel category (number of beds)	Certification costs	Membership fee Incentives provided by Municipality of Budva
<160	€ 350	€ 450
>160	€ 650	€ 750

Source: Research conducted within Towards Carbon Neutral Tourism Project

According to Table 4, in the case of Travelife certification, a hotel up to 160 beds will get incentive for auditing costs of 350 EUR, plus 2-years membership fee of 450 EUR will be paid through municipal funds. So, the hotel will be freed of all costs for certificate holding.

Recognizing the issues of the national (or better to say, local) ownership of the initiative for introduction of ecological certification, the whole process was led by local partners-municipality and National Tourism Organization of Budva. The result was immense interest and applications were received over period of one week.

This clearly confirmed that project-based approach has limited outreach in tourism industry, due to the:

1. Lack of perception of benefits for tourism entrepreneurs, if not jointly implemented with national or local institutions, or under their leadership;
2. Further incentivizing is needed, as hoteliers slowly change operating models and any new investments (even measured less than 1000 EUR) is rather understood as additional burden, which is justifiable considering that enterprises in tourism sector gain profit in limited 3-months summer season period.

Table 5. Overview of certification results by eco-labelling programme

Ecological certificate	Initial phase 2015	Second stage 2016	Direct support phase 2016 - 2017	Certified by end-2017	Incentive support programme for Budva Municipality 2017 ¹⁾	Expected to be certified in 2018 ²⁾	Total (d+f)
	a	b	c	d	e	f	g
EU Eco Label	0	3	6	9	6	11	20
Travelife	0	0	1	1	4	4	5

Note: 1) Number of applicants

2) 5 accommodations in process of obtaining EU Eco Label

Source: Research conducted within Towards Carbon Neutral Tourism Project

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the initial results from introduction of the ecological certification in the accommodation sector in Montenegro, we can confirm both its advantages and challenges for full implementation of the concept.

In regard of advantages, the reports from the 10 certified accommodations in the first year of application of certification criteria proved:

- Energy savings – certified hotels with additional measures of energy management, which include i) regular monitoring of energy spending, as per hotel unit (room, common areas, kitchen and restaurant, washing facilities); setting up of fixed temperature in common areas and rooms, regulating of external lighting system, brought average of 10% of additional savings during summer season on energy bills.
- Water savings – by simple installing of saving perlators in taps and showers, water flow was reduced to 6-9 l/m. Experiences from hotels before introduction of certification showed that

water usage was largely uncontrolled (10-12 l/m in average), even if water price is high, especially in the coastal region of Montenegro. Savings achieved by implementing this measure were up to 30% during summer season, comparing “business as usual” in 2016.

- Waste reduction – certification for tourism accommodations enables less waste quantities, by excluding dose packages for food service as well as disposable products (such as soaps and shampoos). Moreover, personnel and guests are encouraged to do waste separation and recycling, especially for hazardous waste. By doing this, certified hotels become community leaders in efficient use of resources. Additional savings of operational costs were achieved by replacing small product packages with dose packages.
- Sustainable mobility in practice – certified accommodation that offers e.g. bicycles to guests promotes different tourism products, e.g. in the coastal Montenegro, culturally and naturally interesting hinterlands become accessible and overall offer diversified, which led to the longer stay of tourists.
- Marketing position – certified accommodation started using certificate logo and present themselves as “green accommodation”. While the logo could not bring direct benefits in 2017, when most of the contracts and bookings were completed way before summer season, it is expected that as of 2018, especially for Travelife certificate hotels, contracting with leading tour operators will be easier. This will open tourism markets from Western and Northern Europe, perceived as ecologically conscious.
- Simultaneously, the concept of ecological certification has its limitations. We observed the following:
 - Project based approach attracted low number of interested owners and managers during public presentations, discussions and forums, as during 7 presentations during 3 months in 2016 only 15% of invited hotels responded (30 facilities). Even the hotels are implementing number of cost savings measures, they do not perceive green certificate as instrument for business improvement. One argument could be that app. 75% of tourists in Montenegro coming from South East Europe and Russia, which are markets less demanding in terms of environmental friendly practices.
 - Ecological certification is not understood as good promotional tool, that can open new markets and extend average stay of tourists. While accommodations use innovative promotional channels with dominant online presentation and selling, experience from last 10 years (as of Russian market became dominant) proved secured booking during summer season. Moreover, vast majority of beds in Montenegrin tourism sector (up to 70%) are in non-collective accommodation (different types of apartments), which still do not consider year-round operating.
 - Lack of human resources is a constant problem for tourism sector in Montenegro, caused mostly by its seasonality and low retention potential through secured working places. Hotels and apartments are understaffed to allocate time for preparation of policies and documents needed for certification. This is especially related to Travelife certification scheme, as time-demanding process due to the huge number of mandatory requirements by certification body. Once certified, hotel must sustain the achieved standards, that is mostly additional responsibility of the managers.
 - The financial implications of certification process are seeing rather costly. This aspect can be positively solved by joint efforts from project based initiatives and incentive schemes from local or central government. Namely, the case in Budva Municipality proved that if the concept is localized and supported with public funds, which can be perceived re-investment and direct business empowerment, would have high success rate.
 - Globally safety of the destination became one of the priorities, especially in Mediterranean region. Montenegro being such destination has advanced position comparing with another countries, adding affordable prices and positive experience of the destination. These aspects do not alert many of the tourism companies to work more on application of suitability principles.
 - Ecological certification is exclusive branding of businesses, so actual numbers would clearly indicate the proven entrepreneurial champions. According to The EU Ecolabel Tourist Accommodation Catalogue, example of EU Eco Label shows that most of certified accommodations are in Italy (176 hotels), France (92 hotels), Spain (49 hotels), Switzerland

