# An Evaluation of GSTC Destination Criteria & Their Presence in the Industry

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## ABSTRACT:

Certification schemes are emerging for sustainable destination tourism, or ecotourism within an entire region. Ensuring that these schemes have standards, criteria and indicators that promote economic, environmental and social success within the region of interest is a challenge, as most certification programs are new and lack global presence and credibility. In this study, I evaluated the apparent effectiveness of five separate programs: the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), QualityCoast, BioSphere, Green Globe & Costa Rica's Blue Flag. Using the evaluation criteria of each program, I determined the value each placed on different aspects of sustainable destination tourism, and compared this to expert suggestions on what constitutes triple bottom line success. Results provide recommendations on the programs with the most potential to promote economic, environmental and social welfare, as well as a separate evaluation of the role that a single program, GSTC, can play in the industry, both at present and in the long-term.

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## DEFINITIONS AND KEY TERMS:

**Accreditation:** "The process of qualifying and endorsing entities that perform certification of companies, products or services" (Sanabria, Skinner et al. 2003).

**BioSphere:** Spanish destination certifier.

**Blue Flag:** Costa Rica's domestic sustainable destination tourism certification program.

**Certification:** The verification and validation of a program via an evaluation of criteria.

**Destination:** A regional that is bound with physical and administrative borders.

**Ecolabel:** A logo or insignia representing a program's certification or accreditation.

**Ecotourism:** Tourism that meets the needs of present visitors without injuring the environment, society or economics of the region in question.

**EMS:** Environmental Management System

**EUCC:** European Coastal and Marine Union.

**FSC:** Forest Stewardship Council.

**Green Globe:** Certifying body for global sustainable tour operators and destinations.

**GSTC:** Global Sustainable Tourism Council; global initiative dedicated to promoting sustainable tourism practices via certification and accreditation.

**ISO:** International Standards Organization.

**Standard:** "A standard is a document approved by a recognized body that provides for common and repeated use of a prescribed set of rules, conditions or requirements" (Toth 2000).

**Sustainability:** Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability for future generations to meet their needs.

**UNEP:** United Nations Environmental Program.

**WTO:** World Tourism Organization.

## TABLES AND FIGURES:

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## I. INTRODUCTION:

Tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries around the globe; “more than 900 million international tourists traveled last year, and the UNWTO forecasts 1.6 billion tourists by the year 2020” (GSTC 2011). Tourism employs 200 million people, generates $3.6 trillion in economic activity, and accounts for one in every 12 jobs worldwide (Hansen 2007). The need for more sustainable measures within the tourism realm is undeniable, as tourism practices can contribute considerably to the environmental, social and economic degradation of a region. Evidence clearly reveals that unrestricted tourism growth has the potential to create social and environmental impacts at destinations (Forsyth 1997). Tourism’s relationship with the natural environment is complex; the two are often codependent. However, the building of infrastructure for tourism, including roads, airports, resorts, hotels, restaurants, golf courses or shops, can cause extreme damage to surrounding environmental areas (GeoInteractive 2013). Negative impacts occur when visitor use of a region exceeds the environment’s ability to cope with the associated changes, or carrying capacity. The construction associated with tourism puts pressure on a region, leading to soil erosion, increased pollution, discharge into water bodies, habitat loss, endangerment of species, and vulnerability to forests (GeoInteractive 2013). From a social perspective, tourism has the ability to exploit local peoples for the satisfaction of visitors. Overcrowding can also lead to additional strain put on the host community (Archer and Cooper 1998). However, effective sustainable tourism can lead to smart development in rural areas as well as poverty alleviation. The World Tourism Organization, the United Nations agency responsible for the promotion of responsible and accessible tourism, defines sustainable tourism as “tourism that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future of the tourist sector” (Cox, Saucier et al. 2008). Additionally, The International Ecotourism Society defines sustainable tourism as a process which works to minimize the negative impacts on nature and culture that could damage a destination, while at the same time educating travelers on the importance of conservation. Further, the strategy should stress the importance of

responsible business that works in cooperation with local authorities and people to meet local needs and deliver conservation benefits, directing revenues to the conservation and management of natural and protected areas as well as biodiversity. TIES also emphasizes the need for regional tourism zoning and visitor management plans, the usage of environmental and social baseline studies, as well as long-term monitoring programs, to assess and minimize impacts. This is to ensure the maximization of economic benefits for the host country, local businesses and communities, particularly peoples living in and adjacent to natural and protected areas. Support can be achieved via the training of local peoples (TIES 2001).

Using these definitions, countless agencies have been created to certify tourism endeavors in an attempt to promote sustainability within the industry. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) is an international initiative dedicated to promoting sustainable tourism practices. The organization represents a variety of members, including United Nations agencies, leading travel companies, hotels, country tourism boards and tour operators. Thus, the GSTC serves as the international body for promoting the increased knowledge, understanding and adoption of sustainable tourism methods. The core value of the GSTC resides in its evaluation criteria— the minimum requirements that any tourism business should reach in order to maintain ecological and environmental soundness while, at the same time, ensuring it provides economic development to the area in question. These criteria, in a larger sense, are the response of the tourism industry to the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals, which are geared at reducing poverty and promoting sustainable development (WTO 2013).

In 2012, the GSTC began working on criteria to promote the certification and accreditation of sustainable destinations. The initial draft of these criteria was developed by the GSTC Partnership, which is a coalition of more than 50 organizations working together to foster an increased awareness and understanding of sustainable tourism practices. This group developed baseline criteria organized around four pillars of sustainable tourism, spanning effective sustainability planning, the maximization of social and economic benefits to local communities,

the reduction of negative impacts to cultural heritage, and the reduction of negative impacts on the environment (GSTC 2011).

Sustainable *destination* management, in particular, is an approach to tourism development in which local communities, government agencies, NGOs and the tourism industry are dedicated to taking on a multi-stakeholder approach to maintain the cultural, environmental, economic, and aesthetic integrity of their country, region, state or town, through sustainable policy and management frameworks (Matus 2012). Tourism destinations encompass the following: a physical space in which a tourist spends at least one night; tourism products, such as support services and attractions— essentially, tourist resources within one day's return travel time; physical and administrative boundaries defining management and market competitiveness; and local destinations that incorporate various stakeholders, often including a host community, and are able to nest and network to form larger destination areas (Matus 2012).

The GSTC pulled from 37 different certification or standards organizations, some tourism related, others separate, in developing its destination criteria (See Appendix I), and, "in all, more than 4,500 criteria were analyzed" (GSTC 2011). The objective was for GSTC to, theoretically, act as a third party certifier for firms looking to certify destinations. GSTC's eventual goal is to graduate up to accreditation status, lending more credibility to the industry. There is a need for voluntary sustainable destination criteria to be utilized globally and promote triple bottom line value for the industry. Benefits of global criteria include the fact that they outline a common understanding of best practices; allow a standardized approach and provide a mechanism for stakeholders to advance progress toward key elements of sustainability, as well as track changes occurring in destination over time; and that they can be a powerful marketing tool and trusted badge of quality, attracting and assuring customers while creating a competitive advantage and demonstrating market leadership (Matus 2012). QualityCoast, a program operated by the Coastal and Marine Union (EUCC), is currently the largest international certification program for sustainable tourism destinations. This organization incorporated GSTC destination criteria into their own criteria from 2012 to 2013. This inclusion

acted as a pilot program to test the thoroughness and effectiveness of the GSTC criteria and to assess their feasibility in real sustainable destinations.

## II. BACKGROUND AND NEED:

### A. Sustainable Tourism:

In 2000, the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) determined that 85% of people felt it was important that tourism not damage the environment, and that 78% of people considered the inclusion of social and environmental information by their vacation company as important (Sanabria, Skinner et al. 2003). The English Tourism Council (ETC) conducted a study revealing that 84% of consumers "would choose an attraction or accommodation provider that was part of a green accreditation scheme over one that was not, if such a scheme existed" (Sanabria, Skinner et al. 2003). While it is important to note that these survey results reveal ethical perspectives on the issue at hand, rather than actual decisions made by consumers, the market for sustainable tourism is clearly desired.

There are three general measures of sustainability in the tourism industry. These form the triple bottom line of tourism. They include:

1. Environmental: minimizing damage to environment (flora, fauna, water, soils, energy use, contamination); ideally benefitting environment through protection and conservation;
2. Social/Cultural: Does not harm, but revitalizes, social structure or culture of community;
3. Economic: Does not begin and rapidly die because of poor business practices; continues to contribute to well-being of community. Benefits owners, employees and neighbors. (Bien 2006).

Each of these sectors is equally important in the building of sustainable destinations. There are endless definitions for what experts consider truly sustainable tourism, which, for the purpose of this study, I will also refer to as ecotourism (it can be argued that there are distinctions

between the terms, but they generally refer to the following as well as what the criteria examined imply). Examples include those listed in Table 1.

| Examples of Sustainable Tourism Methods from Industry Experts | |
|---|---|
| **Hunter and Green, 1995** | |
| Following ethical principles that respect the culture and environment of the area, the economy and traditional way of life, and political patterns; | |
| Involving the local population, proceeding only with their approval, and providing for a degree of local control; | |
| Keeping intra-generational equity in mind, including fair distribution of both benefits and costs; | |
| Planning and managing tourism with regard for the protection of the natural environment; | |
| Planning in a manner that is integrated with other economic sectors; | |
| Continuously assessing methods to evaluate impacts and initiate action to counter any negative effects. | |
| **Honey, 2002** | |
| Travel to natural areas; | |
| Minimized impacts; | |
| Building environmental and cultural awareness for hosts and guests; | |
| Providing direct financial benefits for conservation; | |
| Providing financial benefits and empowerment for local communities; | |
| Respect of local culture; | |
| Sensitivity to the host country's political environment and social climate; | |
| Support of human rights and international labor agreements. | |
| **UNEP WTO** | |
| Economic viability; | Community wellbeing; |
| Local prosperity; | Cultural richness; |
| Employment quality; | Physical integrity; |
| Social equity; | Biological diversity; |
| Visitor fulfillment; | Resource efficiency; |
| Local control; | Environmental purity. |

*Table 1: Expert ideas on what qualifies as sustainable tourism. Adapted from (Hunter and Green 1995); (Honey 2002) & (Bien 2006).*

Ranging from specific to general, each of these definitions contributes to the store of expert opinion on what the core tenets of the sustainable tourism industry should be. These can be

used to evaluate how well destination certification programs reflect what is asked of them by industry leaders.

Tourism is an ever-present and growing industry. Increasing visitation each year comes hand in hand with increases in "energy costs, continuing degradation of native habitats, finite potable water resources, and increasing public sensitivity to… economic dependency on tourism."(Cox, Saucier et al. 2008). All three realms, then, are being degraded or changed at an unprecedented rate. According to UNEP and Conservation International, "tourism to the world's biodiversity hotspots increased by more than 100% between 1990 and 2000," (Sanabria 2004), meaning human visitation increased in the world's most sensitive areas that house the most sensitive species. We are causing a large impact on areas of high vulnerability. Thus there is an opportunity for firms to enter the picture and attempt the promotion of more sustainable habits through certification. "Certification of sustainable tourism and ecotourism can help to reduce the negative environmental and social impacts of tourism, ensure that the tourism industry is held accountable, [and can] provide marketing benefits to those firms that meet the certification standards" (Sanabria, Skinner et al. 2003).

The tourism industry is gaining its footing in sustainability. According to a study by Ayuso (2006), drivers for sustainable practices within the tourism industry include public and/or official recognition of commitments, envisioned cost savings, pressure from customers and tour operators, a simple personal awareness from hotel managers, and the potential improvements that could be made within internal management systems (Ayuso 2006). The success or failure of said system rests on a number of factors, including knowledge about instrument existence and application, a collaboration between customers, the public sector, suppliers and subcontractors, and changes of routines and management styles (Ayuso 2006). As the industry of sustainable destination tourism comes into being, it is important to note the role these factors play in its presence and its future. These voluntary certification rules have been considered effective in other industries. Civil society can play a major role in affecting both the reputation and performance of a company. The United Nations Research Institute for Social

Development suggests the role is so significant, that voluntary standards may be better understood as *civil* regulation, or the quasi-regulation of businesses by society (Murphy and Bendell 1999).

There is a need, then, for voluntary standards to emerge as a means of promoting a triple bottom line value proposition for the industry. The issues currently being covered by sustainable tourism are fairly limited to the environmental realm, leaving out social considerations. Further, initiatives are generally directed toward the hospitality sector, which is an easier target, as business units are defined and standardized (Bendell and Font 2004). The next step, then, is the promotion of sustainable destinations, as a whole, that fulfill environmental, social and economic needs. Historically, a variety of policy tools have been used by the hotel industry to streamline environmental efforts. These are regulated both by the tourism industry, as well as overarching validation and verification programs. Tools include various codes of conduct, such as Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry; best practices frameworks, such as actions of energy and water saving; ecolabels; EMS systems, such as ISO 14001; and environmental performance indicators (Ayuso 2006).

Moving forward, triple bottom line certification seems to be the most comprehensive means of establishing sustainable destinations. Only by using a means of measuring and assuring best practices can the sustainable tourism industry function successfully. This role can be filled, at least partially, by the utilization of certification methods.

## B. Certification

### B.1. The Need for Sustainable Destination Certification

There has been a paradigm shift for destinations regarding the need for sustainability certification. Increasingly stressed environments, impacts from global economic downturn, shifting trends in how consumers make travel decisions, and an increasingly competitive global marketplace all contribute to a new reality for destination managers and business decision makers (Matus 2012). Industry representatives are finding that tourism destinations are constantly being challenged to look beyond business-as-usual to develop management

strategies that promote social and environmental wellbeing. Certification enables consumers to differentiate among goods and services, based on their environmental and social aspects (Blackman and Rivera 2010). Further, most certification programs (78%) in the industry are based in Europe (Bendell and Font 2004) and target European tourism, leaving developing countries out of the equation. The struggle between "northern" and "southern" countries is present concerning tourism, and environmental justice measures to protect "southern" countries are necessary.

Currently, there are only five international destination certification programs:

1. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council
2. QualityCoast (EUCC)
3. BioSphere
4. Green Globe
5. Costa Rica's Blue Flag (Domestic)

The GSTC plays two roles— as a potential certifier or accreditation party for certifiers, and as a provider of sustainable destination certification criteria. "Accreditation is the process used to certify the certifiers, which is crucial to third-party systems that rely heavily on accreditation to provide credibility" (Cox, Saucier et al. 2008). The GSTC, in regards to destinations, has the power to evaluate standards. The organization is able to certify, as a third party, any other sustainable destination certifier, if their criteria align with those of the GSTC. Gradually, the GSTC will aim to accredit these bodies, so as to enhance credibility with both clients and the public. For the purpose of this study, I will only analyze the role of GSTC in generating criteria, rather than its role as a certifier of certifiers, or a future accreditation body for certification programs. However, recommendations for the GSTC and its accreditation plans were included in my analysis.

### B.2. Finer Points of the Process

As there are various levels of certification, it is important to discuss the terminology and gain a more comprehensive understanding of how the process works. Within any certification

program, there exists a standard. The standard houses various criteria, which are measured by performance indicators.

- Standard: a document or written framework consisting of individual criteria that is designed to be used repeatedly to achieve a result, to establish a basis, example or principle for firms to conform to, utilizing uniform units of measurement. Compulsory standards are generally enforced through national legislation and industry membership requirements, and tend to cover health and safety, competence, occupational safety, land use planning, licensing of businesses and consumer protection. Voluntary standards generally go beyond these aspects, suggesting best practice models and offering training manuals for companies to assist them in making the necessary improvements to meet requirements (Font 2004);
- Criterions/Criteria: say what should be done, but does not specify how the applicant should do it;
- Performance indicator: the way one measures compliance with the criteria; tells users, via measurements, if a destination, for example, is performing the way the criteria designates; can be qualitative or quantitative; and
- Guidelines: offer explanations and suggestions on *how* criteria success can be achieved.

For this study, I chose to focus on criteria, as standards provide a "big picture" overview, and performance indicators are not consistently publicly available. Further, there are three different types of assessment or certification:

1. First Party: involves the suppliers assessing themselves and declaring themselves in conformance;
2. Second Party: involves the customers or purchasers assessing suppliers and/or products, assuring that they are in conformation with standards; and
3. Third Party assessment/certification: Done by an independent organization not related to supplier or purchaser, mandatory or voluntary; informal or formal third party (Cox, Saucier et al. 2008).

There are currently over 1,000 third party certification programs around the world, with about 70% environmentally focused. Regardless of what these programs work to certify, each

program must be evaluated to assess the credibility of the program and the thoroughness of criteria. There are three basic types of evaluation systems used in the sustainable tourism industry:

| Basic Types of Sustainability Evaluation Systems | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Type** | **Example** | **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| Prescriptive: How efforts will be accomplished | Strict use of Energy Star and water saving appliances and fixtures | Applicant knows what is required | No test of the final product, while restricting innovation and alternative solutions |
| Performance: What will be achieved? | Solid waste reduction by 50% | Allows alternative solutions | More ambiguity and imprecision, with the burden of proof on the applicant |
| Management: Elements of sustainable management processes | Monitor utility usage and waste stream | Allows alternative solutions | No requirements to improve performance |

*Table 2: How to evaluate a sustainable system. Adapted from (Cox, Saucier et al. 2008).*

Prescriptive systems offer solutions, but do not partake in follow up auditing. Performance systems place the burden of proof on the applicant, following up with auditing measures to ensure compliance. Finally, Management systems rely on plans and procedures. Comprehension of all three systems is necessary for sustainable tourism certification programs. Examining criteria will reveal expansive coverage of all three in standards development. In terms of the certification programs themselves, there are two types found most commonly: process and performances based.

Process based approaches are based on setting up environmental management systems within businesses, and using these internal systems to monitor and improve procedures. Process based certifiers do not set performance standards; rather, they award ecolabels for progress toward goals, including electricity and water use reduction. This method is more collaborative and responsive, and some critics argue that this approach is more costly and causes difficulty

when one attempts to compare and measure against general standards (Hansen 2007). Ecolabels also come with the risk of too much allocation. While such labels make it easier on consumers to evaluate a product based on a first glance, they do not differentiate or define the details that separate programs from one other.

On the other hand, we have the performance based approach, which is the method the majority of sustainable tourism operators and certifies follow. This approach “utilizes externally determined criteria and benchmarks that are applied uniformly to all tourism venues seeking certification” (Hansen 2007). Performance based certification serves to measure actual achievement, rather than intent, requiring companies to meet thresholds within clearly defined standards, whether environmental or social. This type of certification is simpler to monitor, costs less than its counterpart, and allows easy comparability throughout the industry. Critics argue that this approach can be imprecise, though, as it is difficult to measure qualitative and subjective standards and criteria (Hansen 2007).

The validity of any certification is the key to its long-term presence in the industry. One of the biggest drawbacks to a certification system, whether for a sustainable destination or any ecolabel for a product, is the lack of backing and support by trusted bodies. Only with verification can consumers begin to trust the product and its claims. Attempts to promote sustainable tourism as a quality product suffer from the lack of means to prevent greenwashing, resulting in consumer confusion due to a proliferation of awards, labels and endorsements (Font 2002). Well done ecolabels or certification logos can "offer opportunities for market distinction and could give consumers a tool for identifying socially and environmentally responsible hotels, tour operators, guides and other parts of the tourism industry” (Sanabria, Skinner et al. 2003). One of the most common weaknesses of ecolabels is their credibility. Credibility is an indispensible requirement for any certification system.

Figure 1 is a graphical view of the process. Within the tourism market, the applicant, in this case, the destination, applies for certification from the awarding body. The awarding body

parlays the application and fees to the funding body. A verifying body ensures compliance from both the applicant and the certifying, or awarding, body, using standards and criteria.

