Implementing Rules for the Certification of Destinations

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Sustainability has long become an important locational advantage for tourist places and regions and ensures their competitiveness. It creates new fields of work, strengthens local innovation, offers attractive investment opportunities for companies and improves the quality of life.

The sustainability certification of a destination is based on good cooperation between the key tourism player, the Destination Management Organisation (DMO), and the participating tourism businesses and service providers within the destination (hotels, restaurants, transport companies, etc.). The DMO itself implements a sustainability process in the company and takes the role as the leading actor of the sustainability process in the destination.

Sustainability in the destination is the joint effort of the coordinating DMO and the participating businesses, who sign an agreement to become network Partner Businesses in the sustainability process. For certification, as many suppliers as possible should participate as Partner Businesses. Sustainable management can then develop in the destination and guests will perceive the entire destination as sustainable.

An essential aspect is the appointment of a Sustainability Council in the destination. The Sustainability Council is a strategic body that discusses goals and measures of the sustainability process, monitors its implementation and contributes to quality assurance and coordination.
1 Principles

1.1 Scope of application: The TourCert Implementing Rules for destinations are an applicable annex of the TourCert Certification Guideline and the TourCert Set of Criteria. They define the general conditions of the CSR process and the certification and apply to all destinations.

1.2 Deviations: Deviations from the provisions defined in this document are only possible with the approval of the TourCert Certification Office.

1.3 Destination: TourCert defines destinations as those geographical areas which are chosen as destinations by a guest or a guest segment. A destination usually provides all offers which are necessary for a stay such accommodations, restaurants and entertainment facilities.

The destination promotes itself as a joint unit of a tourism segment, both on the part of supply and on the part of demand. This includes landscape, fauna, flora, climatic conditions and cultural attractions (original offer). It forms an economic competitive unit. It refers to both
small-scale structures (resorts, amusement parks - derived offer) and places (for example in city tourism), but also entire regions.

1.4 **Destination Management Organisation (DMO):** A destination has a central organisational unit which acts both as a tourism service provider and as a coordinating / planning / marketing body for tourism products and services, e.g. management organisations, spa town administrations or tourist marketing. If there is no classic DMO in a destination, the central management tasks are assumed by a DMO-like organisation. Alongside the DMO there are other organisations whose activities / planning have an influence on the (original and derived) tourism offer, e.g. institutions for economic development, building authorities, nature conservation authorities, transportation providers or agriculture.

For the sustainability certification, the DMO is the central entity to manage the sustainability and certification process with its management, communication, stakeholders and in exchange with the suppliers and other relevant stakeholders of the destination.

1.5 **Partner Business:** Partner Businesses are tourism suppliers in the destination who are committed to the sustainability process of the destination. Partner Businesses are defined as followed:

- The services offered are directed towards tourists as the main target group or end consumers. Companies that offer advisory services to address tourists (e.g. marketing services, strategic services) are also accepted.

- The services offered must be part of the overall product "travel/tourism".

- The tourism services offered must account for the main part of total sales.

The Partner Businesses compose the destination's partner network, the DMO coordinates this network and ensures its active participation through regular meetings or other activities. The partner network strives to improve the sustainability performance of its members; the Partner Businesses must therefore plan and implement improvement measures on a long-term basis. They must also meet the following requirements:

- Signing of a sustainability agreement with the DMO
- Appointment of a sustainability manager
- Annual collection of electricity and heating energy data and reporting to the DMO
- Annual update of improvement measures and submission to the DMO
The DMO’s internal audit regularly checks the Partner Businesses’ compliance with the requirements; during the external audit some Partner Businesses will be visited.

Recognized Partner Businesses can be those businesses or organizations who

a) participate in the TourCert Check with its respective requirements

b) or have one of the following recognized environmental or sustainability certifications:

- Blue Flag
- Blaue Schwalbe (Blue Swallow)
- BIO HOTELS
- Ecocamping
- TourCert certification
- Green Globe
- Viabono
- EMAS
- ISO 14.001:2004
- Green Key
- Partner Nationale Naturlandschaften (National Nature Landscapes)
- Certified Green Hotel
- Ökoprofit
- Tripadvisor Green Leaders with at least bronze status