(47 hotels) and Austria (36 hotels) and are ahead of Montenegro (10 hotels). It is important to mention that at the EU level Ecolabel has been issued as of 2003, while first certified accommodations in Montenegro are from 2012.

Ecological certification brings positive results, from savings of operation costs to the marketing advantages. These are common proofs in many researches conducted on this topic. There is clear call for action – resources become more and more scarce, while tourists are becoming aware and want to contribute to the preservation of environment. This was confirmed by the analysis done by Stefanica (2012), on ecological certification and labelling of tourist services. We showed many of the advantages in concrete measures: saving on energy and water bills, improved visibility, longer stay of tourists and higher level of satisfaction.

Of decision is made to opt for national or destination certification, there are pros and cons. In case of Romania, development of sustained management plan (Petrić et al. 2015) brought benefits to the rural tourism enterprises, in order to become recognizable on tourism map and attract nature-friendly visitors. We can state that in this case, certification was used as development tool, so it is integral part of the management plan.

In the case of a single huge destination as Barcelona, besides implementing strategic plan, destination as such was awarded with international certificate. However, the results are not so positive, as elaborated by Rodríguez et al. (2017). If we compare case of overurbanization and massification of tourism in Budva in Montenegro, we can state that identification of community leaders in terms of certified hotels can bring benefits in medium term, as they can mobilize another partners in supply chain to follow sustainability stream.

Also, the role of media in promoting ecological certification was confirmed by Gokirmakl et al. (2017) – our approach showed that 5 additional hotels applied for eco certification based on the intensive media support and their interest to advocate the environmentally sound initiatives.

While Montenegro is streaming towards European Union, the development paradigm is shifting towards green economy. Tourism as leading industry in Montenegro is one of the priority sectors for “greening” the business operations. It will be important to follow the further results of ecological certification, as in 2018, it is expected that 25 facilities will be certified across the country. For example, quantitative analysis of the contribution of the certification to the occupancy rate is one of the areas, and certification as a marketing tool would be of interest as well. Finally, the researches which will advocate for incentivizing the certification process by the local or national authorities – or investment funds and banks, should have priority.

REFERENCES

-
- Baumgartner, Christian. 2015. *Eco Certification for Tourism Accommodation*, UNDP Montenegro, 1.
- Bien, Amos. 2015. *A simple user's guide to Certification for Sustainable Tourism and Ecotourism*, Center for Ecotourism and Sustainable Development.
- The EU Ecolabel Tourist Accommodation Catalogue (<http://ec.europa.eu/ecat/hotels/en/list> accessed on 14 January 2018)
- Cretu, Romeo Cătălin and Ștefan Petrić. et al. 2015. *Sustainable management plan applicable for ecotourism certification systems*, University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine.
- Plüss Christine, Andreas Zots, Antje Monshausen, and Comelia Kühhas. 2014. “Sustainability in tourism - A guide through the label jungle”, *Naturefriends International*.
- Rodríguez, Rocío Arenado, Ana García López and José L. Jiménez Caballero. 2017. “Has implementing an ecolabel increased sustainable tourism in Barcelona?”, *Universidad de Murcia*.
- Gokirmakl, Caglar, Mustafa Bayram and Eugenia Tigan. 2017. “Behaviors of consumers on EU Eco-label: a case study for Romanian consumers”. *Bulg. J. Agric. Sci.*, 23 (3): 512–517.
- National Strategy for Sustainable Development until 2030.
- Statistical Yearbook. 2016. MONSTAT.
- Stefanica, Mirela. 2012. *Ecological certification and labelling of tourist services*. Centre for European Studies
- Tourism Development Master Plan until 2020.
- United Nations World Tourism Organization. 2017. *United Nations Development Programme - Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals – Journey to 2030*, Highlights.