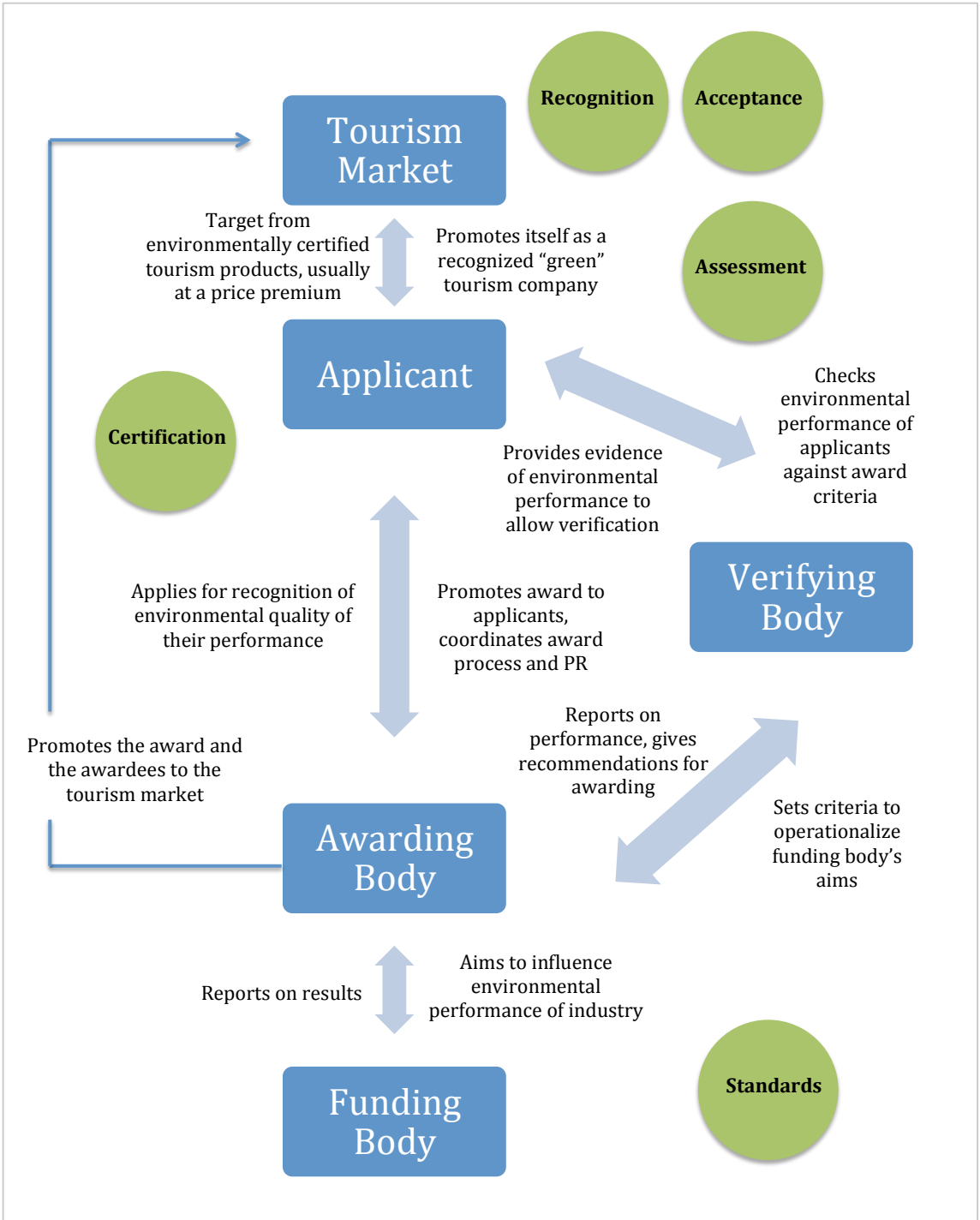


*Figure 1: Graphical view of the certification process within the tourism industry. Adapted from (Font 2002).*

Common elements to most tourism certification programs include their voluntary nature, well-defined standards and criteria, mechanisms for assessment and auditing, recognition of awards through the use of a logo, and follow up audits to renew certification and transparency (Bien 2006). A combination of these elements can contribute to a successful, and consequently credible, certification program.

### B.3. Benefits

There are countless benefits that arise from sustainable destination tourism certification processes. Benefits for the following entities, produced by GSTC technical advisor Amos Bien, reveal the motivation for certification, and the role these programs play in the industry. Certified businesses can expected their firms to improve internally, by promoting sustainability education throughout their workforce. Certification can also help these businesses reduce operating costs via water and energy efficiencies. Certification will also provide easier access to technical assistance and financial backing to implement new technologies, allowing for a marketing advantage. Consumers benefit from certification, as it provides environmentally and socially responsible travel choices, increasing public awareness of responsible business practices. It can also work to alert tourists to environmental or social issues in an area and provide better quality service. Government bodies can benefit from certification as the process helps governments protect market niches and their credibility by raising industry standards in health, safety, and environmental and social stability. The process can also lower regulatory costs and reduce poverty in the region. Lastly, we can expect certification to assist the environment and local communities. Certification requires the protection of the environment, demanding little to no damage done to it, and also requires the protection of local culture, providing economic and social benefits for the long-term (Bien 2006). Each stakeholder in the industry, then, serves to gain from successful certification schemes. There are still challenges, though, that must be overcome in the development of a premier sustainable destination tourism certification scheme.

### B.4. Obstacles to Certification

Certification is one means of promoting credibility in the sustainable destination industry. However, as ideal as successful criteria adherence is, challenges exist. Most certification agencies acknowledge that they could not manage increasing numbers of applicants, as their fees would not cover the costs. This brings forward the lack of funding in existence, and suggests the need for additional resources, potentially government funds, or increased application fees, which, in turn, might deter applicants or require greater incentives for applying (Bendell and Font 2004). Generally speaking, criticisms of both ecolabels and certification logos include the fact that they are "expensive, they require time, usually they focus on hotels or ecotourism providers, the ecolabel organizer has limited marketing power, and the criteria focus [primarily] on environmental management" (SynergyLtd. 2000). There is a narrow scope, then, within the realm of ecolabels acting as declarations of tourism certification. In moving forward with destination certification, the firms discussed in this study must consider the role marketing will play in pushing their programs forward. Foremost among the challenges facing tourism certification programs, though, "is the lack of robust and regular sources of income to operate and market their programs. Out of 33 programs examined in a study on the financial sustainability of sustainable tourism certification programs, none of the programs, not even those that have established user fees, [were] self sufficient" (Poser 2009). The GSTC is still in talks regarding business model revisions that tackle this problem. Specifically, the organization is concerned that the price of accreditation may be too steep for certifiers in the industry.

## III. STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES AND STUDY FRAMEWORK:

The objective of my research was to determine the effectiveness and value of sustainable destination tourism certification by examining various programs, both within and outside the industry. The literature on the topic to date discusses the need for such programs, but does not recommend a best practices framework. Further, the GSTC destination criteria have not yet been vetted by other firms and my study recommendations may fulfill the need to analyze and

validate the criteria. My study framework involved an assessment of the currently proposed GSTC destination criteria via a two-pronged approach.

Initially, I conducted a research review comparing the new GSTC criteria to those that other tourism certification organizations have undertaken, evaluating their apparent effectiveness and proposing improvements. The expected uses of the criteria, according to the GSTC, include, but are not limited to:

- To serve as basic guidelines for any business to become more sustainable, and to help businesses choose sustainable tourism programs that fulfill the GSTC criteria;
- To serve as guidance for travel agencies in choosing suppliers and programs;
- To help consumers identify sound sustainable tourism programs and businesses;
- To serve as a common denominator for information media to recognize sustainable tourism practices;
- To help certification and other voluntary programs ensure their standards meet the broadly accepted baseline;
- To offer governmental, non-governmental, and private sector programs a baseline and starting point for their own development of sustainable tourism requirements; and
- To serve as basic guidelines for education and training bodies, such as hotel schools and universities (GSTC 2011).

As a secondary component of my research, I compared the sustainable tourism certification industry to the forest certification industry, detecting similarities, differences and lessons to be learned.

## IV. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The data sources for my analysis include criteria information from the GSTC, QualityCoast, Green Globe, and the Costa Rican Blue Flag websites, as well as the official criteria manual courtesy of BioSphere. Much of my supplemental knowledge of the GSTC and its methodologies was gained from attending the Annual Membership Meeting and training sessions in

September, 2012, in Washington DC. Additionally, I reviewed program evaluation methods and environmental auditing in regards to tourism firms. In analyzing the criteria, I utilized SWOT analyses for each program. The SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis was first utilized by Albert Humphrey between 1960 and 1970 to compare data from Fortune 500 firms (Poser 2009). The tool is a strategic planning method used for evaluation purposes. Strengths and weaknesses represent internal firm aspects, and opportunities and threats represent external environmental factors that can be isolated from the firm itself. The SWOT analysis for each program highlighted key differences between standards. Specific criteria were analyzed using the qualitative research program, NVivo, version 10. Tag cloud analyses were also performed to determine the most frequently occurring terms in each program. Classifications and definitions of nodes and child nodes can be found in Appendix VIII, but the main themes include protection, cultural heritage, water quality, marine, tourism strategy, conservation, promotional materials, local authority, local products and tourism business. Using these themes, I performed a meta-analysis of research regarding sustainable tourism and used weighted values to quantify destination criteria. Final values were the culmination of criteria similarity to themes, and theme weight was a function of research findings. This allowed a scaling of criteria to account for discrepancies between the number of criteria compared across each program.

## V. CRITERIA ANALYSIS:

To evaluate the criteria (listed in full in Appendices), I utilized NVivo, a qualitative data management software. To get a general picture of the priorities of the each program, separate tag clouds were developed, revealing the prevalence of certain terms with the full criteria list. Along with this analysis, I researched each program in full and determined differences between competitors via criteria and SWOT analyses.

## A. Global Sustainable Tourism Council

The GSTC is a non-profit organization that works to promote the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, while generating socioeconomic benefits for all stakeholders (GSTC 2011). Prior to certifying destinations, the GSTC worked on certifying sustainable hotels and tour operators. There are 25 umbrella criteria for tourism operators and hotels. Recently, in an effort to become "the standard setting organization for sustainable tourism," (GSTC 2011) the GSTC launched their *destination* criteria. The GSTC destination criteria, though still officially in draft form, consisted of 41 criteria with 122 corresponding indicators (Matus 2012) as of February, 2013. This was the second version of the draft criteria. The criteria are designated to the following four pillars of sustainability:

- 13 criteria: Sustainable Destination Management;
- 9 criteria: Social and Economic;
- 7 criteria: Community and Cultural Heritage; and
- 12 criteria: Environmental Issues.

The criteria titles, excluding detailed descriptions, are as follows:

| GSTC's 41 Umbrella Criteria | |
|---|---|
| **Category A: Demonstrate Sustainable Destination Management** | |
| A1 | Tourism strategy |
| A2 | Tourism management organization |
| A3 | Monitoring |
| A4 | Climate change adaptation |
| A5 | Inventory of attraction sites |
| A6 | Planning regulations |
| A7 | Access for all |
| A8 | Property acquisitions |
| A9 | Tourist satisfaction |
| A10 | Sustainability standards |
| A11 | Safety and security |
| A12 | Crisis and emergency preparedness and response |
| A13 | Promotion |

| Category B: Maximize Social and Economic Benefits to the Host Community and Minimize Negative Impacts | |
|---|---|
| B1 | Economic monitoring |
| B2 | Local career opportunities |
| B3 | Stakeholder participation |
| B4 | Local community opinion |
| B5 | Local access |
| B6 | Tourism awareness |
| B7 | Preventing exploitation |
| B8 | Support for community |
| B9 | Supporting local entrepreneurs and fair trade |
| **Category C: Maximize Benefits to Communities, Visitors and Cultural Heritage, and Minimize Negative Impacts** | |
| C1 | Attraction protection |
| C2 | Visitor management |
| C3 | Visitor behavior |
| C4 | Cultural heritage protection |
| C5 | Site interpretation |
| C6 | Intellectual property |
| C7 | Visitor contributions |
| **Category D: Maximize Benefits to the Environment and Minimize Negative Impacts** | |
| D1 | Environmental risks |
| D2 | Protection of sensitive environments |
| D3 | Wildlife protection |
| D4 | Greenhouse gas emissions |
| D5 | Energy conservation |
| D6 | Water management |
| D7 | Water security |
| D8 | Water quality |
| D9 | Wastewater |
| D10 | Solid waste reduction |
| D11 | Light and noise pollution |
| D12 | Low impact transport |

*Table 3: GSTC Criteria Titles, excluding details on criteria specifics. Version 2.*

These criteria are meant to serve as one global standard that can be fine-tuned to the needs of each destination being evaluated (Matus 2012). The language of the criteria is specific and can be incredibly influential regarding interpretation by applicants. Much like the method used in

United Nations text edits, the GSTC hosted a series of editing sessions to go over the finer points within each criteria. Roundtable discussions were held to go over every word and line of text to ensure maximum clarity and adherence to the intended message. As an observer and contributor to these sessions, I was able to see how minute differences in terminology serve to benefit or upset stakeholders, and can be monumental in how destinations justify their following of criteria. Specifically, the following four words played a large role in the legitimacy between the promise of a destination to perform according to criteria and actual performance:

- "Shall:" the body must take the specific action to be in compliance; strongest term;
- "Will:" the body commits to undertake the specified action;
- "Should:" the body is expected to take the specified action;
- "May:" the body is allowed to take the specified action; weakest term (Matus 2012).

These terms are key indicators in evaluating a criterion's message, expectation and potential success. The GSTC body is made up of working groups, which report to the Secretariat as well as the Accreditation panel. These bodies report to the Board, as well as the Ambassador's Council, which fall under the Membership Council.

Not only does the GSTC wish to become the leading global tourism certification agent, but it also endeavors to provide new means of promotion and market access to clients. The goal is to increase the demand for sustainable travel and tourism. The key is building trust with consumers and offering solutions for alignment with greater market potential (GSTC 2011). The organization is also working to promote knowledge about the industry by providing educational materials and training guidance to destinations and certifiers, as well as tourism programs in universities.

### A.1. GSTC Criteria Evaluation

To evaluate the criteria (listed in full in Appendix II), I analyzed term frequency using NVivo, developing both a tag cloud and a top ten frequency list. I also researched the program in full and determined differences between GSTC and its competitors. The GSTC is the only program using global outlook that focuses first, and foremost, on the destination as a whole, in its certification model. The focus of GSTC criteria is centered on the top ten terms within its criteria (See Table 4).


*Figure 2: GSTC Tag Cloud, produced by NVivo.*

As can be seen, the priority of these criteria lies in the fact that it is a destination that is being certified. This information is in line with the mission of the organization at this juncture. The GSTC is differentiating itself from its own past, as well as the majority of sustainable tourism certifiers, by focusing on destinations as a whole, which is a fairly untapped market. Generally, the focus on tourism related certification concerns hotel operators or tourism products, rather than entire regions. The motivation behind this approach is to create a management system for a sustainable tourism destination. Maintaining the cultural integrity of said destination is a priority, as is the marketing and promotion that comes with GSTC approval.

| GSTC Word Frequency List - Top 10 | | |
|---|---|---|
| **#** | **Word** | **Count** |
| 1 | destination | 44 |
| 2 | system | 25 |
| 3 | tourism | 20 |
| 4 | cultural | 12 |
| 5 | publicly | 9 |
| 6 | related | 9 |
| 7 | enterprises | 8 |
| 8 | key | 7 |
| 9 | natural | 7 |
| 10 | sites | 7 |

*Table 4: Frequency of terms in GSTC criteria.*

### A.2. GSTC SWOT

In analyzing the criteria and program structure, I developed SWOT models to easily explain the strengths and weakness of each program. These highlight best and worst practices, contributing to a best practices framework the industry can utilize in developing effective sustainable destination certification standards and criteria.

Strengths of the GSTC program include the fact that it is already globally recognized for the work it has performed regarding the certification of hotels and tour operators. This will help to support more expedient client base building. Further, the GSTC was conceived as an international program, giving it a wider geographic scope and reducing limitations. The program is backed by the UNWTO, and pulled the basis of its destination criteria from a wide spread of sources, (Appendix I), adding credibility. Weaknesses of the program include the stark fact that it is, indeed, the newest destination certifier to date. Further, it is immensely costly, both for the applicant and for GSTC members. There is no news on how the program intends on maintaining a cost effective structure that promotes more certification. Opportunities include the fact that the GSTC intends on becoming the premier global certifier of sustainable destinations by leveraging UN support and marketing. The program also wishes to eventually become the first ever accreditation body for sustainable tourism endeavors, which would add great credibility and assurance to the industry. Finally, the program can work to assist destinations in becoming more sustainable by providing fact sheets and consultancy advice. Threats are fairly uniform across the industry, for all programs. Specific to the GSTC, threats include competition from the other programs of study, rising costs and inability of destinations to cover expenses, and consumer mistrust of the certification itself. The takeaway for GSTC, then, is that it should capitalize on its existing recognition and support as a tour operator and hotel certifier, and it should work on creating financial models that promote more affordable means of certification. Destinations and GSTC members must be involved in financial discussions in order to ensure that all stakeholder needs are met, while ensuring a profit.

## B. QualityCoast

QualityCoast is currently vetting GSTC destination criteria in a hybrid application that allows destinations to apply for QualityCoast certification using the traditional QualityCoast criteria, as well as the draft GSTC criteria. The QualityCoast program is a competitor of GSTC in terms of attracting more destinations for application. Further, the program is established, and GSTC can learn from QualityCoast in refining its destination criteria. QualityCoast is a certification program that was developed by the European Union and is orchestrated by the Coastal and Marine Union (EUCC). The primary focus of this program is to measure the success of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) at local levels. The EUCC is attempting to establish an international network of coastal communities which share similar values in regards to sustainable and socially responsible tourism, while still maintaining high standards in the quality of their tourism offers (EUCC 2012). The QualityCoast Award "is an independent, international certification program for sustainable tourism of coastal and island destinations that are:

- Combining good overall policy performance in sustainable tourism with a good attractiveness for tourists;
- Providing transparent information to residents and visitors; and
- Planning for improvement (EUCC 2012).

QualityCoast has found a niche, as "fifty percent of international tourism takes place in Europe" (Hamele 2004). This program promotes sustainability awards for coastal communities, towns and islands. It is the only sustainable tourism destination award developed by local authorities themselves (EUCC 2012). The certification is valid for two years, and 21 destinations were awarded between 2011-2012. The program seeks to include local authorities to improve awareness, performance and achievements in an international context. Further, the certification allows for consumers to compare various QualityCoast destinations, providing a better picture of strengths and weaknesses. The communities who partake in the program join a network of like-minded destinations that are able to share, transparently, their experiences and best practices, so as to improve sustainability and social responsibility within the tourism sector. These best practices and performances are then marketed via certification under the supervision of independent, international juries which issue the actual awards (EUCC 2012). The

program considers criteria falling under the following five categories: Nature, Environment, Local Identity, Tourism & Business, and Host Community and Safety. In total, there are only 20 general criteria within the QualityCoast system:

| QualityCoast's 20 Umbrella Criteria | |
|---|---|
| **Nature** | |
| 1 | Nature & Conservation |
| 2 | Access, Information & Education |
| 3 | Green Policies |
| 4 | Open Landscapes |
| **Environment** | |
| 5 | Environmental Management |
| 6 | Blue Flags & Beaches |
| 7 | Water Management |
| 8 | Sustainable Transportation |
| 9 | Waste & Recycling |
| 10 | Energy & Climate Mitigation |
| 11 | Climate Change Adaptation |
| **Identity & Culture** | |
| 12 | Cultural Heritage |
| 13 | Territory & Tradition |
| 14 | Local Identity |
| **Tourism & Business** | |
| 15 | Destination Management |
| 16 | Business Involvement |
| 17 | Hospitality & Satisfaction |
| **Host Community & Safety** | |
| 18 | Freedom & Justice |
| 19 | Community Participation |
| 20 | Health & Safety |

*Table 5: The QualityCoast general criteria categories as of February, 2013.*

The application form for QualityCoast Awards currently consists of 86 core indicators and 153 optional indicators (the 86 core indicators are for 2011-2012; prior to 2011, there were only 53 core indicators) (EUCC 2012). Application forms are evaluated and assessed by the QualityCoast Secretariat, who may hire the services of local experts. A draft is then reviewed by members of the international QualityCoast Jury. For each separate application, the EUCC designates a jury composed of at least three members, including an independent local expert, a national expert, and an international EUCC expert (EUCC 2012). The jury scores all indicators on a scale from one to five, with "one" meaning absence of quality or no information provided, and "five" indicating excellence. The average score of all 20 criteria is the final score. Applicants who score a "one" in two or more criteria are ineligible for the QualityCoast Award, and no public references are made regarding unsuccessful applications. However, if the Award threshold is met, the jury will look into the average scores of the individual categories and determine if any category reaches a minimum of "eight," or "excellence." With one case of "excellence," a Quality Coast Bronze Award will be given; with two, Quality Coast Silver; with three, and with no other category below "five," QualityCoast

Gold; and finally, in case of excellence in all five categories, QualityCoast Platinum is awarded (EUCC 2012). Within the past year, QualityCoast has revised its destination criteria to include all GSTC destination criteria. QualityCoast is a member of the GSTC, and is testing a new set of hybrid criteria in an attempt to test the sustainability of destinations in a more thorough manner.

### B.1. QualityCoast Criteria

As an initial study of the QualityCoast Criteria, found in full in Appendix III, I found the most common terms occurring in the criteria text. The three most prominent terms, and thus themes, found in QualityCoast's criteria include destination, local and tourism. It should be noted that QualityCoast, in general, has the most expansive listing of criteria of all programs analyzed. The details revealing what sets QualityCoast apart from competitors can be found in the program's SWOT below. Further, the version being studied here includes GSTC criteria, embedded for a pilot study. QualityCoast decided to embed draft GSTC criteria into their application process from 2012 to 2013 to test how destinations responded and to determine the effectiveness of GSTC criteria. The QualityCoast criteria studied here do incorporate GSTC criteria, adding immense credibility to QualityCoast in terms of its competitive abilities with the other programs studied. As this project was formed via a partnership between myself and QualityCoast/GSTC member Magdalena Muir, it was agreed upon that I would utilize the 2012-2013 QualityCoast criteria.