- Green Sign / InfraCert
- ehc eco hotels certified
- Wellness-Stars
- Wellness-Hotels & Resorts quality standards
- Quality management Golf & Natur
- EU Ecolabel for accommodations
- Quality management water tourism (QMW) Kanu
- TUI Eco Resorts
- Ecolabel for alpine huts of the German Alpine Association DAV
- DGNB certification system for sustainable building
- Green Pearls

Regional or other certifications must meet the following minimum requirements in order to be recognized:

- the focus is on environmental, social or sustainability aspects (at least 50% of the criteria) and covers various thematic areas

- the assessment is carried out as an on-site audit or as a verification by a third party (e.g. certification council or award committee)

- the validity period is no longer than 3 years

The recognition of certification systems will be evaluated by TourCert. In particular cases existing partner models of a destination can be recognized after evaluation by TourCert.
2 Core Indicators

The core indicators of the destination are presented in the audit report and benchmarked against comparable destinations. The core indicators consist of available destination data and sustainability indices, which are collected by surveys and evaluations.

1. Percentage of recognized Partner Businesses (%)
2. Percentage of certified tourism suppliers (%)
3. Bed occupancy rates in accommodations (%)
4. Average CO₂ emissions from energy consumption of accommodations (Partner Businesses) (t)
5. Percentage of renewable energies (%) from total energy consumption (Partner Businesses)
6. Index Destination Evaluation DMO level (%)
7. Index Destination Evaluation Destination level (%)
8. Index Product Evaluation (%)
9. Percentage of suppliers with the certification "travel for all" (%) 
10. Percentage of tourism suppliers with a quality certification (%)
11. Percentage of regionally produced, organic and fair-trade products in the DMO (%)
3 Data Collection

Destinations seeking TourCert certification must meet basic requirements of data collection in order to apply for certification.

Data collection includes the indicators defined in the Set of Criteria for Destinations. As a minimum requirement, it must contain the scope defined below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation/Survey</th>
<th>Scope</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mandatory for all certifications</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Evaluation of sustainability measures already implemented in the DMO and the destination</td>
<td>One evaluation by the sustainability manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sustainability Evaluation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Evaluation of product development</td>
<td>First certification:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Product Evaluation</td>
<td>At least one product or offer for every business area or product line advertised by the DMO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Evaluation of employee satisfaction</td>
<td>Recertification:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Employee Survey</td>
<td>In-depth evaluation of all products or offers of one business area or product line advertised by the DMO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Optional for first certification, mandatory for every recertification</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Evaluation of guest information</td>
<td>All employees of the DMO with customer contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Guest Information Evaluation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Evaluation of business partner satisfaction</td>
<td>Representative selection of relevant business partners of the DMO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Business Partners Survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Evaluation of the sustainability orientation of tour guides</td>
<td>Representative selection of tour guides of the destination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Tour Guides Survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4 Rules for Certification

4.1 Reporting year: The data collected must relate to the last closed financial year. The reference date is the date on which data collection started.

4.2 Sustainability manager: To implement and maintain the TourCert certification system, sustainability managers are required to have a respective qualification. This rule also applies if there is a change in assignment and another person takes on the sustainability management. Changes of responsibilities for the management must be communicated to TourCert.

It must be ensured that the knowledge about the TourCert certification process remains within the company. Interns are therefore not permitted as sustainability managers.

5 Deadlines and Periods

The TourCert sustainability system promotes the continuous improvement of the certified destinations’ sustainability performance. This requires the timely submission of relevant documents and information in order to be able to monitor improvement and development in a timely manner.

5.1 Validity period of the certification: Destinations are considered certified as soon as the DMO has received a confirmation letter from the TourCert Certification Office. The certification period begins in the respective month.

The validity period of the certification is three years.

Every year (in the respective month) between (re)certifications, the certified destination must submit an updated improvement program to the TourCert Certification Office.
TourCert may contact the DMO regularly to discuss relevant changes of content or structure of the sustainability process. The update of the improvement program will be checked annually.

If the DMO has between 50 and 99 employees (full-time equivalents), TourCert examines whether an annual monitoring audit is required. An annual monitoring audit is mandatory for DMOs of 100 or more employees (full-time equivalents).

5.2 **Responsibility of companies to meet deadlines:** Audit documents and updated improvement programs must be submitted to the TourCert Certification Office in time and unsolicited. It is the responsibility of the destinations to meet the relevant deadlines.