*Figure 3: QualityCoast Tag Cloud, produced by NVivo.*

The following are the top ten terms used in the QualityCoast criteria:

| QualityCoast Word Frequency List - Top 10 | | |
|---|---|---|
| # | Word | Count |
| 1 | tourism | 46 |
| 2 | destination | 45 |
| 3 | local | 30 |
| 4 | water | 26 |
| 5 | national | 23 |
| 6 | sustainable | 19 |
| 7 | including | 17 |
| 8 | situation | 17 |
| 9 | place | 16 |
| 10 | cultural | 15 |

*Table 6: Frequency of terms in QualityCoast criteria*

In general, the term count in QualityCoast's criteria was higher. As EUCC incorporated the GSTC criteria *into* the QualityCoast criteria, there was more text to work with. The takeaway from QualityCoast's tag cloud and top ten frequency list is the focus on local, destination tourism near a body of water. QualityCoast has been traditionally, exclusively, concerned with coastal communities. Thus their perspective is a bit more limited than the truly global perspective of the GSTC. Further, the role cultural heritage plays in QualityCoast is placed significantly lower than the role culture plays in the GSTC criteria.

### B.2. QualityCoast SWOT

The specific differences between QualityCoast and the other programs of study can be found in the program's SWOT below. This analysis provides insight as to what sets QualityCoast apart from GSTC, BioSphere, Green Globe and Blue Flag.

One of the most prominent strengths of the program includes the fact that QualityCoast is currently the largest destination certifier in Europe, with an established client base that trusts the program. This allows for large-scale recognition in Europe, which is a massive tourism hub. The program also boasts the most expansive list of criteria and indicators, and has not experienced funding obstacles to date. Weaknesses include a lack of global exposure that threatens to limit worldwide consumer recognition and trust of the logo. This relates to QualityCoast's focus on coastal areas, which limits expertise regarding inland areas. This harms the scope of opportunity for global certification. Finally, the large number of criteria threaten to

overwhelm applicants. Opportunities include the potential to branch out of Europe and coastal regions, establishing certification globally and in inland regions. Threats parallel those of GSTC, and include competition and consumer mistrust of the logo outside of Europe. The highlights of the QualityCoast SWOT include its clout in Europe, which will serve it well in gaining support, as the majority of international travel takes place in European countries. However, the focus on coastal regions inhibits QualityCoast's ability to expand to certify inland areas.

### C. Biosphere

The Biosphere Responsible Tourism Certification is sponsored by the Spanish Instituto de Turismo Responsable (ITR). The certification recognizes and certifies destinations, enterprises, establishments and tourist products via a publicly acknowledged BioSphere label. ITR is a non-profit organization that maintains a MoU, or memorandum of understanding, with UNESCO; further, it is a member of the UNWTO and the GSTC. BioSphere is the first formally recognized certification body that is GSTC approved for destinations. BioSphere has currently certified one destination, La Palma, Canary Islands; three are in progress: La Gomera, Canary Islands, Valle del Cabriel, Spain, and Easter Island. The main elements of destination sustainability in this system concern: the tourist area and its basic environmental and cultural resources, as well as accommodation structure; the tourist infrastructure related to the management of water, energy, waste and mobility; actual tourist attractions; and tourist services such as restaurants, transport and information (BioSphere 2012). For this study, I will focus only on the BioSphere Destination criteria, which were provided to me from BioSphere directly (a full listing of criteria and definitions can be found in Appendix IV). The requirements demanded by BioSphere standards are grouped into the following categories:

1. Instruments for a Responsible Tourism Policy
2. Management of the Cultural Variable
3. Management of the Socio-Economic Variable
4. Management of the Environmental Variable
5. Responsible Behavior in the Value Map
6. Client Satisfaction and Involvement in the System (ITR 2012).

The program has 25 umbrella criteria, listed below, with 79 specific criteria.

| BioSphere's 25 Umbrella Criteria | |
|---|---|
| **Category 1: Instruments for a Responsible Tourism Policy** | |
| 1.1 | Responsible Tourism Policy |
| 1.2 | Planning, Control & Monitoring |
| 1.3 | Legal and Regulatory Requirements |
| 1.4 | Responsible Marketing |
| 1.5 | Corrective Actions |
| **Category 2: Management of the Cultural Variable** | |
| 2.1 | Preservation and Improvement of Cultural Heritage |
| 2.2 | Visitor's Knowledge and Integration in the Local Community |
| **Category 3: Management of the Socio-Economic Variable** | |
| 3.1 | Participation and Involvement of the Local Community |
| 3.2 | Accessible Tourism |
| 3.3 | Socio-Economic Impact of Tourism |
| **Category 4: Management of the Environmental Variable** | |
| 4.1 | Landscape Protection |
| 4.2 | Natural Resources |
| 4.3 | Sustainable Transport |
| 4.4 | Atmosphere |
| 4.5 | Noise |
| 4.6 | Energy Management |
| 4.7 | Water Management |
| 4.8 | Waste Management |
| 4.9 | Light Pollution |
| **Category 5: Responsible Behavior in the Value Map** | |
| 5.1 | Responsible Behavior of Suppliers |
| 5.2 | Responsible Behavior of Tourist Establishments |
| 5.3 | Responsible Behavior of the Tourist Administration |
| **Category 6: Client Satisfaction and Involvement in the System** | |
| 6.1 | Safety Management |
| 6.2 | Service Quality Management |
| 6.3 | Information and Visitor's Involvement |

*Table 7: The umbrella criteria of BioSphere as of February 2013.*

### C.1. BioSphere Criteria

| BioSphere Word Frequency List - Top 10 | | |
|---|---|---|
| **#** | **Word** | **Count** |
| 1 | must | 37 |
| 2 | destination | 21 |
| 3 | developed | 19 |
| 4 | order | 19 |
| 5 | tourist | 18 |
| 6 | tourism | 16 |
| 7 | local | 13 |
| 8 | resources | 13 |
| 9 | responsible | 13 |
| 10 | areas | 12 |

*Table 8: Frequency of terms in BioSphere criteria*

As with the other certification programs, I developed a tag cloud to gain a general picture of what the BioSphere criteria focused on. The BioSphere frequency list (See Table 8) reveals the top ten terms found in criteria, the most frequent being "must." The BioSphere criteria were more instructive than both GSTC and QualityCoast, in that the terms used were straightforward and needed less interpretation, as discovered from both the tag cloud and my own analysis of the standard. One could argue that the BioSphere perspective on destination certification follows the more traditional "checklist" format, which makes applying much easier on destinations, as there is clear language delineating what, and what does not, qualify for certification. The BioSphere criteria were more limited than that of QualityCoast, but alignment with GSTC was clear. Both BioSphere and GSTC cover the same principles and ask similar demands of applying destinations.


*Figure 4: BioSphere Tag Cloud, produced by Nvivo*

### C.2. BioSphere SWOT

The BioSphere SWOT analysis provides an overview of the elements of the BioSphere program and standard that set it apart from its competitors in the sustainable destination certification industry.

Strengths include the notable fact that BioSphere is, indeed, the very first GSTC "certified certifier." While this does not hold much weight in the industry now, it does add credibility to the program. BioSphere is also supported by both UNWTO and UNESCO, adding global validity. The format of the BioSphere standard also made it easier on applicants to apply, as it was presented directly, transparently and simply, similar to a checklist. Finally, BioSphere boasts experience in other tourism sectors. Weaknesses include a lack of exposure outside the Spanish world, and reduced consumer focus on BioSphere alone as the logo competes with GSTC's certification support logo. Opportunities include the ability to branch out of Spanish speaking countries to gain global reach, and the utilization of the GSTC partnership for exposure and support. Threats include competition and consumer mistrust of the logo. The most notable strength BioSphere boasts is its direct and clear language. Any standard must easily relay its information to applicants to ensure understanding. As sustainable destination tourism is a new market, ensuring that all parties involved are clear on criteria is key. The biggest drawback of BioSphere is its lack of experience. While the program is the most supported by UN agencies, it lacks credibility as a certification program to date.

### D. Green Globe

Green Globe certifies the sustainable operation and management of travel and tourism businesses, complying with ISO 17021. Located in Los Angeles, CA, the program has partners in Mexico, South America, Europe, the Caribbean, the Middle East and South Africa. Their criteria are updated every six months, and certification services are delivered by accredited consultants and auditors (Globe 2012). The Green Globe Standard is a structured assessment of the sustainability performance of travel and tourism businesses and their supply chain partners. Businesses can monitor improvements and document achievements leading to certification of their enterprises' sustainable operation and management. As of 2012, there were 337 compliance indicators that were applied to 25 individual sustainability criteria that total 39 with sub-criteria. These criteria are based on the following standards and agreements: The GSTC, the Global partnership for Sustainable Tourism Criteria (STC Partnership), the Baseline Criteria of the Sustainable Tourism Certification Network of the Americas, Agenda 21, and ISO

9001/14001/19011. The full listing of criteria and definitions can be found in Appendix V. The umbrella criteria include the following:

| Green Globe's 25 Umbrella Criteria | |
|---|---|
| **Category A: Sustainable Management** | |
| A.1 | Implement a Sustainability Management System |
| A.2 | Legal Compliance |
| A.3 | Employee Training |
| A.4 | Customer Satisfaction |
| A.5 | Accuracy of Promotional Materials |
| A.6 | Local Zoning, Design and Construction |
| A.7 | Interpretation |
| A.8 | Communications Strategy |
| A.9 | Health & Safety |
| **Category B: Social/Economic** | |
| B.1 | Community Development |
| B.2 | Local Employment |
| B.3 | Fair Trade |
| B.4 | Support Local Entrepreneurs |
| B.5 | Respect Local Communities |
| B.6 | Exploitation |
| B.7 | Equitable Hiring |
| B.8 | Employee Protection |
| B.9 | Basic Services |
| **Category C: Cultural Heritage** | |
| C.1 | Code of Behavior |
| C.2 | Historical Artifacts |
| C.3 | Protecting of Sites |
| C.4 | Incorporation of Culture |
| **Category D: Environmental** | |
| D.1 | Conserving Resources |
| D.2 | Reducing Pollution |
| D.3 | Conserving Biodiversity, Ecosystems, and Landscapes |

*Table 9: Umbrella criteria for Green Globe; does not include sub-criteria.*

### D.1. Green Globe Criteria

I also produced a NVivo tag cloud for Green Globe's criteria, which clearly highlights key themes within the organization's mission. The following ten terms were the most frequently used in the Green Globe criteria:

| Green Globe Word Frequency List - Top 10 | | |
|---|---|---|
| # | Word | Count |
| 1 | local | 52 |
| 2 | tourism | 28 |
| 3 | community | 22 |
| 4 | business | 19 |
| 5 | businesses | 15 |
| 6 | environmental | 15 |
| 7 | operations | 13 |
| 8 | sustainable | 13 |
| 9 | activities | 12 |
| 10 | health | 12 |

*Table 10: Frequency of terms in Green Globe criteria*


*Figure 5: Green Globe Tag Cloud, produced by NVivo.*

The Green Globe criteria, while thorough in their own right, seem to place less emphasis on the global quality of this certification process, and instead focus on community or local engagement within tourism operations, as indicated in the tag cloud. Specific ecosystems are not mentioned, but activities that do not diminish the health or safety of local peoples are emphasized. Green Globe is possibly the best certification process in terms of priority on the social welfare for the community in question. This process best illustrates the triple bottom line concept, though may not be the best option for destination certification.

### D.2. Green Globe SWOT

The Green Globe SWOT provides insights as to what makes Green Globe an important competitor in the realm of sustainable destination certification. This information was harnessed via my own analysis of the standard and its operations.

Strengths include the fact that Green Globe has regional representations, such as Green Globe Asia Pacific, supporting a global reach as well as global administration. This office model is the

first of its kind in the industry. Further, the criteria boast a specific strength regarding the certification of cultural elements. Green Globe also already has clout in the industry due to its long-term presence, and a clear showing of experience. The biggest weakness of the program is its minimal focus and lack of expertise on the conservation of natural elements. This hinders the program from being a triple bottom line leader. The greatest opportunity for Green Globe is the chance to revamp criteria to include more natural elements, which would put Green Globe on a more even playing field with competition. The biggest threat is competition. It should be noted that Green Globe has and immense stock of experience. The regional office model is particularly intriguing in terms of best practices for sustainable destination tourism moving forward. However, the standard does lack expertise regarding natural elements of a destination.

### E. Costa Rican Blue Flag

The Costa Rican hotel sector grew more than 400% in 13 years, from 433 hotels in 1987 to about 1,800 in 2000. This shift can be attributed to the increase in visitors, which rose from 250,000 in 1987 to one million in 1999 (Rivera 2002). Hotels and other tourism related businesses have become the second most important sector of the Costa Rican economy. The Blue Flag Ecological Program of Costa Rica is currently in its twelfth year of operation. This inter-institutional effort, made official through executive decrees as well as the Costa Rican Tourism Institute (ICT), National Water and Sewer Act (AyA), Public Health Administration (MS), Environmental Ministry (MINAE), Education Ministry (ME) and the National Tourism Chamber (CANATUR), is granted annually to communities that have reached a minimum of 90% of required criteria. This criteria program is domestic, but GSTC experts recommended comparison. The criteria for coastal communities is more limited than the programs mentioned above. The following eight criteria are awarded anywhere form one to four stars based on a destination's alignment:

| Costa Rica's Blue Flag Criteria | |
|---|---|
| **All Criteria Listed** | |
| 1 | Microbiological quality of the ocean's water |
| 2 | Quality of potable water |
| 3 | Quality of coastal sanitation areas: |
| 3.1 | Garbage and garbage containers |
| 3.2 | Treated industrial waste |
| 3.3 | Treated run-off water |
| 4 | Environmental education |
| 5 | Security and administration |

*Table 11: All Blue Flag Criteria; Awarded one to four stars in certification process.*

The rating system works by awarding one star if the criteria listed is achieved between 90% and 100% completion (See Appendix VI for details). Two stars are awarded if the criteria are achieved by 100%, and there are motorized vehicle restrictions, horse and domestic animal restrictions, and maritime current signals. Three stars are awarded when there is compliance with Star Two, security and rescue teams during the high seasons, and a regulator plan of action regarding conservation zones. Finally, four stars are awarded if there is compliance with Star Three, easy access and security measures for those with disabilities, separation and recycling of solid waste, constant security and rescue measures, local emergency committees, and if the destination is a member of the Sanitary Quality Seal program (ICT 2013).

### E.1. Blue Flag Criteria

The Blue Flag criteria, though brief in comparison to others, were also evaluated by established a graphical view of said criteria. As


*Figure 6: Blue Flag Tag Cloud, produced by NVivo.*

| Blue Flag Word Frequency List - Top 10 | | |
|---|---|---|
| # | Word | Count |
| 1 | quality | 3 |
| 2 | water | 3 |
| 3 | garbage | 2 |
| 4 | treated | 2 |
| 5 | administration | 1 |
| 6 | areas | 1 |
| 7 | coastal | 1 |
| 8 | containers | 1 |
| 9 | education | 1 |
| 10 | environmental | 1 |

*Table 12: Frequency of terms in Blue Flag criteria*

the criteria for the Costa Rican Blue Flag program is much more limited in scope than the others, the top ten frequency list was more of a summary of specific criteria, themselves. As can be seen, there were very few terms to work with. Blue Flag closely resembles QualityCoast, though, with a focus on water quality and coastal community wellbeing. The priorities lie in the treatment of water and waste to ensure better quality conditions. All administrative, governance, educational and promotional concerns fall lowest on the list. As this is a domestic program, its limitations are not surprising, as a global perspective was not considered in criteria development.

### E.2. Blue Flag SWOT

The Blue Flag strengths and weaknesses are the most evident of any of the programs of study. The clear strength is Blue Flag's program is its expertise regarding coastal and water quality issues. Further, the criteria are simple to digest, making the process easier for applicants. Finally, the program's domestic influence and clout in Costa Rica, a huge tourism industry region, will serve it well moving forward. The limited criteria, lack of global reach, and lack of expertise regarding cultural heritage issues are the key weaknesses to the program. Blue Flag is threatened by its competition, as well as the lack of infrastructure outside of Costa Rica, which allows other organizations to fill global niches. Blue Flag does lead other programs in terms of water expertise, but the lack of reach on a global scale, and the narrow scope of priorities, hold this program back from being a viable competitor.

## F. Overall Comparison

A comparison of each program in contrast to its competitors was necessary to determine criteria effectiveness and value throughout the industry. The overall comparison will serve the industry well as it moves forward in developing a best practices framework. As an introduction to the overall comparison of all criteria, I developed a large tag cloud, featuring each program. This cloud focused on the most frequently occurring terms. As would be expected, based on the high volume of criteria and thus terms, the tag cloud for cumulative criteria most closely resembles QualityCoasts'. As the EUCC produced the most expansive criteria program, this is no surprise. However, when one looks at the overall frequency word list, there are some interesting deviations.


*Figure 7: Overall comparison of all programs using an NVivo tag cloud; only most frequently occurring terms included.*

While the top three terms still resemble those of QualityCoast, there is weight placed on the culture of the community and its importance. There is forceful language ("must"), indicating a more straightforward or stringent certification method than that of QualityCoast. Finally, business is mentioned, which is a deviation from QualityCoast's top ten terms. The overall term list, then, gives a much more holistic and complete view of the necessary criteria for sustainable destination tourism, pulling fairly evenly from each program excluding Blue Flag. See Appendix VII for a comparison of terms by quantity only.

To better compare the programs and their criteria, I utilized the Nodes and Classification system in NVivo. This mechanism allows users to "code" certain phrases into "nodes." Each criteria "cell" was categorized to a "node" and then coded with more detail via a "child node." This allows for organization of information and provides an overview of what "nodes" are most common in different programs. After classifying, I was left with 344 "cells," or individual criteria. With these 344 cells, there were 60 "child nodes," classified under eight "node classifiers," or umbrella categories. I created these categories based on my own knowledge of sustainable tourism, destination management, certification schemes and expert suggestions. Going through each individual criterion, it became clear which themes were more important than others, and what management schemes were more commonly implemented. Listed below are the umbrella categories. A full listing of "nodes" and "child nodes" with definitions can be found in Appendix VIII.

| Overall Word Frequency List - Top 10 | | |
|---|---|---|
| **#** | **Word** | **Count** |
| 1 | destination | 117 |
| 2 | local | 114 |
| 3 | tourism | 110 |
| 4 | water | 51 |
| 5 | cultural | 50 |
| 6 | sustainable | 43 |
| 7 | must | 42 |
| 8 | business | 41 |
| 9 | including | 40 |
| 10 | community | 39 |

*Table 13: Frequency of terms from all programs*

1. **Business Involvement** – Includes local and foreign business entities, and their role in a local destination's community and its economy.
2. **Education** – Includes marketing and visitor education.
3. **Governance** – Policies and politics regarding the area in question; legal control.
4. **Management** – Actual references to administrative organizations to manage tourism related or other activities within the region. Authority.
5. **Monitoring** – Actual monitoring and inventorying of practices within the destination; data aggregation and verification.
6. **Natural Areas** – Information regarding biodiversity, flora and fauna of destination. Environmental perspective.
7. **Recreation** – Activities for tourists.
8. **Transportation** – All mentions of transport within destination.

There are some duplicates in specific child node that occur under different umbrella nodes (reference Appendix VIII). This is due to different management strategies toward duplicates. For example, Energy Efficiency is listed in Business Involvement, Management and Monitoring. This is because the criteria coded concern energy efficiency in local businesses (correlating to Business Involvement), energy efficiency involved in general tourism strategies (correlating to Management), and energy efficiency being logged throughout the destination for data reporting purposes (correlating to Monitoring). So, specific child nodes were classified according to the realm they would be applied in.

With this information, I categorized which criteria fit into which node. After compiling this information, a list was made featuring the top ten child nodes (those most often classified). The top ten specific nodes coded include:

1. Protection (under Governance) – relates to community, tourist and heritage protection and maintenance, as well as general security of all parties (people and businesses) involved.
2. Cultural Heritage (under Management) – relates to the maintenance of cultural identity of the region in question, including physical maintenance of artifacts and historic sites.
3. Water Quality (under Monitoring) – relates to drinking water quality and health, as well as pollution prevention.
4. Marine (under Management) – relates to aquatic water quality in natural areas, as well as pollution prevention.
5. Tourism Strategy (under Management) – relates to EMS or other strategies that the region has undertaken to develop more sustainable destination tourism development. Must be clearly indicated.
6. Conservation (under Natural Areas) – relates to physical conservation of both natural areas and species biodiversity.
7. Promotional Materials (under Education) – relates to marketing, including emphasis on bilingual options.