Need for technical support must be planned in time with the respective consulting body.

5.3 **Request for extension of deadlines:** If the deadlines for submission of the sustainability report or the updated improvement programs cannot be met for understandable reasons, the Certification Office must be informed in time and a request must be made for an extension of the relevant deadline.

The extension of deadlines will not change on the validity period of the certification. The date of the first certification will always be the reference for future deadlines and periods.

5.4 **Failure to comply with deadlines:** Failure to comply with deadlines for the submission of the sustainability report or updated improvement program and failure to apply for an extension may result in the withdrawal of the TourCert label.

The sustainability report for recertification as well as the updated improvement program must not be submitted later than three months after the deadline.
6 Rules for Certification

6.1 Audit: Audits take place on site in the office of the DMO as well as by site visits in the destination (e.g. attractions) and visits of Partner Businesses.

For the audit the following documents must be submitted to TourCert:
- Sustainability report
- Improvement program
- Surveys and evaluations

6.2 Recommendations: The auditor’s recommendations in the audit report should be included as measures in the improvement program. If individual recommendations cannot be implemented, this must be justified.

6.3 Conditions: Once the audit has been carried out, the auditor or the Certification Council can impose conditions, which may be either

- prerequisites for the current (re-)certification are or
- must be implemented in the coming certification period.

The auditor’s conditions from the audit report must be included into the improvement program as measures and implemented within the agreed period. If individual conditions cannot be implemented, this must be justified.

6.4 Use of the labels: After successful certification, the DMO receives the label "Sustainable Destination" and the TourCert label "Sustainable Destination Certified". The DMO may use both labels for public advertising. Companies or branch offices belonging to the DMO may only use the certification labels if they have been actively involved in the sustainability process and have been considered in the data collection. DMO shareholders do not automatically receive the certification labels.

Recognized Partner Businesses may use the partner label “Sustainable Destination” to publicly advertise. If a Partner Business has been awarded with the TourCert Check, the company also receives this label.
The DMO must publicly communicate the certification of the destination. The following specifications apply to the use of the labels:

- The label "Sustainable Destination" must be placed prominently on the DMO website and linked to the TourCert website. The TourCert label should also be presented.
  - The TourCert label may only be published in the formats published by TourCert and only in the colours red or black.
  - The use of the label "Sustainable Destination" must comply with the requirements defined in the logo manual (the logo manual is handed out after certification).
  - At least the label „Sustainable Destination“ is placed on publications of the DMO.
  - TourCert is a company and destination certification, not a product certification. References to the certification may only refer to the destination, DMO and Partner Businesses, not to the products and services offered.
  - If the certification is not renewed, DMO and Partner Businesses must remove all references to the certification from their own media and publications.

Destinations outside the German-speaking area only receive the TourCert label "Sustainable Destination Certified", recognized Partner Businesses receive the international TourCert label for Partner Businesses "Sustainable Destination Partner". If a Partner Business has been awarded with the TourCert Check, the company also receive this label.

6.5 **External communication after first certification**: Certified destinations must publish the current sustainability report on the DMO website and display at least the label “Sustainable Destination” in a prominent position on the website.

The TourCert certification must be explained at a suitable place, for which the following template can be used:

"**With the label “Sustainable Destination Certified” we acknowledge our responsibility for sustainable tourism. Our management and reporting system has been implemented according to the TourCert certification standard and has been assessed by an independent auditor. With the TourCert label, we have committed ourselves together with the suppliers**"
of our destination to continuous improvement in the areas of management, economy, ecology and social matters.

6.6 **Suspension of certification:** If a destination is not interested in recertification or if the resources necessary for recertification are not available to the destination, the certification ends at the end of the certification period.

6.7 **Re-application for first certification:** If a destination is not recommended for certification by the auditor or if the Certification Council rejects a certification, the destination can apply for a new audit.

At least three months must lay between the first and second audit. A new data collection is not necessarily required. Which reporting year will be audited will be decided on a case-by-case basis by the auditor or the Certification Office.

6.8 **Re-application for recertification:** If a destination is not recommended for recertification by the auditor; if the Certification Council rejects recertification; if a destination loses the TourCert label due to non-compliance with deadlines or in circumstances that do not allow an audit; then the destination has the opportunity to be audited within six months without re-collection of data.

After six months, data collection must be renewed, and the introduction workshop must be visited again.