8. Local Authority (under Governance) – relates to governance on community level, promoting involvement of local government stakeholders and ensuring promotion of local laws.
9. Local Products (under Business Involvement) – relates to fair trade and local business enrichment.
10. Tourism Business (under Business Involvement) – relates to tourism industry on the ground in region in question.

Using this information, I matched the above nodes to specific program criteria, culminating in the following table:

| Number of Specific Nodes (top 10) in Each Program | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **#** | **Node** | **References** | **GSTC** | **Quality Coast** | **Green Globe** | **BioSphere** | **Blue Flag** |
| 1 | Protection | 28 | 4 | 21 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 2 | Cultural Heritage | 23 | 3 | 14 | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| 3 | Water Quality | 21 | 3 | 11 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| 4 | Marine | 16 | 0 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 5 | Tourism Strategy | 16 | 2 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 0 |
| 6 | Conservation | 14 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 1 |
| 7 | Promotional Materials | 12 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 7 | 0 |
| 8 | Local Authority | 12 | 0 | 10 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 9 | Local Products | 11 | 2 | 8 | 4 | 2 | 0 |
| 10 | Tourism Business | 10 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 0 |
| | *Totals:* | *163* | *19* | *89* | *17* | *32* | *6* |

*Table 14: Number of criteria from each program that fall within the top ten most common nodes coded in NVivo.*

The nodes can be considered the most important aspects of any destination tourism certification program. These are the main themes any program must adhere to in order to compete. Each node shows the priority of each program in relation to other programs, and throughout the industry. I then compared this information to expert suggestions on what qualifies as sustainable tourism. Using information from TIES (TIES 2001), UNEP WTO (WTO 2013), Martha Honey (Honey 2002), Hunter & Green (Hunter and Green 1995), and the concept

of the Triple Bottom Line, I developed a comparison system that matched expert ideas with nodes (Table 15). This table reveals what nodes, and consequent tourism themes, best match what sustainable tourism experts, in summary, consider to be *the* tenets of ecotourism. While there is still disagreement as to what methodology is the most sound, the compilation of these expert findings provides an overall representation of best practices. These tenets were discussed at length in the Background section of this paper (see Table 1). The "count" column represents the number of experts that highlighted associated aspects. All ten of the top nodes were related to various expert themes. The nodes were the most important themes in the sustainable tourism certification industry according to the only programs partaking in said industry (all five studied). The more expert support a given node had, the higher value it would be given. For example, "Protection" and "Cultural Heritage" both fell under the most commonly cited node: Minimization of Negative Impacts to Culture. Thus, for this expert suggestion, both Protection and Cultural Heritage were awarded five points apiece, as they occurred in all five expert suggestions (See Tables 15, 16 for details). Experts were chosen based on an expansive literature review. Upon extensive research on the topic of sustainable destination or sustainable tourism certification, I was able to detect which groups or individuals were considered, by the industry, to have best practices suggestions. Each time a node occurred in the "Final Program Criteria Comparison – Similar Terms" column, it was multiplied by the "count." Totals were added and the ranking for node occurrences within expert suggestions reveals deviations from isolated node occurrence rankings we saw in Table 14. Table 16 reveals the weight each node holds in this study. This is a culmination of top theme occurrences in criteria and expert suggestions, or the number of times a theme occurred in an expert suggestion. These are the concepts that hold the most value in the tourism industry, according to acclaimed experts. Using the values from Table 16, I determined how each program's node totals from Table 14 adjusted to account for new weights. Expert suggestions, then, were used to recalibrate theme occurrences. Values from Table 14 were divided by the weights in Table 16, allowing for a more evenly weighted representation of each node in each program. The culmination of this process can be found in Table 17.

| Rationale for Scale System based on Literature Review Findings | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **#** | **Expert Key Proponent of Sustainable Tourism** | **Expert Organization** | **Count** | **Final Program Criteria Comparison - Similar Terms** |
| 1 | Minimization of negative impacts to culture | The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)<br>Triple Bottom Line<br>Hunter & Green, 1995<br>Honey, 2002<br>UNEP WTO | 5 | Protection; Cultural Heritage |
| 2 | Minimization of negative impacts on nature | The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)<br>Triple Bottom Line<br>Hunter & Green, 1995<br>Honey, 2002 | 4 | Water Quality; Marine; Conservation |
| 3 | Conservation of biodiversity | The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)<br>Triple Bottom Line<br>Honey, 2002<br>UNEP WTO | 4 | Conservation; Protection |
| 4 | Conservation of natural areas | The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)<br>Triple Bottom Line<br>Honey, 2002<br>UNEP WTO | 4 | Conservation; Marine; Water Quality; Protection |
| 5 | Meeting of local business needs | The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)<br>Triple Bottom Line<br>UNEP WTO | 3 | Local Products; Tourism Business; Local Authority |
| 6 | Maximization of economic benefit for host community | The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)<br>Triple Bottom Line<br>Hunter & Green, 1995 | 3 | Local Products; Tourism Business; Local Authority |
| 7 | Equal employment | The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)<br>Honey, 2002<br>UNEP WTO | 3 | Tourism Business; Local Products; Local Authority |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | Education of traveler | The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)<br>Honey, 2002 | 2 | Promotional Materials |
| 9 | Tourism management strategies | The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)<br>Hunter & Green, 1995 | 2 | Tourism Strategy |
| 10 | Monitoring programs | The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)<br>Hunter & Green, 1995 | 2 | Water Quality; Tourism Strategy |
| 11 | Local governance | Hunter & Green, 1995<br>UNEP WTO | 2 | Local Authority; Protection |
| 12 | Education of local community | Honey, 2002 | 1 | Promotional Materials |
| 13 | Economic viability | UNEP WTO | 1 | Tourism Business; Protection; Local Products |
| 14 | Social equity | UNEP WTO | 1 | Protection; Local Authority |
| 15 | Visitor fulfillment | UNEP WTO | 1 | Tourism Business; Promotional Materials |
| 16 | Zoning policies | The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) | 1 | Local Authority; Conservation |

*Table 15: Rationale for scaling of nodes. By using expert suggestions, I developed a means to re-evaluate the node occurrence totals, thereby scaling values for a more just representation. The number of times a node (theme) occurs in expert text is reflected in the "count."*

| Node Occurrences within Expert Suggestions | | |
|---|---|---|
| **#** | **Node** | **Total #** |
| 1 | Protection | 17 |
| 2 | Local Authority | 13 |
| 3 | Tourism Business | 11 |
| 4 | Conservation | 13 |
| 5 | Local Products | 10 |
| 6 | Water Quality | 10 |
| 7 | Promotional Materials | 4 |
| 8 | Marine | 8 |
| 9 | Tourism Strategy | 4 |
| 10 | Cultural Heritage | 5 |

*Table 16: Specific node occurrences within expert suggestions (which can be found in Table 15). These values were used to scale original occurrence values. "Total #" refers to the number of times the listed node (theme) occurred in an expert suggestion.*

The values of Table 17, then, are indicative of the value each program places on certain themes of sustainable tourism, which are represented by nodes. This table accounts for populous nodes, as well as the opinions of experts in the field, which were included via Tables 15 and 16.

| Final Program Criteria Comparison Using Common Nodes | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Node | References | GSTC | EUCC | GG | BioSphere | Blue Flag |
| Protection | 28 | 0.24 | 1.24 | 0.06 | 0.06 | 0.06 |
| Cultural Heritage | 23 | 0.60 | 2.80 | 0.00 | 1.00 | 0.00 |
| Water Quality | 21 | 0.30 | 1.10 | 0.10 | 0.30 | 0.30 |
| Marine | 16 | 0.00 | 1.50 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.13 |
| Tourism Strategy | 16 | 0.50 | 1.50 | 0.75 | 1.25 | 0.00 |
| Conservation | 14 | 0.23 | 0.23 | 0.31 | 0.23 | 0.08 |
| Promotional Materials | 12 | 0.25 | 0.50 | 0.50 | 1.75 | 0.00 |
| Local Authority | 12 | 0.00 | 0.77 | 0.08 | 0.08 | 0.00 |
| Local Products | 11 | 0.20 | 0.80 | 0.40 | 0.20 | 0.00 |
| Tourism Business | 10 | 0.09 | 0.18 | 0.09 | 0.45 | 0.00 |

*Table 17: Color-coded indication of each organization's stake in the most commonly coded nodes, scaled by dividing original occurrence values from expert suggestion frequency (Table 16). GG refers to Green Globe; EUCC refers to QualityCoast. See Figure 8 for color associations.*

Table 17 also divides program values by color. The color-coding system, explained in Figure 8, delineates values by certain ranges and assigns colors based on said range. So, for example, any node occurrences divided by expert suggestions that equaled zero were coded as red, and those less than 0.10 were assigned orange; and so on and so on for six shades. This was an important step in the evaluation process because after all values were color coded, the prevalence of colors was converted to a numerical representation. All values coded as red were assigned one point; orange, two; yellow, three; green, four; blue five; and purple, six. In an initial examination of Table 17, it appears that most programs, excluding Blue Flag, are relatively similar. EUCC/QualityCoast boasts the highest priority matching experts, and Blue Flag the least. After assigning color-coded values to the number of certain colors within a program, we found the following ranking, which represents program criteria thoroughness in comparison to expert suggestions:

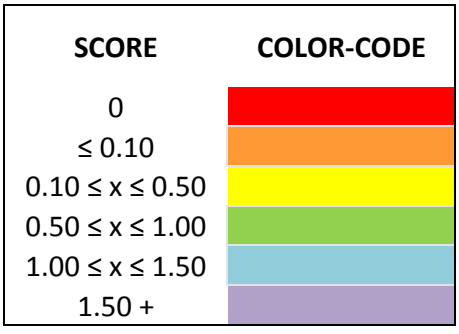


*Figure 8: Color-coding scheme for node/expert references, and program scoring.*

| Final Ranking of Programs Based on Criteria Relevance to Expert Opinion | |
|---|---|
| **Ranking** | **Program** |
| 1 | QualityCoast |
| 2 | BioSphere |
| 3 | GSTC |
| 4 | Green Globe |
| 5 | Blue Flag |

*Table 18: Final ranking of programs based on their priorities and alignment with ecotourism experts.*

After analysis, then, we find that QualityCoast best aligns with the expert literature on what constitutes truly sustainable tourism. Following QualityCoast is BioSphere, which is followed closely by GSTC. Green Globe and Blue Flag fall as the least comprehensive categories. These results pose an interesting question to GSTC as to how well its program will be received by others in the industry. It should be noted, however, that the QualityCoast criteria *did* incorporate GSTC criteria in this analysis, and that BioSphere is the first GSTC certified certifier for destinations. Thus, the top three programs are logically fitting. Further, Blue Flag is a domestic program and should not be considered a contender for the role of being the premier global certifier of sustainable destinations.

## VII. NON-INDUSTRY COMPARISON: FORESTRY

### A. Forest Certification

In refining information on sustainable destination tourism and providing recommendations on best practices, I wanted to add credibility to the study by utilizing an established, non-industry certification process that has seen success. The certification of sustainable forestry has been a relatively effective industry since its inception. There are lessons that destination tourism can learn from forestry in developing best practices moving forward.

Through the application of criteria and indicators, sustainable forest management has become highly relevant in environmental and social management processes. Sustainable forest management can be defined by the maintenance of forest resources and their role in global carbon cycles, forest ecosystem health, the productive functions of forests, both wood and non-wood, the maintenance and conservation of biological diversity, the maintenance and appropriate enhancement of protective functions in forest management, specifically in regards

to soil and water, and of other socio-economic functions and conditions (Wolfslehner, Vacik et al. 2005).

Within forest certification schemes there are more and more "non-state, market-driven governance structures" (van Kooten, Nelson et al. 2005) meant to address environmental issues. Of these, private certification is one of the most comprehensive methods. Certification of sustainable forestry aims to address environmental issues related to improper or unsustainable exploitation of forests through private regulation. This regulation is enforced by the market through incentives or the threat of boycotts by consumers (van Kooten, Nelson et al. 2005). To be successful, any sustainable forest management (SFM) certification scheme must be trusted by consumers, have criteria and standards that are consistent with extant definitions of SFM, must include effective monitoring, and must offer sufficient rewards as incentives to justify certification costs (van Kooten, Nelson et al. 2005). Certifiers of SFM practices give written assurances that products or processes conform to the requirements specified in forest management standards (Rametsteiner and Simula 2003). These aspects could serve as a basis as the destination certification industry moves forward.

### B. Certification Councils

Another lesson the tourism certification industry could learn from other schemes is the use of oversight councils. Stewardship systems, or councils, are multi-stakeholder partnerships that provide a forum in which different interest groups in targeted sectors can engage in a collaborative, "solution-oriented dialogue to their mutual advantage, and create market-based incentives [that] stimulate the production and consumption of certified sustainable products" (Woolford 1998). Stewardship councils, then, can accredit certification programs based on performance, and ensure the credibility of said certification by conducting inquiry through objective and transparent methods, according to standards and criteria that meet internationally accepted frameworks (Sanabria, Skinner et al. 2003). Examples of these include the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) as well as the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). This type of council could be beneficial in the tourism realm, as well. The GSTC is currently the

largest global body available to tourism operators that provides a means of sharing strategies and discussing opportunities and threats. This forum is helpful, but has not played a large enough role to resemble the success of the FSC or MSC.

The Forest Stewardship Council is a non-profit, international standards and accreditation organization that works toward the conservation and restoration of the world's working forests. Founded in 1993, the organization consists of environmental groups, foresters, timber experts, indigenous peoples, and community groups, all of whom work to promote more responsible forest management tactics. The FSC has over 500 members from more than 40 different countries, with participation from governments, industry, communities and environmental interests groups. As of 2003, "nearly 60 million acres of forestland in 32 countries across five continents [had] been certified to the FSC standards" (Sanabria, Skinner et al. 2003). Products bearing the FSC logo are readily available, lending to high levels of consumer awareness. Each certified product undergoes independent evaluation, adding incentive to the marketplace for better practices regarding forest stewardship. The FSC governance system consists of an elected board including representatives from industry, conservation groups, indigenous communities and others, from both northern and southern countries. The FSC, then, is a body to accredit certification programs. Examples of certifiers who partake in FSC accreditation include:

- Domestic:
    - American Forest Management
    - Bureau Veritas Certifiers
    - Rainforest Alliance Inc.
- International:
    - QMI-SAI Global
    - SQS – Swiss Association for Quality and Mgmt. Systems
    - TUV Rheinland (China) Ltd.

The certification teams are responsible for annual audits of certified sites, and these programs must ensure compliance with FSC standards and criteria. Only when the chain-of-custody, or the tracking of the timber from the forest to the product's shop, has been evaluated and certified, can a product be FSC accredited and thus can carry the FSC logo. FSC certification includes an environmental impact assessment, a management and maintenance plan for rare,

threatened and endangered species, as well as their habitats, the prohibition of the use of genetically modified organisms, control of the use of exotic species and the prohibition, with some exceptions, of the conversion of natural forests (Gullison 2003). There are ten general principles of forest management embedded within the FSC framework:

| Forest Stewardship Council's 10 Principles of Forest Management | |
|---|---|
| | |
| 1 | Forest management shall respect all applicable laws of the country in which it takes place, abide by all international treaties and agreements to which that country is a signatory, and comply with all FSC Principles and Criteria. |
| 2 | Long-term tenure and use rights to the land and forest resources shall be clearly defined, documented and legally established. |
| 3 | The legal and customary rights of indigenous peoples to own, use and manage their lands, territories, and resources shall be recognized and respected. |
| 4 | Forest management operations shall maintain or enhance the long-term social and economic well-being of forest workers and local communities. |
| 5 | Forest management operations shall encourage the efficient use of the forest's various products and services to ensure economic viability and a wide range of environmental and social benefits. |
| 6 | Forest management shall conserve biological diversity and its associated values, water resources, soils, and unique and fragile ecosystems and landscapes; by so doing, it shall maintain the ecological functions and the integrity of the forest. |
| 7 | A management plan appropriate to the scale and intensity of the operations shall be written, implemented, and kept up-to-date. The long-term objectives of management—and the means of achieving them—shall be clearly stated. |
| 8 | Monitoring appropriate to the scale and intensity of forest management shall be conducted to assess the condition of the forest, yields of forest products, chain of custody, management activities, and the social and environmental impacts of these activities. |
| 9 | Management activities in forests with high conservation value shall maintain or enhance the attributes that define such forests. Decisions regarding forests with high conservation value shall always be considered in the context of a precautionary approach. |
| 10 | Plantations shall be planned and managed in accordance with Principles and Criteria. Although plantations can provide an array of social and economic benefits and can contribute to satisfying the world's needs for forest products, they should complement the management of, reduce pressures on, and promote the restoration and conservation of natural forests. |

*Table 19: FSC principles of forest management as of 2012. Information courtesy of (FSC 2000).*

These principles resemble some of the sustainable destination certification standards, but are written more generally and with more flexibility. However, they do cover economic,

environmental, and social grounds, ensuring triple bottom line profitability via certification. The criteria for forest regimes is much more narrow in scope than that of tourist regimes, which is understandable, as the forestry sector is not nearly as expansive as the tourist sector regarding stakeholders or global reach. The criteria for forests is much more straightforward, and in language that is transferable to any forest around the world. In contrast, tourism criteria must be somewhat catered, or revised, to fit certain regions.

The FSC engages in global campaigns to promote the use of certified sustainable woods. Marketing techniques include retail postcards, brochures, press releases, and a web presence that grants the program exposure at the industry, consumer and retail levels (Sanabria, Skinner et al. 2003). Further, the FSC openly and transparently lists those programs that it has accredited, allowing timber companies with interest to easily research valid and credible certification options. This open source information sharing is a model tourism accreditors or certifiers should look for as they attempt to refine best practices for the industry.

There is evidence that FSC certification motivates, by its very nature, companies to improve their management practices so as to benefit biodiversity (Gullison 2003). Improvements motivated directly by FSC certification include:

- Canada:
    - A ban on cutting trees in riparian zones;
    - The development of specific management guidelines for sensitive habitats;
    - A ban on felling on steep slopes; and
    - Increased retention of trees until final harvests.
- United States:
    - The identification of special management areas;
    - Development of prescriptions for snag retention;
    - Deer population control;
    - Promotion of uneven-aged silviculture; and
    - Implementation of ecological reserve programs.
- Zimbabwe:
    - Improved planning and management of unplanted areas.
- Bolivia:
    - Hunting prohibition;
    - Development of management plans for Red Listed species.
- Mexico:

    - Prohibition of extraction of timber from riparian areas;
    - Mapping and management of ecologically sensitive areas; and
    - Prohibition of extraction of rare species.
- Sweden: Reduction of clear-cut areas (Gullison 2003).

One of the most obvious differences between the tourism industry and the forestry industry is that tourism, especially destination tourism, has "products" that are intangible and abstract, and there are many more stakeholders involved (Sanabria, Skinner et al. 2003). However, experts from the World Wildlife Fund, The Rainforest Alliance, the World Tourism Organization and Central American tourism boards agree that the success, thus far, of sustainable forestry certification and accreditation makes the development of "a similar model for tourism well worth considering" (Sanabria, Skinner et al. 2003).

It should be noted, though, that the detrimental effects of deforestation are still present. "In the forestry sector, deforestation has not been stopped simply by introducing certification and accreditation schemes" (Sanabria, Skinner et al. 2003). The FSC, for example, offers only one level of certification, which motivates the "good" companies to do better, but does not necessarily affect the "bad" companies, who see no incentive in the cost of participating. Following the LEED, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, example, which assigns stratified rewards based on level of standard adherence, the FSC could certify top performing forests with the greatest level of recognition, and medium performing forests with a lesser level of recognition. This could motivate medium performing forests to improve so as to graduate to a higher level of certification and recognition. This would need to be addressed in the tourism industry.

While the FSC was developed to encompass global sustainable forestry certification processes, there are domestic mechanisms as well. In Canada, the Forest Products Association requested that the Canadian Standards Association develop a forest certification plan based on the systems approach to SFM. The costs of this certification are quite high, and criteria are fairly stringent. In fact, this program is comparable to FSC, but lacks the same global recognition (van Kooten, Nelson et al. 2005). In the United States, the American Forest and Paper Association's

Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) works like the CSA certification, but neglects chain-of-custody certification. As the United States is the primary market for Canadian wood products, though, "about half of certified forestlands in Canada are SFI-certified" (van Kooten, Nelson et al. 2005). In Europe, various national forest landowner associations started the Pan-European Forest Certification (PEFC) in 1999. This program endorses national schemes that utilize third-party certification. The FSC remains the primary certification method in the tropics (van Kooten, Nelson et al. 2005).

### B.1. Forest Certification Programs SWOT

The following is an informal SWOT analysis, based on data from Fisher et al., 2005, comparing the above forest certification programs. The strengths and weaknesses of each program are compared, but opportunities and threats for the programs are omitted. As can be seen, the FSC is the most comprehensive system, which acts as a double-edged sword in the process. While the FSC covers the most territory in terms of criteria, it also prohibits smaller firms from applying, as the stringent criteria may be difficult to achieve; in short, some criteria aspects are exclusive. In contrast, North America's SFI has a relatively simple application process. PEFC is fortunate to have European backing, and thus widespread recognition in Europe.

| Major Forest Certification Programs: Strengths & Weaknesses | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Program** | **Geographic Distribution** | **Strengths** | **Weaknesses** |
| **FSC** | Global | Comprehensive scheme, rigorous attention paid to stakeholder concerns; | High level of requirements leads to limited access in practice. |
| | | Support form NGOs, trade and industry; | |
| | | Visibility in marketplace; | |
| | | Flexible performance standards. | |
| **PEFC** | Europe | Comprehensive approach toward all elements of forest management; | Regional application; |
| | | | Lacks NGO support; |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Established mechanisms for endorsement of national schemes; | Accreditation arrangements not yet completed; |
| | | Common trademark. | Low performance requirements by certain stakeholders. |
| **SFI** | North America | Multiple stakeholders; | Regional application; |
| | | Clear set of core and optional performance indicators; | |
| | | Easy application to local contexts; | |
| | | Clear assessment process; | Less comprehensive than FSC. |
| | | Requires continuous improvement over time; | |
| | | Independent governance. | |

*Table 20: Strengths and Weaknesses of global forest certification schemes. Adapted from (Fischer, Aguilar et al. 2005).*

### C. Motivation for Forest Certification

The success of forestry certification to date can also be attributed to the rationale for its inception. Most terrestrial biodiversity is found in the world's forests, half being located in tropical forests (Alfonso, Dallmeier et al. 2001). As the global deforestation rate is about ten million hectares per year (FAO 2000), there is a clear need to step up efforts and implement strategies to conserve forests. The market for forest certification is easily explained when one considers the tangible quality of the product, and the new emphasis being placed on supply chains for consumer products. "Firms and forest owners that export a high proportion of their wood products" are more likely to seek certification of management practices (van Kooten, Nelson et al. 2005). There is consumer recognition to be gained by participating in certification schemes. Outside of economic motivations, social capital has the greatest influence on a country or firm's decision to participate in certification. For example, in countries where citizens are able to participate and feel empowered enough to affect the political or industrial and economic system, there are more cases of certification (van Kooten, Nelson et al. 2005). Environmental justice within the forestry sector is a hotspot in the life cycle of any wood

product. Communities who rely on small-scale forestry usage must not be ignored in large-scale forestry use from corporations. Certification schemes that bolster the triple bottom line will likely be more accepted in the destination or region of forestry, as they offer a return on investment encompassing environmental, economic and social concerns. As a stand-alone effort, forest certification is also capable of "raising awareness and disseminating knowledge on a holistic SFM concept" (Rametsteiner and Simula 2003).

These are lessons learned in the forestry sector that can be easily applied in the tourism sector. In areas where local peoples are well represented, we will find more support for certification schemes. In destination criteria, this is especially important, as the community of the destination is what gives said destination its unique character. Any certification scheme must work to put cultural heritage and community protection at the forefront of its efforts if it expects continued support in the region of interest. Raising consumer awareness and sharing best practices via certification is another parallel that can be drawn between the two industries.

Forest certification deals with a multitude of stakeholders. Consequently, it must serve a variety of uses. For the timber industry, certification acts as an instrument for environmental marketing and market access; for consumers, it shares information on the products they purchase and their associated impacts; for forest owners and managers, certification serves to gain market advantage; for governments, certification acts as a soft policy tool to promote SFM; finally, for the environmental movement, forest certification influences how forests are managed and promotes biodiversity maintenance (Rametsteiner and Simula 2003). Destination tourism must address the needs of the local people; must ensure visitor satisfaction and education; must allow tour operators in the region of interest to gain a market advantage; must empower local authorities and train them to better manage their destination; and, finally, must ensure it is protecting its key asset— the destination itself.

## D. Issues Associated with Forest Certification

There are problems associated with forest certification and its further development, many of which find parallels in the destination tourism industry. These issues include technical ones, related to data availability, quality and reliability, as well as socio-political ones (Rametsteiner and Simula 2003). Less than four percent of the world's forests are certified, and of those, most certified forests are in the Northern Hemisphere (FAO 2000). Further, according to the FSC, the share of FSC certified plantations in developing countries is about 40% of the total FSC certified area. In South Africa, nearly 100% of certified forests are plantations (Rametsteiner and Simula 2003), which implies that less biodiversity is being protected, as plantations house lower levels of biodiversity than natural or semi-natural forests. These statistics seem to contradict the mission of forest certification. Lessons to be learned for the tourism industry are evident. There must be a stringent screening process that certifies destinations that *need* certification and promote unique benefits and conservation. The business model may depend upon more applicants, but the moral and fundamental mission of certification is to encourage sustainability and protection. These priorities cannot be lost in the GSTC's attempt to grow and stabilize.

The FSC in particular has been criticized for its methods. The Rainforest Foundation, a non-profit organization designed to conserve global rainforests, published a report citing the FSC as inadequate in certifying tropical timber, as the FSC's third-party audits were deficient and lacked "effective control mechanisms" (Counsell and Loraas 2002). Furthermore, nearly 50% of the area certified by the FSC in developing countries consists of plantations, or uniform, monocultures lacking genetic variability (FSC 2003, Gullison 2003). This statistic serves as a paradox to the original purpose of the FSC, which was to certify high diversity, tropical forests. Since timber that is sourced from plantations is marked with the same ecolabel as timber from natural growth forests, consumers have no means of distinguishing between the two. While plantations take some pressure off the commercial utilization of natural growth forests, they present many new problems. Often, natural forests are *replaced* with plantations to promote faster growth (Gulbrandsen 2004). Finally, there are barriers to entry in developing countries, for both forest and destination certification. The adoption of forest certification, specifically,

has been slow in developing countries for countless reasons. Developing countries often have diverse ecological and socioeconomic conditions, leading to uncertainties regarding land tenure, conflicts regarding resources, and a lack of human and financial resources. There is also often a lack of information, a lack of governmental support, inflexibility, incompatibility with national schemes, and, sometimes, perceived discrimination (Fischer, Aguilar et al. 2005).

## E. The Future of Forest Certification

For forest certification to be successful at an international level, "a common global verification and recognition system… would need, as a core element, an adequate basis for comparison of different standards against established quality criteria" (Rametsteiner and Simula 2001); a similar model is necessary for sustainable destination tourism. There is, fundamentally, a methodological problem in comparing various certification and accreditation schemes, as they generally act on different levels (national or global, for example) (Gulbrandsen 2004). The FSC, as a global certifying scheme, "aims to promote environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable management of forests" (Gulbrandsen 2004), by providing global performance standards via principles and criteria that touch on forest use rights, environmental impacts, management plans, monitoring and assessment methods, and the maintenance of forests and plantations (Gulbrandsen 2004). Forest certification under ISO does not warrant success, as ISO acts as a generic "checklist" of sorts that can be utilized in certification schemes. The methods of ISO have been criticized for lacking transparency and neglecting environmental group involvement (Gulbrandsen 2004). In seeking an international agreement on what qualifies as accurate forest certification, then, programs must work to find a common baseline, whether that's strictly using the FSC or creating a new program, to promote comparability of regions. While there may be commonalities between standards, there are various discrepancies and inconsistencies between regions that could result in an uneven playing field in the realm of international ecolabeling and trade (Wood 2000). We have seen these same obstacles, and opportunities, in the tourism sector. This report analyzes five destination certifiers. As destination certification is a relatively new field, we can expect more programs to arise in the future. Subjectivity is difficult to avoid in criteria evaluation and program success

measurements. If destination tourism can, at its very beginning, establish baseline criteria and an effective means of evaluation, it may have the chance to develop in a more successful manner than previous certification schemes, reducing confusion and increasing consumer awareness and appreciation.

## VIII. CONCLUSIONS OF PROGRAM ANALYSIS

Based on the evaluation of the criteria in each program as well as the study of forestry certification, I recommend the sustainable destination tourism industry utilize BioSphere as a launching point in the development of a best practices framework. The QualityCoast program and its criteria did rank as the most comprehensive according to my methodology, but the clarity, simplicity and transparency of the BioSphere standard would serve this fledgling industry well as it gains its footing. BioSphere's criteria presentation was the most straightforward and direct compared to other programs. The strong language of the program demanded compliance from the destination, which is key. The standard could be interpreted more as a checklist, making it significantly easier on the applicant to complete the process. Further, there was an emphasis placed on the responsibility of the tour operators in the region, which assigned accountability to the operators in the destination. Finally, BioSphere is the only body that GSTC has certified thus far. A combination of the two programs, as one body, would serve the destination tourism industry well. GSTC's long-term aim is to become **the** "certifier" of "certifiers," or an accreditation body for the industry. This goal is ideal, and would add great credibility to the industry. However, I would recommend that the GSTC focus more on short-term goals, refining its criteria and approach, and harnessing a stronger client base. If other programs can scale up to GSTC criteria, there may be an opportunity for GSTC to become the primary "certifier of certifiers." Based on individual criteria, QualityCoast is the most expansive, but is also overwhelming, limited to coastal bodies, and lacking experience in the global market outside of Europe. The standard could even be considered a bit redundant. Green Globe and Blue Flag also seem too limited to function as global entities that earn mass consumer recognition. Blue Flag, as the national program of Costa Rica, is too narrow in scope to be

considered a viable competitor. Green Globe does have experience, but I would pool the Green Globe program with the initial industry leaders who certified in the past. The criteria and mechanisms of Green Globe must be refined to better fit the needs of destinations today and in the future. However, the regional office model of Green Globe could very well become the norm in the sustainable destination tourism industry, and should be considered in the development of a best practices framework. With its UNEP WTO backing, GSTC has the ability to become an excellent resource for destinations in terms of sustainable destination consulting and verification. Aligning GSTC know-how with BioSphere direction seems to be the best option in moving forward with destination tourism.

## IX. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE INDUSTRY

Certification and accreditation should not be conceived as a panacea for the problems associated with traditional tourism. There are over 100 programs worldwide to certify tourism sustainability (Bien 2006), and while it is generally agreed upon that voluntary programs provide economic benefits to firms participating, assisting companies in moving beyond just compliance protection, it will be a challenge to promote one global entity to fit this role. As Mendoza and Prabhu (2003) state, "due to the intrinsically complex nature of assessing sustainability, it is difficult to develop a framework that has universal applicability."

Voluntary programs that allow for third-party auditing and verification can help to overcome the lack of credibility that is intrinsic to individual, self-reported or self-audited environmental efforts. By utilizing ecolabels or environmental certifications, voluntary initiatives are able to distinguish firms with truly superior environmental performance measures. Programs need to fulfill two requirements for this to happen: first, they must be controlled by an independent third-party. Second, based on performance-based standards, they must provide a clear indication of a firm's environmental performance (Rivera 2002). The GSTC, in the long term, could potentially fill this vacant role. Having an accreditation program in the sustainable destination tourism industry would add great credibility.

### A. Stakeholder Roles

Moving forward in the development of a best practices framework for this relatively new industry, stakeholders need to encourage sustainable behavior and sustainable purchasing patterns. Further, they need to operationalize the concept of international sustainability, and coordinate efforts to promote the recognition of sustainable practices. Certification programs as stakeholders seek to expose international tourism distribution channels, promote credibility and legitimacy, operate at economies of scale, simplify their message to consumers and ensure stable financing options. BioSphere has proven an example of this type of success, as the standard is backed by the Spanish Institute of Responsible Tourism, has been vetted by various UN agencies, and is certified by GSTC. Governmental stakeholders must gain international recognition, access to distribution channels, and methodologies that easily compare and asses the true value of various certification programs. Tour operators must ensure quality control regarding supply chain management, the reduction of consumer complaints, and continued health and safety (Sanabria, Skinner et al. 2003). All stakeholders, including local governments, NGOs, tour operators, local communities and visitors, then, have motives to promote the certification and accreditation processes.

### B. Existing Obstacles

Challenges to the feasibility of setting international tourism standards include the differences in priorities between northern and southern countries due to various economic, social, political and environmental situations; the difficulty in equal representation of each sector involved, which reduces legitimacy (Sanabria, Skinner et al. 2003); the difficulty in absorbing costs; and, finally, the lack of easy access to programs. Overcoming these obstacles will be a challenge, and will serve as a hindrance in the promotion of one, premier certification program working with sustainable destinations. As mentioned, some programs focus on coastal regions, others on community enhancement— finding a successful hybrid program that can be molded to fit regions of interest is no small task. The debate between sustainable development in the "north" and "south" resounds in nearly every international discussion on curbing destructive habits. Any international tourism scheme must realize the development needs of southern

destinations while fulfilling the environmental endeavors of the north, as the economic viability of the destination in question is a priority. If a developing country's economic needs are not met, funding for social and environmental works will be threatened. One solution the GSTC destination criteria serve is that the ownership is, indeed, international, with annual membership meetings rotating around the globe, following the example of Green Globe's regional office model. Limiting barriers to entry, while still ensuring that certification or accreditation programs are financially sustainable, requires finding a balance between meeting all stakeholder needs. There is a high level of contention in the industry regarding the value of certification, and if certification favors larger firms/destinations over smaller ones, which may lack the resources necessary for participation. This is especially challenging for sustainable tourism under the umbrella of the GSTC, which boasts a pillar of criteria concerning locally owned businesses and local community development. At least three consumer facing aspects continue to hinder the success of destination eco-certification:

1. Little awareness among tourists;
2. Consumer confusion due to multiple ecolabels; and
3. Questionable credibility due to the absence of internationally accepted frameworks against which to measure certification programs (Hansen 2007).

Support has been passive. There are a multitude of other concerns tourists realize prior to thinking about sustainability, including the destination itself, costs, flight and transportation logistics, safety and security issues, and political and social conditions in the region.

Any certification program has operational costs. "Virtually all sustainable certification programs… are underfinanced and lack financial stability and mechanisms that will allow for growth and long-term survival (Rome, Crabtree et al. 2006)." These are the costs and other realities that are associated with long-term operations, and they offer significant challenges. These include user's fees, which, to date, are not fully supporting any one tourism certification program; volunteers, which are generally required to make certification programs successful, both in their development and implementation; business capacity to pay, which might be too significant to allow small businesses or destinations to partake in said certification program;

insignificant marketing advantages; and auditing costs (Rome, Crabtree et al. 2006). Few tourism businesses have seed money that promotes financial sustainability in the long term, as many programs lack realistic business planning to support operational costs. Further, there is little to no funding for the marketing of tourism businesses, which results in a lack of effective consumer campaigns. This feeds into lower consumer recognition, and less certified products or destinations, all of which degrade the value and effectiveness of sustainable tourism principles.

## C. Strengths and Opportunities

There are also emerging solutions, however, to the struggle of financing sustainable destination certification. These include tangible benefits, such as increased exposure, preferential access or greater staff retention rates; credibility balancing, which can ensure fair comparability across the tourism sector; diversified income streams; eco-efficiency and real cost savings via better practices and green technologies; and government support, including rebate programs (Rome, Crabtree et al. 2006). Successful, non-tourism certification programs have several aspects in common. Most received significant start-up funding, were able to be financially sustainable outside of income derived from certification fees alone, boast marketing partnerships to enhance promotion, assist small and medium enterprises with their work, and collaborate across the market (Rome, Crabtree et al. 2006). The one factor that has assisted sustainable tourism businesses is their formation of alliances with academic institutions and government agencies. These partnerships can assist in fund transfers via grants, as well as knowledge dissemination and research (Rome, Crabtree et al. 2006). This is an area where the GSTC demonstrates a clear strength. The partnerships the GSTC has created allow for information sharing and provides a platform for certifiers to utilize.

### C.1. Opportunity Case Study

While a certification scheme may not result in direct and tangible benefits, it can serve as an educational tool that can get destinations started on their triple bottom line mission. By providing standards and criteria for destinations to adhere to, any organization can promote

stewardship habits to improve the environmental, economic and social wellbeing of the region in question.

As an example, National Geographic has a Geotourism program which aims to encourage tourism practices that promote and protect the true sense of the tourism place as a whole. This program highlights the unique assets of destinations, enhancing each region's identity, stewardship, and economic growth (Brouwer, Nystrom et al. 2012). The main purpose behind the program stemmed from the marketing of certain geotourism sites via detailed maps on a multimedia website. A circle of stakeholders, known as a "Geocouncil," is responsible for raising funds of $250,000 for the National Geographic Society and continued support of the project. This Geocouncil is also responsible for creating selection criteria used to review site nominations (Brouwer, Nystrom et al. 2012).

According to a study by Brouwer et al. (2012), 82% of sites surveyed by the authors indicated that sustainability measure implementation was *not* a result of the Geotourism program (Brouwer, Nystrom et al. 2012). The study further indicated that 74% of sites surveyed did increase their participation in stewardship activities due to the program (Brouwer, Nystrom et al. 2012). A final conclusion of the study revealed that very few sites indicated that the Geotourism project enhanced the number of visitors or the length of their stay. The greatest apparent benefits from the NGS Geotourism program lie in the educational component that seeks to share information with visitors. In its marketing endeavor, then, the Geotourism websites serve their primary function well.

### D. Moving forward

The Rainforest Alliance, in accordance with various government officials, tourism professionals, and other conservation, social and cultural advocacy groups, is currently exploring the development of a Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council to analyze verification and continuous improvement (Sanabria, Skinner et al. 2003). By verifying, via an independent body, the processes certification programs undergo, credibility can be built to ensure programs and

operations improve in the long term, raising standards and moving the tourism industry to a higher level of sustainability. The Rainforest Alliance study suggested that in order for this proposed STSC to be successful in its marketing of the message to consumers and stakeholders, it must maintain "low, subsidized prices in initial period[s] and high involvement with key certification bodies to reach economies of scale" (Sanabria, Skinner et al. 2003). At the 2012 GSTC Annual Membership Meeting, it was openly discussed that fees would, indeed, be raised. However, to date only one certification body has been certified (BioSphere) due to the financial barriers to entry. The study further revealed the obstacles associated with branding. It was suggested that any stewardship firm avoid using a logo that competes with the certifying body's logo, as this would create confusion for consumers. GSTC is currently in works to develop ways to align their "infinite footprint" logo with certifying body logos. Moving in this direction may be detrimental to the success of the GSTC logo or the certifying body logo, though, and it remains to be seen how the graphic display of certification and accreditation for destinations will be handled. Wherever brand recognition is achieved on the widest scale will we find a successful certification or accreditation body (Sanabria, Skinner et al. 2003).

Sustainable tourism certification programs, regardless of differences in criteria, operations or management, face similar challenges, the most pressing issue being "the lack of robust and regular sources of income to effectively deliver and market relevant, appropriate and credible programs" (Rome, Crabtree et al. 2006). According to Rome, Crabtree et al. (2006), in order to secure funding and ensure better financial health, tourism programs can utilize the following steps:

| Steps Tourism Programs can take to Ensure Financial Health |
|---|
| |
| Work to develop a business plan for the program that includes a financial structure, financing plan, and monitoring plan; |
| Involve key stakeholders such as government, businesses, NGOs, host communities and academic institutions; |
| Utilize government assistance via financial incentives (tax mechanisms and credits); |
| Work to receive funds from grants and donations; |
| Secure in-kind support from organizations and individuals who can offer development, design, auditing, training, analysis and monitoring, and promotional support; |
| Offer a range of products and services, and charge accordingly; |
| Attract small and medium enterprises; |
| Develop partnerships for outreach and marketing; and |
| Monitor and evaluate all progress. |

*Table 21: Listing of mechanisms programs can undertake to work toward more financially stable models. Adapted from (Rome, Crabtree et al. 2006).*

Using these starting points, programs can begin to refine their financial models to promote a more sustainable business plan that relieves some financial pressure off destinations themselves. Certification is expensive as a stand-alone aspect of the industry; keeping a program up and running is also a major concern that could potentially be combatted by the recommendations.

## E. The GSTC as an Accreditation Body

Accreditation can provide certification programs with the legitimacy and the credibility they need to differentiate themselves throughout the industry (Poser 2009). There is also a market demand for accreditation. The Rainforest Alliance conducted an accreditation feasibility study, which determined the willingness to pay for accreditation in the tourism certification industry. The results are listed for the following firms and the roles they might play:

- Intergovernmental organizations and donor institutions could contribute to the costs of housing the accreditation council, subsidizing operations;
- Governments could contribute toward marketing, technical assistance, and other operational costs;

- Tourism certification programs could absorb a portion of the cost of accreditation, as it would improve their programs and make them internationally marketable;
- The tourism industry could absorb partial costs; and
- Tourists could pay a higher price for accredited destinations; value-added tax (Sanabria, Skinner et al. 2003).

These potential solutions should be kept in mind as the GSTC embarks upon its mission to graduate up to being an accreditation body. As a certification body, currently, the organization recognizes that there are countless pros, as well as cons, in developing a fully integrated sustainable tourism accreditation system. Implementing an accreditation program for sustainable destination tourism certifiers can lead to strengths, such as internationally recognized standards that make programs more comparable, and the creation of a stronger brand that has a real chance to make a difference in the ecotourism realm. However, the accreditation model also houses weaknesses. For example, such a process might force smaller, regional labels to comply with external and more stringent criteria that they may not be able to compete with. Further, most ecolabels are subsidized by regional governments, and the willingness to fund them may change once the government feels they have lost control to an accreditation party. Finally, accreditation is yet another layer of verification processes, adding unwelcome expenses.

Keeping these in mind, the GSTC must work to make their certification scheme affordable and globally applicable, first, prior to pushing accreditation. We know that "overall, certification strengthens the ecotourism industry, but the lack of an international accreditation body and the existence of weak certification programs poses a significant threat to ecotourism certification" (Hansen 2007). If the GSTC can take on the role of being *the* premier global agency to certify and accredit truly sustainable tourism, in destinations, it will have an undeniable edge in the market, and create an offering able to bolster the success of any destination. One, centralized system has clear benefits over the presence of multiple labels. Toth et al. (2000) suggests that decentralized systems, in comparison, take much longer to organize and implement. When one parent organization is held directly responsible for all levels

of the certification process, less checks and balances and less administrative costs are required. Further, a centralized system allows for specialists, rather than *all* stakeholders, to be held responsible for preparing standards for consideration and ratification. Developing a comprehensive worldwide certification system is also much more effective than attempting to harmonize the standards and procedures of multiple organizations within a mutual recognition agreement. One program also lends itself to wider recognition and success, which feeds directly into marketing and promotional benefits (Toth 2000). International and global standards have the widest acceptance and recognition, as we saw with the case of the FSC. This is a role the GSTC is clearly well positioned for. International standards organizations such as GSTC are preferable because if a standard is international, it could be inferred that the organization does not discriminate among various member territories.

The success of the GSTC as an accreditation body rests on the market potential for accreditation, which is reliant on certifiers. Some of the largest obstacles for certifiers looking to be accredited include high costs, unfair competition and the formation of oligopolies, delays with implementation, the imposition of new management systems, a loss of individuality, consumer confusion and neglect of local realities. The largest benefits from accreditation, according to certifiers, include marketing assistance, brand development, competitive advantage, access to new markets, added credibility, and support. The greatest benefits are improvements in the industry, and knowledge exchange. If the industry wishes to improve, it must openly share best practices and make universal strides. The key factors certifiers believe accreditation bodies should take into account in order to be successful include representing diverse sectors, having multiple stakeholders from multiple realms, implementing educational programs, identifying tangible benefits, working in total transparency, and, most importantly, utilizing a rotating headquarters model, which could assist in the "north" vs. "south" debate and promote equality for all regions involved (Sanabria, Skinner et al. 2003). These generalized guidelines should be recommended to the GSTC as the organization works on its business model in attempts to become an accreditation body. The philosophy behind the accreditation process, though, aligns well with the philosophy behind the certification process.

### E.1 GSTC Future Endeavors

As we have seen with the case of BioSphere becoming the first GSTC certified certifier for destination tourism, the current framework GSTC has is experiencing success. As a certifier, GSTC is well positioned to become a leader in the industry. Shifting toward a role as certifier, exclusively, though, may not be the best option for the organization. The GSTC is already a certifier for hotels and tour operators. The other programs analyzed have served their functions well, if not on a global, mass certification level that allows consumer recognition.

It remains to be seen, however, how successful the destination tourism market will be. To date, conventional, non-destination tourism certification has not gained the traction that other certification schemes have (especially compared to SFM certification). If the GSTC is concerned with the viability of their destination tourism scheme, one feasible option for them to look into is sustainable destination consulting and verification for large events, such as Olympic bids or large international conferences. There is more pressure on specific events and their organizers, who must vet different locations, to be sustainable. The market for Olympic bids is especially interesting, as hosting Olympic events brings exposure and revenue to any given location. Partaking in such an endeavor could certainly boost GSTC recognition, and gain them credibility in the marketplace for future certification attempts.

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# X. APPENDICES

## Appendix I: Input for GSTC Destination Criteria

Courtesy of GSTC Technical Director, Amos Bien:

**Destination standards and guidelines 2011 (input for GSTC Criteria for Destinations)**

| Standard or guideline | Application |
|---|---|
| 1. EarthCheck Community Standard. Note: The original Green Globe 21 destination program was designed in 1997 to extend corporate improvement and Agenda 21 principles to communities. Contact: Stewart Moore (Stewart.Moore@ec3global.com). Pilot programs were initiated in the following regions: Cumbria, UK; Vilamoura, Portugal; Cape Met, South Africa; Kaikoura, New Zealand; Ko Somui, Thailand; Douglas Shire, Australia; Huatalco, Mexico; and Bournemouth, UK | 1. Community indicators |
| 2. Audubon Sustainable Communities (http://scp.audubooninternational.org). Contact: Suzi Zakowski at Audubon International (518-767-9051 x 124, szakowski@audubooninternational.org) | 2. Community indicators |
| 3. European Commission Tourism Sustainability Group's Indicator System for 'Sustainable Tourism Destinations' (http://destinet.eu/tools/measurement_instruments/draft_indicators_15th_Nov_t2009.doc). November 15, 2009 version replaced with May 2011 version. Contact: Judith Estol (Judith.ESTOL-I-PEREZ@ec.europa.eu) | 3. Destination sustainability indicator set |
| 4. Sustainable Travel International's Greening Municipalities Standard | 4. Community and sustainable tourism criteria and indicators for certification |
| 5. UNWTO Indicators of Sustainable Development for Tourism Destinations (http://mekongtourism.org/website/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2011/02/Indicators-of-Sustainable-Development-for-Tourism-Destinations-A-Guide-Book-by-UNWTO.pdf) | 5. Sustainable tourism goals and indicators |
| 6. UNESCO, Biosphere Responsible Tourism and Instituto de Turismo Responsible Biosphere Certification/Responsible Tourism System (STR) (http://www.biospheretourism.com/en-US/contenido.aspx?seccion=4&padre=4) | 6. Destination sustainability criteria and indicators for certification |
| 7. National Geographic Geotourism Principles (www.changemakers.com/system/files/Geotourism Principles REV.pdf) | 7. Sustainable tourism principles |
| 8. IDB Tourism Sustainability Scorecard (www.iadb.org/tourismscorecard/index.cfm) | 8. Project level screen with cumulative impact section |
| 9. Global City Indicators (www.cityindicators.org) | 9. Community indicators |
| 10. Enterprise Green Communities (www.greencommunitiesonline.org/tools/criteria/EGC2011Criteria_final.pdf) | 10. Community indicators |
| 11. Pan Parks (www.panparks.org/learn/apply-for-verification/principles-and-criteria) | 11. Standard for park protection including tourism |
| 12. Aalborg Commitments (www.aalborgplus10.dk/default.aspx?m=2&i=307) | 12. Community indicators and standards |
| 13. NRDC Smarter Cities (http://smartercities.nrdc.org/rankings/scoring-criteria) | 13. Community indicators and standards |
| 14. CED System of Measures for Excellence in Destinations (www.ced.travel/en/our-services/service/smed-brochure.html) | 14. Essentially a program audit tool with unique measures for each destination |
| 15. Sustainable Tourism Zone of the Caribbean Destination Evaluation Form | 15. Goals and indicators for destination sustainability and certification |
| 16. Blue Flag (www.blueflag.org/Menu/Criteria) | 16. Goals, indicators, and standards for beach certification |
| 17. Fairtrade Foundation (www.fairtrade.org.uk/get_involved/campaigns/fairtrade_towns/about_fairtrade_towns.aspx) | 17. Commitment process for fair trade (leads to certification) |
| 18. TransFair Canada (http://fairtrade.ca/fr/node/106) | 18. Commitment process to free trade |
| 19. Zagreb Declaration for Healthy Cities (www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/environmental-health/urban-health/publications/2009/zagreb-declaration-for-healthy-cities) | 19. Commitment to make cities more healthy (statement) |
| 20. UN Habitat The Sustainable Cities Program-Asia | 20. UN Program to make cities more |

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|---|---|
| (www.fukuoka.unhabitat.org/programmes/detail04_03_en.html) | sustainable |
| 21. ASEAN Environmentally Sustainable Cities (www.aseansec.org/framework.htm) | 21. Menu of actions to clean urban air land and water |
| 22. Sustainable Regional Tourism Destinations: Best practice for management, development and marketing (www.sustainabletourismonline.com/awms/Upload/Resource/bookshop/80099%20Sustainable%20Regional%20Tourism%20Destinations%20Project%20WEB.pdf) | 22. Compilation of case studies of Australian best practice re sustainable tourism |
| 23. National Geographic Destination Scorecard (e.g., http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable/pdf/geotourism_national_parks_scorecard.pdf) | 23. National Geographic results of a Delphi for National Park issues |
| 24. SustainLane City Rankings (www.sustainlane.com/us-city-rankings/articles/the-sustainlane-methodology/JXICFDNN7CF9H7MD7P8USMW9Y78J) | 24. Essentially a liveability index for US cities – based on weighted criteria for e.g., water quality, lifestyle, etc |
| 25. Destination Competitiveness: Determinants and Indicators (http://www.hospitality.ucf.edu/faculty/raywang/documents/HFT6938/Sustainability%20and%20Competitiveness/Destination%20Competitiveness.pdf) | 25. Paper on things it might be useful to measure about destination competitiveness |
| 26. Ethical Traveler's The World's Best Ethical Destinations (www.ethicaltraveler.org/explore/the-worlds-best-ethical-destinations-2011/) | 26. Comparative index re selected social and environmental criteria to rank countries |
| 27. WTTC Tourism for Tomorrow Destination Stewardship Award (www.tourismfortomorrow.com/bin/doc/original_doc_file/rules_and_guidelines_2011_fina.doc) | 27. Application for award – subjective essay to win-substantive criteria not evident |
| 28. Costa Rica's *Bandera Azul Ecológica* (BAE) program. Contact: Alberto López (alopezch@ict.go.cr, tel +506 2220-3559) www.visitcostarica.com/ict/paginas/mapas/areasurf.asp, www.comex.go.cr/Bazulecologica/Paginas/default.aspx) | 28. Certification for beaches, communities, schools, and private nature reserves – has some objective criteria |
| 29. ICOMOS Charters (www.international.icomos.org/charters.htm) | 29. Principles and commitments to built heritage preservation (implies some key values to protect but no specific indicator measures) |
| 30. Coastal the draft "Blue Communities" standard. Contact: Dr. David W. Randle (wavesofchange4@me.com) | 30. Essentially a program to get communities to buy into water saving with some measures of progress |
| 31. Sustainable Tourism Destinations Magic Number Assessment. Contact: Alexandra Crineanu (a.crineanu@europarc.org) from The EUROPARC Federation | 31. Process to charter parks – essentially a code of practice |
| 32. IRT Standard for Destinations | 32. Destination level standard is actually list of criteria for destinations not dissimilar to most other lists – all criteria are in our list |
| 33. IFC's Tourism Diagnostic Tool | 33. Process to evaluate readiness for tourism investment and state of the sector |
| 34. Twining-Ward, L. (2002) *Monitoring Sustainable Tourism Development: A Comprehensive, Stakeholder-driven, Adaptive Approach*, Ph.D. Dissertation, School of Management Studies for the Service Sector, University of Surrey. | 34. Specific application and procedure to get to a long list and short list of useful indicators Samoa case. |
| 35. Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Management Toolkit | 35. Applicable to businesses only |
| 36. The Utah Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) | 36. Holistic collection of indicators designed to measure societal sustainability |
| 37. Italian Touring Club's Orange Flag Program (Bandiere arancioni) | 37. Goals, indicators, and standards for communities |

## Appendix II: GSTC Criteria in Full

| GSTC Draft Destination Criteria as of February 10th, 2013 | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Category A: Demonstrate Sustainable Destination Management** | | |
| **#** | **Title** | **Description** |
| A1 | Tourism strategy | The destination has established and is implementing a multi-year tourism strategy that is publicly available, is suited to its scale, that considers environmental, economic, social, cultural heritage, quality, health, and safety issues, and was developed with public participation. |
| A2 | Tourism management organization | The destination has an effective organization, department, group, or committee responsible for a coordinated approach to sustainable tourism. This group has defined responsibilities for the management of environmental, economic, social, and cultural heritage issues. |
| A3 | Monitoring | The destination has a system to monitor, publicly report, and respond to environmental, economic, social, and cultural heritage issues. |
| A4 | Climate change adaptation | The destination has a system to identify challenges and opportunities associated with climate change. This system encourages climate change adaptation strategies for development, siting, design, and management of tourism facilities. The system contributes to the sustainability and resilience of the destination. |
| A5 | Inventory of attraction sites | The destination has an up-to-date, publicly available inventory of its key tourism assets and attractions including natural, historical, archaeological, religious, spiritual, and cultural sites. |
| A6 | Planning regulations | The destination has planning guidelines, regulations, and policies that integrate sustainable land use, design, construction, and demolition. The regulations protect natural and cultural heritage, are publicly communicated, and are enforced. |
| A7 | Access for all | All tourist sites and facilities, including those of natural, cultural and historic importance, are accessible to all, including persons with disabilities and others who have specific access requirements. Where such sites and facilities are not immediately accessible, access should be afforded through the design and implementation of solutions that take into account both the integrity of the site and such reasonable accommodations for persons with access requirements as can be achieved. |
| A8 | Property acquisitions | Laws and regulations regarding property acquisitions exist, are enforced, consider communal and indigenous rights, and do not authorize resettlement without informed consent and/or full compensation. |

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| A9 | Tourist satisfaction | The destination has a system to monitor, to publicly report and, if necessary, to take action to improve tourist satisfaction. |
| A10 | Sustainability standards | The destination has a system to promote sustainability standards consistent with the GSTC criteria for tourism enterprises. |
| A11 | Safety and security | The destination has a system to prevent and respond to tourism-related crime, safety, and health hazards. |
| A12 | Crisis and emergency preparedness and response | The destination has a crisis and emergency response plan that is appropriate to the destination. Key elements are communicated to residents, tourists, and tourism-related enterprises. The plan establishes procedures and provides resources and training. |
| A13 | Promotion | Promotion is accurate with regard to the destination and its products, services, and sustainability claims. The promotional messages are authentic and respectful. |

| **Category B: Maximize Social and Economic Benefits to the Host Community and Minimize Negative Impacts** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **#** | **Title** | **Description** |
| B1 | Economic monitoring | The direct and indirect economic contribution of tourism to the destination's economy is regularly monitored. These results are publicly reported. |
| B2 | Local career opportunities | The destination provides equal employment and training opportunities for local residents. The opportunities are open to women, youth, minorities, and other vulnerable populations. |
| B3 | Stakeholder participation | The destination has a system that enables stakeholders to participate in tourism-related planning and decision making on an ongoing basis. |
| B4 | Local community opinion | Residents' aspirations, concerns, and satisfaction with tourism are regularly monitored, recorded and publicly reported. Care is taken to ensure that key stakeholders are included and that responsive action is taken where needed. |
| B5 | Local access | The destination protects, monitors, and safeguards local resident access to natural, historical, archaeological, religious, spiritual, and cultural sites. |
| B6 | Tourism awareness | The destination provides regular programs to residents to enhance their understanding of tourism opportunities, tourism challenges, and the importance of sustainability. |
| B7 | Preventing exploitation | The destination has a defined system and established practices to prevent commercial, sexual, or any other form of exploitation and harassment, particularly of children, adolescents, women, and minorities. |
| B8 | Support for community | The destination has a system to enable tourism-related enterprises to support community and development initiatives. |

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| B9 | Supporting local entrepreneurs and fair trade | The destination has a system that supports local entrepreneurs and promotes fair trade principles. |
| **Category C: Maximize Benefits to Communities, Visitors and Cultural Heritage, and Minimize Negative Impacts** | | |
| **#** | **Title** | **Description** |
| C1 | Attraction protection | The destination has a policy and system to conserve key natural, historical, archaeological, religious, spiritual, and cultural sites, including scenic, cultural, and wild landscapes. |
| C2 | Visitor management | The destination has a visitor management system for attraction sites that includes measures to preserve and protect key natural and cultural assets. |
| C3 | Visitor behavior | The destination has publicly available guidelines for visitor behavior that are designed to minimize adverse impacts |
| C4 | Cultural heritage protection | Historical and archaeological artifacts are not illegally sold, traded or displayed. |
| C5 | Site interpretation | Interpretive information is provided at key natural, historical, archaeological, religious, spiritual, and cultural sites. The information is communicated in relevant languages. |
| C6 | Intellectual property | The destination has a system to ensure respect for the tangible and intangible intellectual property of individuals and communities. |
| C7 | Visitor contributions | The destination has a system that encourages visitors to volunteer or contribute to community development, cultural heritage, and biodiversity conservation. |
| **Category D: Maximize Benefits to the Environment and Minimize Negative Impacts** | | |
| **#** | **Title** | **Description** |
| D1 | Environmental risks | The destination has identified key environmental risks and has a system in place to address these. |
| D2 | Protection of sensitive environments | The destination has a system to monitor the impact of tourism on sensitive environments and protect habitats and species. |
| D3 | Wildlife protection | The destination has a system to ensure compliance with local, national, and international standards for the harvest or capture, display, and sale of wildlife (including both plants and animals). |
| D4 | Greenhouse gas emissions | The destination has a system to encourage tourism-related enterprises and services to measure, monitor, report, and mitigate their greenhouse gas emissions. |
| D5 | Energy conservation | The destination has a system to promote energy conservation, measure energy consumption, and reduce reliance on fossil fuels. The destination encourages tourism-related enterprises to conserve energy and use renewable energy technologies. |

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| D6 | Water management | The destination has a system to conserve and manage water usage. The destination encourages tourism-related enterprises to manage and conserve water. |
| D7 | Water security | The destination has a system to monitor its water resources to ensure that use by tourism is compatible with the water requirements of the destination community. |
| D8 | Water quality | The destination has a system to monitor drinking and recreational water quality. The monitoring results are publicly available. |
| D9 | Wastewater | The destination has clear and enforced guidelines in place for the siting, maintenance and testing of discharge from septic tanks and wastewater treatment systems. |
| D10 | Solid waste reduction | The destination has a system to ensure solid waste is reduced, reused, and recycled. The destination encourages tourism-related enterprises to adopt waste reduction strategies. |
| D11 | Light and noise pollution | The destination has guidelines and regulations to minimize noise, light, and visual pollution. The destination encourages tourism-related enterprises to follow these guidelines and regulations. |
| D12 | Low impact transport | The destination has a system to increase the use of low-impact transport, including public transport, in the destination. |

## Appendix III: QualityCoast Criteria in Full

Note: Those criteria which incorporate GSTC criteria have been updated to reflect the newest version of GSTC criteria.

| EUCC / QualityCoast Destination Criteria | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Category A: Nature** | | |
| **#** | **Title** | **Description** |
| 1 | Nature & Conservation | Presence of nature in the territory and international and national designations of terrestrial and marine (12 nm zone) nature. |
| 1.1 | | Nature area as a % of total land surface of destination. |
| 1.2 | | Legally protected nature area (including geological features) as a % of the total land surface of the destination. |
| 1.3 | | Names and type of designation of the protected nature areas (e.g. Biosphere Reserve, UNESCO World Heritage, Natura 2000, National Park, Nature Reserve, Geopark). |
| 1.4 | | Marine protected area (incl. under Natura 2000) as a % of the marine waters (12 nautical miles zone). |
| 1.5 | | Main measures & actions conducted by the applicant(s) in 2012 for the conservation, restoration and management of nature (including geological features). |
| 1.6 | | Which invasive alien species pose a problem for nature conservation? |
| 1.7 | | What measures do you take to avoid or control invasive alien species? |
| 1.8 | | Are you responsible for the nature areas referred to in 1.1 and 1.3? If not, who is? |
| 2 | Access, Information & Education | Information and facilities that promote interaction with natural values in the territory, including nature education. |
| 2.1 | | Is it information and interpretation of the natural surroundings provided to visitors in various languages? (GSTC/C5). |
| 2.2 | | What kind of organized/guided nature excursions and tours (including commercial marine discovery tours) are offered to tourists? In what languages? |
| 2.3 | | Name and location of nature oriented visitor and environmental education center(s) in the territory. |
| 2.4 | | List of special facilities for disabled to and in natural areas. |
| 2.5 | | Have guidelines been developed for interpretation and codes of behavior for visits to ecologically sensitive sites, in order to minimize visitor impact and maximize enjoyment? (GSTC/C3). |

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| 2.6 | | Are visitors informed how to behave appropriately while visiting natural areas? (GSTC/C5) |
| 2.7 | | Opportunities for hiking in the destination. |
| 2.8 | | Opportunities for biking in the destination. |
| 2.9 | | Opportunities for snorkeling to observe marine wildlife. |
| 3 | Green Policies | The extent to which natural values are enhanced by the local authority and the private sector, throughout the destination. |
| 3.1 | | To what extent have natural values been of major importance in recent policy decisions, e.g. in spatial planning and project development? |
| 3.2 | | Which natural areas or beaches are sometimes used by off-road motorized vehicles. |
| 3.3 | | Do you have planning requirements and laws related to planning, siting, design, construction, materials, renovation, demolition and impacts assessment to protect natural and cultural heritage? (GSTC/A6). |
| 3.4 | | Do you have a policy and program to conserve key cultural and natural tourist attractions to ensure that landscapes, ecosystems and habitats are identified? Threats to them are identified and assessed, and access and use is managed to be sustainable. (GSTC/C1). |
| 3.5 | | Does the destination facilitate tourist contributions to community development and biodiversity conservation? (Including supporting protected areas and areas of high cultural and biodiversity value) (GSTC/C7). |
| 3.6 | | Is there a system in place to measure the impact of tourism and to manage intensive tourism impacts on landscapes and ecosystems (including sensitive and threatened wildlife and habitats)? (GSTC/D2). |
| 3.7 | | Do you require from tourism enterprises to have an environmental management plan which includes vegetation, runoff, avoidance of the introduction of invasive species? (GSTC/D1). |
| 3.8 | | Does the destination have a program in place to comply with international standards regarding the protection, harvesting, and captivity of wildlife (fauna and flora, habitats) and the management of impacts of tourism on wildlife? (GSTC/D3). |
| 3.9 | | Are one of the following items caught from the sea and/or locally traded: whale, dolphin, tuna, shark, shark fins, seahorse, other rare fish? |
| 3.10 | | Are local markets or shops selling types of items regulated by the CITES convention (e.g. protected wildlife, corals, cacti, orchids, shells)? |
| 4 | Open Landscapes | Presence of open landscapes (including forests) and open sea. |

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| 4.1 | | % of non built–up areas (C+D in the land use table,1st sheet of this form) of the land area. |
| 4.2 | | % of the coastal strip (500 m to 1 km from high water mark, please specify) free from buildings, incl. on the beach. |
| 4.3 | | Is a policy in place to protect and restore open landscapes and to avoid landscape degradation? |
| 4.4 | | Names of landscapes with earth (geological and geomorphological) heritage value. If possible, estimate the % of the total destination area. |
| 4.5 | | Location and extension (ha) of human-made structures in the marine domain (wind parks, oil and gas platforms, aquaculture) that are visible from the shore. |
| **Category B: Environment** | | |
| **#** | **Title** | **Description** |
| 5 | Environmental Management | Policy to address the key environmental challenges and practice to reduce environmental impacts. |
| 5.1 | | What are the key environmental challenges for the destination? (GSTC/D1). |
| 5.2 | | Do you have adequate policies and processes in place to address these key environmental challenges? (GSTC/D1). |
| 5.3 | | Do you implement practices to minimize noise? Do you require tourism enterprises to adhere to these practices? (GSTC/D11). |
| 5.4 | | What is the citizens experience of noise from the nearest recreational airfield? If there is an airfield in or near the territory, please indicate location on the map. |
| 5.5 | | What is the citizens' experience of noise from the nearest airport? |
| 5.6 | | List of noisy events in 2012 (e.g. involving cars, motors, powerboats, aircraft; not music concerts) and other sources of noise, e.g. racing or outdoor karting circuits. |
| 5.7 | | Do you implement practices to minimize impacts from ozone-depleting compounds and other air contaminants? Do you require tourism enterprises to adhere to these practices? (GSTC/D11). |
| 5.8 | | Do you implement practices to minimize any negative impacts of light to birds, insects and e.g. sea turtles? Do you require tourism enterprises to adhere to these practices? (GSTC/D11). |
| 6 | Blue Flags & Beaches | Sustainable management of beaches, waterfronts and marinas. |
| 6.1 | | Number of beaches awarded with Blue Flag in 2012 (please indicate location on the map). |
| 6.2 | | Approximate % of total length of urban beaches awarded with Blue Flag. |

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| 6.3 | | Is a system in place to monitor bathing water quality at public beaches? (GSTC/D8). |
| 6.4 | | % of bathing water points within the destination with the status “Excellent” according to the EEA / EU Bathing Water Directive (most recent year) (please indicate location on the map). |
| 6.5 | | % of bathing water points in the destination with the status “Good” according to the EEA / EU Bathing Water Directive (most recent year). |
| 6.6 | | % of marinas with Blue Flag, please specify which have a Blue Flag (most recent year). |
| 6.7 | | List of special facilities for disabled to and on public beaches. |
| 6.8 | | Approximate % of your urban beaches where waste separation facilities are available. |
| 6.9 | | Frequency of beach cleaning during high-season. |
| 7 | Water Management | Availability of water, water efficiency, waste water treatment, and reuse of water. |
| 7.1 | | Estimated % of population connected to waste water treatment plants - National average. |
| 7.2 | | Approximate % of population of the destination connected to waste water treatment plants - local figure for the destination. |
| 7.3 | | Do you implement practices to minimize water pollution from waste water, runoff, landfill erosion, harmful substances, water and soil contaminants? Please give an example (GSTC/D9). |
| 7.4 | | Is there a program to monitor and conserve water use at the destination level and to encourage tourism enterprises monitor and conserve water? (GSTC/D7). |
| 7.5 | | List of water saving measures (including for industry, agriculture and golf) and measure to reduce and prevent spillage. |
| 7.6 | | Is the water supply for tourism used at the destination sustainable ecologically and does not adversely affect community uses, taking into account the overall cumulative impacts or all local surface and groundwater use? (GSTC/D6). |
| 7.7 | | Is a system in place to monitor water quality in aquatic areas and sources of drinking water? (GSTC/D8). |
| 7.8 | | Which golf courses in the territory are irrigated with ground water or drinking water? |
| 7.9 | | Which golf courses in the territory are irrigated with surface water or gray / re-used water? |
| 8 | Sustainable Transportation | Availability and promotion of sustainable transport modes. |

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| 8.1 | | Is there a policy and plan in place to increase the use of low-impact transport, including public transport, in the destination? (GSTC/D12). |
| 8.2 | | Main measures in 2012 to realize the above policy. |
| 8.3 | | Are there any car free zones in the urban areas? What is its total size? |
| 9 | Waste & Recycling | Policies and structures for waste collection, recycling and re-use. |
| 9.1 | | Estimated % of municipal solid waste which is recycled and/or composted - National average. |
| 9.2 | | Approximate % of municipal solid waste of the destination which is recycled and/or composted - local figure for the destination. |
| 9.3 | | Are systems in place to ensure wastes from tourism sites and enterprises are properly treated and reused or released safely, with no adverse effects to the local population and the environment? (GSTC/D10). |
| 9.4 | | Are systems in place to ensure waste from tourism sources is minimized, reused or recycled? Any residual solid waste disposal from tourism and supporting community is sustainable, with quantitative goals to minimize waste that is not reused or recycled (GSTC/D10). |
| 9.5 | | Is information about social responsible behavior and proper waste separation made available to the citizens and tourists (in various languages)? |
| 10 | Energy & Climate Mitigation | Efforts aimed at reducing greenhouse gases and promoting renewable energy. |
| 10.1 | | Do you have a program to promote energy conservation, measure and reduce reliance on fossil fuels and encourage tourism enterprises to monitor and conserve energy and use renewable energy sources? (GSTC/D5). |
| 10.2 | | Renewable energy as a % of the total energy use of the public buildings and services (paid by municipality) in the destination. |
| 10.3 | | Main measures to promote renewable energies use and application of solar collectors and photovoltaic panels in 2012. |
| 10.4 | | Main measures to support awareness campaigns and actions for energy saving. |
| 10.5 | | Do you have a program in place to assist tourism operators to measure and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and encourage the tourism sector to participate in local carbon offset and abatement initiatives (GSTC/D4). |
| 11 | Climate Change Adaptation | Efforts in place to adapt/protect against climate change. |

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| 11.1 | | Do you have a program to identify risks associated with climate change and to encourage adaptation in development, siting, design and management that will contribute to the sustainability and robustness of the destination in the face of potential changes? (GSTC/A4). |
| 11.2 | | Programs, policies or plans for coastal resilience, protection against climate change and risk of coastal erosion, flooding and saline infiltration of coastal aquifers. |
| 11.3 | | Tourism infrastructure and establishments located in zones vulnerable to flooding, e.g. restaurants on beaches. |
| 11.4 | | Total coastline length with seawalls and hard coastal revetments protecting the coast against marine flooding and erosion: total number of kilometers. |
| 11.5 | | Coastline length with seawalls and hard coastal revetments, compared to the total coastline length of the destination (%.) |
| 11.6 | | Total coastline length with groynes and other structures against beach erosion: number of kilometers. |
| 11.7 | | Coastline length with groynes and other structures against beach erosion, compared to the total coastline length of the destination (%). |
| **Category C: Identity & Culture** | | |
| **#** | **Title** | **Description** |
| 12 | Cultural Heritage | Presence and level of protection of elements that are connected to the history of the destination. |
| 12.1 | | List of most important historical and archeological sites that are really interesting for tourists. |
| 12.2 | | Lists of museums that are really interesting for tourists. |
| 12.3 | | List of annual festivals and public events that have their roots in local culture or history. |
| 12.4 | | Have guidelines been developed for interpretation and codes of behavior for visits to culturally sensitive sites, in order to minimize visitor impact and maximize enjoyment? (GSTC/C3). |
| 12.5 | | Do you ensure that historical and archaeological artifacts are not sold, traded or displayed, except as permitted by local to international law? (GSTC/C4). |
| 12.6 | | Is information and interpretation of local culture and cultural heritage provided to visitors in various languages? How? (GSTC/C5). |
| 12.7 | | Are visitors informed how to behave appropriately while visiting living cultures, cultural heritage sites and communities? How? (GSTC/C5). |
| 13 | Territory & Tradition | Presence of valuable landscapes that are man-made or man formed and the traditional use of the territory. |

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| 13.1 | | List of cultural landscapes in the territory, that have been maintained in this state since 1940 or earlier, including: ancient or traditional (small scale) cultivation patterns (vineyards, orchards, olive groves, horticulture, meadows etc.) and archeological-historical landscapes. Please indicate the approximate extension (in hectares). |
| 13.2 | | Please indicate the approximate total surface of cultural landscape as specified under 13.1 as a % of the total land surface of the destination. |
| 13.3 | | Are policies and plans in place to maintain the specific values of these cultural landscapes? (indicate if at local, regional or national level). |
| 13.4 | | Are policies or plans in place promoting non-intensive or organic agriculture and sustainable/traditional use of the territory (indicate if at local, regional or national level). |
| 14 | Local Identity | Presence and attention for distinct physical and/or social aspects that are considered typical for the destination. |
| 14.1 | | Approximate % of all urban/built-up areas that still has a historical architecture (from before 1940) or has been rebuilt in a similar style, scale or pattern. |
| 14.2 | | List of local products that are typical for the destination or for the region. |
| 14.3 | | List of local products certification schemes and certified local products incl. sustainable fishery products. |
| 14.4 | | List of traditional local food and crafts markets (indicate their frequency). |
| 14.5 | | Estimated % of the local restaurants promoting and serving traditional local or regional dishes. |
| **Category D: Tourism & Business** | | |
| **#** | **Title** | **Description** |
| 15 | Destination Management | Sustainable tourism and diversity of opportunities for leisure and recreation and how environmentally friendly these are. |
| 15.1 | | Are you implementing a multi-year sustainable tourism strategy that is publicly available, and that considers environmental, socio-cultural, quality, health and safety issues, including cumulative impacts (GSTC/A1). |
| 15.2 | | Do you have a functioning organization responsible for a coordinated approach to sustainable tourism with involvement by the tourism sector, local government and community stakeholders with assigned responsibilities to accountable parties for managing environmental, socio-cultural, and sustainable tourism issues? (GSTC/A2). |
| 15.3 | | Do you have a program to monitor, publicly report and support response to the cumulative environmental, socio-cultural, and sustainable tourism issues at the destination |

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| | | level? (GSTC/A3). |
| 15.4 | | Do you have programs designed to reduce the effects of seasonal variability of tourism where appropriate, while recognizing the ecological and cultural impacts of such programs? (GSTC/A2). |
| 15.5 | | Is there an ongoing process to identify the destination's key tourism assets and attractions, as well as the key potential impacts (positive and negative) on them? (GSTC/A5). |
| 15.6 | | Which key tourist attraction sites with infrastructure and facilities in the destination (incl. accommodations, food & beverage facilities, as well as means of transportation to the site) are accessible to persons with special needs? Here, all legal requirements regarding access are met (GSTC/A7). |
| 15.7 | | Do you have a program to develop and promote sustainable products and services compatible with the destination's ecological, social, and cultural circumstances? (GSTC/A13). |
| 15.8 | | Are promotional materials accurate and complete with regard to the destination and its products and services, including sustainability claims? They do not promise more than is being delivered (GSTC/A13). |
| 15.9 | | Is the economic contribution of tourism to the destination’s economy monitored and publicly reported? (GSTC/B1). |
| 15.10 | | Do you have a visitor management plan for key attraction sites including measures to preserve and protect key natural and cultural assets? (GSTC/C2). |
| 15.11 | | Do you promote your destination as a green, clean or sustainable destination, referring to awards or certifications in this field? |
| 16 | Business Involvement | The extent to which the tourism business community is involved in efforts for sustainable development. |
| 16.1 | | Has the tourism sector in the destination implemented specific sustainable tourism policies or credible certification programs and quality assurance programs? (GSTC/A10). |
| 16.2 | | Is there a program in place to support local small entrepreneurs and to promote local sustainable products and services and fair-trade principles that are based on the area’s nature, history and culture (including food and beverages, crafts, performance arts, agricultural products, etc.)? (GSTC/B9). |

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| 16.3 | | Does the tourism sector provide fair and equal employment opportunities and training for women, youth, minorities, and other vulnerable populations in tourism, including paying a fair wage and providing training in management positions, while restraining child labor? (GSTC/B2). |
| 16.4 | | Are programs in place to support economic sustainability in small and medium sized tourism-related enterprises? (GSTC/B8). |
| 16.5 | | Estimate the extent to which tourism enterprises (as a % of all tourism enterprises) are involved in sustainable development measures such as : |
| 16.5.1 | | Participation in destination based eco-friendly vacation products or packages. |
| 16.5.2 | | Independent certification for environmental/sustainability and/or applying corporate social responsibility policies. |
| 16.5.3 | | Waste management. |
| 16.5.4 | | Participation in energy saving actions: low energy systems (e.g. LEDs for lighting) and a policy on terrace outdoor heaters. |
| 16.5.5 | | Generation and/or use of renewable energy. |
| 16.5.6 | | Sourcing a minimum of 25% of food and drink produced locally / regionally. |
| 16.6 | | Number of accommodations awarded with a Green Key and/or Travelife label (specify names of accommodations) in relation to the total number of accommodation in the destination. |
| 16.7 | | Restaurants that have adopted a sustainability policy on seafood, e.g. re: shark fin soup, tuna, swordfish; preferring MSC-certified fish; indicate names of these restaurants; and the % compared to all restaurants in the destination. |
| 17 | Hospitality & Satisfaction | The appreciation level of residents and tourists and the efforts of the territory to be a good host. |
| 17.1 | | Assessment of satisfaction of the destination as reported in tourism evaluation websites: |
| 17.1.1 | | Zoover destination rate for your destination (www.zoover.com): number of reviews. |
| 17.1.2 | | Any other national tourism evaluation website for destinations number of reviews. |
| 17.2 | | Do you have a program and policy to measure and report on tourist satisfaction, perceptions, behaviors and concerns? (GSTC/A9). |
| 17.3 | | Are communities' aspirations, concerns, and satisfaction with tourism regularly monitored and publicly reported by the destination? (GSTC/B4). |

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| 17.4 | | Do you regularly offer tourism awareness programs for residents of the destination? (GSTC/B6). |
| **Category E: Host Community & Safety** | | |
| **#** | **Title** | **Description** |
| 18 | Freedom & Justice | Protection of citizens and visitors against human rights violations and corruption. |
| 18.1 | | Do you contribute to the protection and preservation of the intellectual property rights of local communities and of property rights to local historical, archaeological, culturally and spiritually important properties and sites? (GSTC/C6). |
| 18.2 | | Do you ensure that any property acquisitions are legal, comply with local communal and indigenous rights, including their free, prior and informed consent, and not requiring involuntary resettlement? (GSTC/A8). |
| 18.3 | | Do you protect local access to natural, historical, archaeological, religious, spiritual and cultural sites and attractions, including land and aquatic resource use, rights-of-way, transport and housing? (GSTC/B5). |
| 18.4 | | How does the situation in the destination compare with the national situation re: the relevant issues below (a to p)? |
| 18.4.a | | a. Government use of torture: independent perception of the national situation. |
| 18.4.b | | b. Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation: independent perception of the national situation. |
| 18.4.c | | c. Freedom of speech: independent perception of the national situation. |
| 18.4.d | | d. Freedom of press: independent perception of the national situation. |
| 18.4.e | | e. Freedom of religion: independent perception of the national situation. |
| 18.4.f | | f. Political corruption: independent perception of the national situation. |
| 18.4.g | | g. Organized crime: independent perception of the national situation. |
| 18.4.h | | h. The national army is involved in civil war or occupies foreign territory, not sanctioned by the UN. |
| 18.4.i | | i. Gender discrimination, sexual violence and harassment against women: independent perception of the national situation. |
| 18.4.j | | j. Female genital mutilation: independent perception of the national situation. |
| 18.4.k | | k. Forced marriage: independent perception of the national situation. |
| 18.4.l | | l. Dowry murder: independent perception of the national situation. |

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| 18.4.m | | m. Honor killing: independent perception of the national situation. |
| 18.4.n | | n. Human trafficking and exploitation (e.g. for sexual purposes): independent perception of the national situation. |
| 18.4.o | | o. Child labor: independent perception of the national situation. |
| 18.4.p | | p. Discrimination against specific minorities or populations. |
| 18.5 | | Do you implement a policy against commercial, sexual or any other form of exploitation and harassment, particularly of children, adolescents, women and minorities? (GSTC/B7). |
| 18.6 | | Do you implement a policy to improve the situation in any other of the above relevant issues (a to p). |
| 19 | Community Participation | Level of community participation and stakeholder involvement in management and decision-making. |
| 19.1 | | Do you have a program to encourage and facilitate public participation in tourism planning and decision-making on an ongoing basis? (GSTC/B3). |
| 19.2 | | Are tourism sector and all stakeholders actively involved in developing and supporting adequate community and infrastructure development initiatives? (GSTC/B8). |
| 19.3 | | Presence of a discussion platform on sustainable tourism, involving local politicians, business sector, NGOs a.o. stakeholders and citizens (e.g. QualityCoast Committee). |
| 19.4 | | To what extent did you, in 2012, support citizen and NGO participation in local policies, incl. specification of local government budget to support civil society involvement. |
| 19.5 | | Presence of a community front office for environmental and other local issues and web forum for citizens. |
| 19.6 | | To what extent is the tourism business sector locally / regionally owned and managed (in contrast to owned by foreign investors from elsewhere)? |
| 19.7 | | Approximate % of unemployment among residents during low tourism season (average in period 2010-12). |
| 19.8 | | Approximate % of unemployment among residents during high tourism season (average 2010-12). |
| 20 | Health & Safety | Presence of a healthy, safe and secure environment and of preventative measures. |
| 20.1 | | Does the destination have a program in place to combat tourism-related crime, safety and health hazards? (GSTC/A11). |
| 20.2 | | Have you established and provided resources for a crisis preparedness plan that is available to tourists and tourism enterprises and organizations, and the local communities? |

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| | | (GSTC/A12). |
| 20.3 | | Total number of major crimes (i.e. homicides, assaults, robbery, sexual crimes, etc.) in the last year. |
| 20.4 | | Air pollution: number of respiratory problems attributable to air pollution (smog), per year. |
| 20.5 | | Air pollution: number of days/year exceeding the standard limits for health safety. |
| 20.6 | | Number of reported accidents and deaths associated to beach tourism (e.g. drownings, accidents related to cliff instability and aquatic activities)? |
| 20.7 | | Drinking water quality: reported cases of waterborne disease (number/year). |
| 20.8 | | In case of busy beaches and lake shores: presence of exclusive use zoning for potentially dangerous activities (jet skis, speed boats, kite surf etc.); clarify how effective control systems work. |

## Appendix IV: BioSphere Destination Criteria in Full

Courtesy of ITR Project and Communications Manager, Patricio A. Diaz de Losada.

| BioSphere Destination Criteria | | |
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| **Category 1: Instruments for a Responsible Tourism Policy** | | |
| **#** | **Title** | **Description** |
| 1.1 | Responsible Tourism Policy | The destination should have a Responsible Tourism Policy that is documented and translated into customary languages, and formally approved by the highest responsible authority and communicated in an on-going manner to citizens and tourist. This policy shall contain the commitments made with regard to sustainable tourism, and specifically: Adoption of the principles of the World Charter for Sustainable Tourism; Commitment to prevent negative impacts of policies and activities, and to maximize positive impacts; Commitment to on-going improvement in all areas of sustainability: Socio-cultural, economic and environmental; and commitment to the satisfaction of tourists and local population. |
| 1.2 | Planning, Control & Monitoring | |
| 1.2.1 | | The existence of planning mechanisms that consider the impact of tourism in all areas of sustainability must be ensured in order to guarantee the respect towards the destination's capability form an ecological, social, cultural and economic point of view, thus avoiding the damage of resources, a negative impact on the wellbeing of the local community and the reduction of the tourist experience quality. |
| 1.2.2 | | The destination shall prepare, document and implement an Action Plan based on its Responsible Tourism Policy to set forth the specific priorities and objectives that should be met in order to fulfill the commitments it has undertaken. This plan shall be structured with the following contents: A prioritized list of objectives to be achieved, specifying the person responsible for achieving each point;<br>A general description of the measures designed to achieve these objectives and the deadlines and means for implementing the measures. The total timeline shall not exceed three years, by which time the Plan must have been reviewed and updated, setting new targets for improvement; A definition of the follow-up planned for these objectives, to monitor compliance and to take action if necessary. |
| 1.2.3 | | The indicators needed to evaluate the situation of the destination in all areas of tourism sustainability shall be developed. Starting form their initial values, one shall be able to prove the constant monitoring and the improvement achieved in all areas of sustainability. |

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| 1.3 | Legal and Regulatory Requirements | Destination's responsible players shall know the legislation and regulation that must or may be applied and developed, in order to be able to fulfill the requirements established by higher instances in terms of sustainability, as well as to facilitate the implementation of the responsibility guidelines needed in the destination, consistent to its commitment to tourism sustainability. |
| 1.4 | Responsible Marketing | All promotional messages shall contain accurate, clear and precise information on the commitment made by the destination with tourism sustainability. Therefore, information provided through different channels shall not create expectation that cannot be met or ambiguously describe the different aspects of this commitment and the destination's sustainable offer. |
| 1.5 | Corrective Actions | There shall be an effective and consistent procedure to implement actions when necessary to correct deviations from the commitments made with regard to the principles of sustainability, the objectives that have been set and the requirements of this standard. |
| **Category 2: Management of the cultural variable** | | |
| **#** | **Title** | **Description** |
| 2.1 | Preservation and Improvement of Cultural Heritage | |
| 2.1.1 | | There must be an integral assessment strategy for cultural heritage, seeking the enforcement of the destination's cultural identity opposite to the excessive polarization on specific resources, integrated into the tourist development policy. |
| 2.1.2 | | Urban plans should support conservation and valuation of the destination's cultural identity and resources from the point of view of land-use planning, aesthetics and traditional architecture |
| 2.1.3 | | There must be mechanisms for the proper management of those aspects related to the destination's image and heritage, such as outdoor advertising, conservation of facades, street furniture and other elements. |
| 2.1.4 | | There must be an inventory and an action plan for the conservation of the historical and artistic heritage. |
| 2.1.5 | | There must be an action plan for the conservation and valuation of intangible cultural heritage: Gastronomy, local arts, local festivals, folklore, etc. |
| 2.2 | Visitor's Knowledge and Integration in the Local Community | |
| 2.2.1 | | The tourist information provided shall seek to genuinely convey the destination's cultural identity, avoiding the use of empty words. |

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| 2.2.2 | | Visitors should be provided with enough information about the tangible and intangible cultural resources in a complete and comprehensive way. |
| 2.2.3 | | Visitors should receive information about the local traditions in order to facilitate their knowledge and involvement, for example: Dress codes, patterns of behavior, tipping, languages, etc. |
| **Category 3: Management of the Socio-Economic Variable** | | |
| **#** | **Title** | **Description** |
| 3.1 | Participation and Involvement of the Local Community | |
| 3.1.1 | | Initiatives must be created and developed with the participation of citizens and interested parties in the decision-making process in terms of tourist |
| 3.1.2 | | Training, information and awareness plans on sustainable tourism must be promoted, for both entrepreneurs and citizens. |
| 3.1.3 | | The access to tourist resources and complementary infrastructures must be granted for the local community. |
| 3.1.4 | | Mechanisms must be developed for the analysis of the resident's satisfaction regarding tourism. |
| 3.2 | Accessible Tourism | |
| 3.2.1 | | A programmed should be developed to reduce architectural barriers in the itineraries and tourist resources in order to allow accessibility to people with disabilities. |
| 3.2.2 | | Tourist information services must be designed according to universal principles of accessibility, being able to assist people with motor, hearing, visual or other types of disabilities. |
| 3.3 | Socio-Economic Impact of Tourism | |
| 3.3.1 | | In order to maximize the capitalization of the tourist infrastructures, there must be a promotion of incentive mechanisms for the local ownership. |
| 3.3.2 | | There must be a promotion of enough training centers in terms of tourism in order to maximize the management and local employment possibilities. |
| 3.3.3 | | The hiring of local residents in the tourism sector should be encouraged. |
| 3.3.4 | | There should be mechanisms to facilitate access of tourism businesses to new technologies and therefore maximize their efficiency: Training, subsidies, etc. |
| 3.3.5 | | The adoption of measures to facilitate the reconciliation of work and personal life in the sector should be encouraged. |
| 3.3.6 | | The reduction of seasonality should be encouraged through the diversification of activities and development of other incentive factors for visitors. |
| **Category 4: Management of the Environmental Variable** | | |
| **#** | **Title** | **Description** |
| 4.1 | Landscape Protection | |

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| 4.1.1 | | There must be criteria for the integration of buildings and infrastructures into the landscape in order to minimize the impact on the natural environment. |
| 4.1.2 | | In natural areas, landscape integration criteria should be considered when choosing signposting elements or furniture. |
| 4.2 | Natural Resources | |
| 4.2.1 | | There must be inventories for natural resources (flora, fauna, etc.) and environmental sensitivity areas. |
| 4.2.2 | | Mechanisms must be developed to achieve a responsible management of natural areas and their resources. |
| 4.2.3 | | The responsible tourist exploitation of natural resources must be promoted through adequate management plans. |
| 4.3 | Sustainable Transport | |
| 4.3.1 | | Mechanisms must me developed in order to ensure that tourists have access to a quality public transport system. |
| 4.3.2 | | Public low-emission transport must be promoted. |
| 4.3.3 | | Trips on foot or by bike should be encouraged by providing the appropriate means: Bike lanes, bike rentals, pedestrian routs, etc. |
| 4.4 | Atmosphere | |
| 4.4.1 | | A healthy air quality shall be ensured, based on existing regulations or, failing these, on international recommendations. |
| 4.4.2 | | The information available on atmospheric pollution levels must be easily accessible. |
| 4.4.3 | | A clean atmosphere, free from bad smells must be ensured. |
| 4.4.4 | | The emission of greenhouse gases in the destination must be controlled and monitored, applying measures in order to achieve climate neutrality. |
| 4.5 | Noise | |
| 4.5.1 | | The existent noise pollution must be determined, establishing the most affected areas. |
| 4.5.2 | | Noise levels should be generally minimized through the implementation of actions based on the applicable law or, failing this, on international standards. |
| 4.5.3 | | Actions plans must be implemented for those areas exposed to noise. These action plans shall be based on the applicable law or, failing this, on international guidelines. |
| 4.5.4 | | Residents and visitors shall be involved in actions regarding noise minimization. |
| 4.6 | Energy Management | |
| 4.6.1 | | Awareness plans about energy savings must be developed for residents and visitors. |
| 4.6.2 | | Renewable energy programs must be promoted. |
| 4.6.3 | | There must be practices and mechanisms for the optimization of energy consumption in public infrastructures (buildings, lightning, traffic lights) and private infrastructures. |

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| 4.6.4 | | The destination's energy supply shall never be compromised by the needs of tourist infrastructures. |
| 4.7 | Water Management | |
| 4.7.1 | | Awareness plans about water savings must be developed for residents and visitors. |
| 4.7.2 | | Saving programs for the water consumption will be developed at a public and private level. |
| 4.7.3 | | A proper wastewater management shall be ensured in order to ensure the quality of receiving waters. |
| 4.7.4 | | Programs will be developed for the reuse of treated water, so that the use of wastewater for irrigation will be increased. In areas where this is not possible, the consumption will be at least minimized through efficient irrigation systems. |
| 4.7.5 | | The destination's water supply shall never be compromised by tourist infrastructures. |
| 4.7.6 | | The quality of receiving waters shall never be affected by tourist infrastructures. |
| 4.8 | Waste Management | |
| 4.8.1 | | Awareness plans about waste minimization and management will be developed for residents and visitors. |
| 4.8.2 | | The destination must count on a selective collection system for urban waste, which must be accessible for residents and tourists. |
| 4.8.3 | | There must be a recycling center for the collection of special waste, accessible for residents and tourists. |
| 4.8.4 | | There shall only exists properly managed landfills, avoiding the proliferation of uncontrolled disposal locations. |
| 4.8.5 | | Programs for the reduction of waste shall be developed at a public and private level. |
| 4.9 | Light Pollution | |
| 4.9.1 | | There must be guidelines for the minimization of pollution coming from the night lightning of a city in order to protect the night landscape, the visibility of the night sky and the sensitive fauna. |
| 4.9.2 | | There must be guidelines aimed at residents and visitors in order for them to collaborate. |
| **Category 5: Responsible Behavior in the Value Map** | | |
| **#** | **Title** | **Description** |
| 5.1 | Responsible Behavior of Suppliers | Motivational programs will be developed for providers of products and services towards the adoption of best practices in sustainability, in line with the principles of this standard, including the promotion of local and genuine products, and generally discouraging consumption of sensitive or protected resources, foreign products and high-impact activities. |
| 5.2 | Responsible behavior of Tourist Establishments | The destination should encourage the adoption of responsible tourism practices by agents of the local tourism offer, consistent with the content of this standard, either by their own guidelines or the stimulus to assume external sustainable certification systems. |

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| 5.3 | Responsible Behavior of the Tourist Administration | The administrations managing the tourist activity must assume patterns of responsible behavior in all areas of sustainability, in line with the principles of this standard, including responsible purchasing and subcontracting policies. |
| **Category 6: Client Satisfaction and Involvement in the System** | | |
| **#** | **Title** | **Description** |
| 6.1 | Safety Management | |
| 6.1.1 | | The necessary human resources should be available in order to ensure the safety and, when necessary, care of visitors and their belongings. |
| 6.1.2 | | The existence of emergency plans for abnormal situations must be ensured and these shall include the protection of tourists. |
| 6.2 | Service Quality Management | |
| 6.2.1 | | Mechanisms shall be developed to ensure controlled access of tourists to the tourist resources (natural areas, cultural sites, recreational resources ...) in terms of their sensitivity, to facilitate their integration and knowledge, as well as the conservation of these. |
| 6.2.2 | | There must be qualified and professional staff in order to provide a quality service to the visitor regarding visitor assistance and the discovery of the destination. |
| 6.2.3 | | Measures shall be developed to improve the quality of tourist services at all levels. |
| 6.2.4 | | Mechanisms shall be developed in order to measure the tourist's satisfaction, including the management of their complaints and suggestions. |
| 6.2.5 | | Visitors shall be informed about the possibility of sending their suggestions and complaints to the Responsible Tourism Institute, providing them with the necessary information to do so. |
| 6.3 | Information and Visitor's Involvement | |
| 6.3.1 | | Information and awareness strategies about the destination shall be developed for the visitor in order to achieve his/her collaboration, appreciation and respect. Acting guidelines about brochures, telematics support, etc. shall be specified, and they shall be focused on a real and responsible enjoyment of the destination. |
| 6.3.2 | | Visitors shall be informed about the responsible measures adopted by the destination regarding energy and water savings, waste management, noise reduction, conservation, etc., in order to count on their appreciation and support, through notices that fulfill the following characteristics: Notices shall be located, at least, in places with the greatest flows of tourists; They shall be written in the commonest language of its visitors, including the local language; They shall clearly request visitor's collaboration, explaining the reasons why such behavior is requested and describing recommended behavior. |
| 6.3.3 | | Tourist promotions shall be developed in order to increase the visitor's knowledge of the values, customs, traditions, etc. of the local community. |

## Appendix V: Green Globe Criteria in Full

| Green Globe Destination Criteria | | | |
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| **Category A: Sustainable Management** | | | |
| **#** | **Title** | **Criteria** | **Description** |
| A.1 | Implement a Sustainability Management System | The Business has implemented a long-term sustainability management system that is suitable to its reality and scale, and that considers environmental, sociocultural, quality, health, and safety issues. | The first step toward embracing sustainable business practices entails creating a sustainability management system (SMS) that 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. |
| A.2 | Legal Compliance | The Business is in compliance with all relevant international or local legislation and regulations (including, among others, health, safety, labor, and environmental aspects). | International and local legislation and regulation address many of the social and environmental negative practices associated with tourism operations. These include major labor conventions of the International Labor Organization (ILO) covering freedom of association, no child labor, no forced or bonded labor, no discrimination, health and safety, work hours and minimum pay. This criteria is not an alternative to government regulation and national labor legislation, rather it is a complementary instrument that fills voids in the application, adherence and enforcement of critical social and environmental protections. |
| A.3 | Employee Training | All personnel receive periodic training regarding their role in the management of environmental, sociocultural, health, and safety practices. | The success of the business' sustainability management system depends on the effective integration and internalization of the system by employees at all levels. A defined training program for all employees on the SMS aspects will enable employees to understand the business' goals and objectives, why they're important, and how they can positively contribute to the business' efforts in each of their individual roles. |

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| A.4 | Customer Satisfaction | Customer satisfaction is measured and corrective action taken where appropriate. | The customer is the central focus of the tourism experience. Their satisfaction should be eagerly sought in order to foment continued travel to a destination through return visits and word of mouth communication. Additionally, the customer provides a unique vantage point on the business' operations that the management and business employees may not be able to provide. The business tools used to monitor customers' satisfaction with internal operations, relations with the community and other stakeholders, and the effectiveness of sustainable programs enable the business to make improvements on a regular basis. |
| A.5 | Accuracy of Promotional Materials | Promotional materials are accurate and complete and do not promise more than can be delivered by the business. | Ethics in marketing dictate that all promotional tools should provide an honest representation of what services the business provides. In addition, they reflect the responsible and sustainable strategies that the business undertakes. Accurate information improves customer satisfaction by ensuring that expectations can be met. |
| A.6 | Local Zoning, Design and Construction | | |
| A.6.1 | Design and Construction – Compliance with Legal Requirements | Comply with local land acquisition and land rights legislation and local zoning and protected or heritage area requirements. | Land used for buildings and operations should be acquired respecting traditional rights and local legislation. Local zoning defines how activities can be carried out in a community reflecting the community's social, economic, and environmental needs, balanced with long-term sustainability. Alteration of protected and designated heritage sites is regulated through local zoning and legal requirements (local, national, and international conventions). Tourism operations must consider these zoning and area requirements to optimize community development plans, while minimizing impact. |

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| A.6.2 - 3 | Sustainable Design and Construction of Buildings and Infrastructure – New and Existing Buildings | Use locally appropriate principles of sustainable construction and design while respecting the natural and cultural surroundings. | Local environmentally and economically sound design and development techniques should be integrated into the design and construction phase of the tourism operation for minimizing natural resource impacts as well as consideration of the potential socio-cultural and economic benefits. This includes:<br>- Locally appropriate tools and materials that minimize environmental impact<br>- Locally appropriate technologies that is used in buildings and for construction, including indigenous materials and technologies<br>- Development of local capacity – education, knowledge and experience – to use the materials, technologies, tools for sustainable construction<br>- Local involvement of all concerned stakeholders in the process of adoption and implementation of sustainable construction principles.<br>Enhancing the aesthetic, cultural, historic, and natural assets of a destination as well as ensuring that built structures and operations do not negatively impact adjoining lands and people is also an important factor in sustainable design. Businesses must also ensure universal access to its facilities and services to people with special needs. |
| A.7 | Interpretation | Information about and interpretation of the natural surroundings, local culture, and cultural heritage is provided to customers, as well as explaining appropriate behavior while visiting natural areas, living cultures, and cultural heritage sites. | Interpretation of the natural and cultural environment is not only important for educating visitors and protecting heritage, but a key factor for a high quality tourist experience marked by a high level of satisfaction (criterion A.4 addresses the need to measure it). Providing information to the customer to educate and inform about the surroundings is a key factor for tourism businesses. |
| A.8 | Communications Strategy | The Business has implemented a comprehensive communications strategy to inform visitors and guests on its sustainable policies, programs and initiatives. | A well written Communications Strategy will clearly communicate organizational goals and objectives as they relate to the business' environmental, socio-cultural, and economic performance. It is important that all stakeholders including management, employees, customers and the local community understand the business' goals and objectives, why they're important, and how they can positively contribute to the business' efforts in each of their individual roles. |

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| A.9 | Health & Safety | The Business ensures compliance with all relevant health and safety measures to ensure the well-being of its customers, staff and local community. | International and local legislation and regulation address many of the health and safety obligations associated with tourism operations. This criteria is not an alternative to government regulation and national health and safety legislation, rather it is a complementary instrument that fills voids in the application, adherence and enforcement of critical health and safety protections. The health and wellbeing of all stakeholders is a prime responsibility of all tourism businesses. |
| **Category B: Social/Economic** | | | |
| **#** | **Title** | **Criteria** | **Description** |
| B.1 | Community Development | The business actively supports initiatives for social and infrastructure community development including, among others, education, health, and sanitation. | Linkages to the local community should exceed employment and economic growth through the development of the business. Opportunities should be undertaken on a regular basis to provide resources, education, training, financial assistance, or in-kind support for initiatives in accordance with community priorities to improve the local livelihoods, thereby engendering community support for operations and creating a better customer experience. |
| B.2 | Local Employment | Local residents are employed, including in management positions. Training is offered as necessary. | Local hiring and training is the key to maximizing community economic benefit and fostering community involvement and integration with the business. In addition, the tourism operation establishes a long-term stable labor relationship while enhancing the local authentic character of the tourism service and product. Providing jobs at all levels of management ensures that the local population does not feel disenfranchised and can provide a sufficient dialogue between the business' ownership and the community. The business should support programs – internal or external – that will allow employees to develop beneficial skills for upward mobility. |

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| B.3 | Fair Trade | Local and fair-trade services and goods are purchased by the business, where available. | Using goods and services produced locally or with “fair-trade” principles have numerous social, economic and environmental benefits:<br>- Supports local businesses and provide jobs;<br>- Higher percentage of the price paid is transferred directly to the provider of the goods and services which is then re-circulated several times in the community;<br>- Reduced ecological footprint due to fewer greenhouse gases being burned in the transportation of the goods;<br>- Fair prices and wages are received by the producers;<br>- The visitor experience is enhanced; and,<br>- Local goods and services can substantially lower costs with fewer middlemen and transportation costs. |
| B.4 | Support Local Entrepreneurs | The business offers the means for local small entrepreneurs to develop and sell sustainable products that are based on the area’s nature, history, and culture (including food and drink, crafts, performance arts, agricultural products, etc.). | Programs that expose customers to the local culture and encourage the purchase of local crafts, goods and services help increase positive economic benefits to the community while engendering a sense of pride in cultural heritage. Working with local small entrepreneurs can help diversify the product, thus increasing spending and length of stay. In some cases this can include designating a specific area on the premises for use by local entrepreneurs or promoting local cultural activities that are open to the public. |
| B.5 | Respect Local Communities | A code of conduct for activities in local communities has been developed, with the consent of and in collaboration with the community. | Respecting and preserving the traditions and property of local populations is an important aspect in terms of today’s globalization. Codes of conduct for tourism activities that are developed in concert with local communities, respecting the principle of prior informed consent and the right of communities to say “no” to tourism activities is key to the long term viability and sustainability of the community and its environment. Tourism businesses should develop a plan to maintain regular and open communication with community officials to create a cooperative agreement that accounts for tourist interaction with the peoples and passage through the local communities. |

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| B.6 | Exploitation | The business has implemented a policy against commercial exploitation, particularly of children and adolescents, including sexual exploitation. | Children, adolescents, women and minorities are particularly vulnerable to abusive labor practices, including sexual exploitation. Weak law enforcement, corruption, the Internet, ease of travel, and poverty have created an underground industry which creates devastating immediate and long term community impacts in terms of disease, pregnancies, trauma, ostracism and even death. Many codes and international initiatives within the tourism industry have appeared in recent years as a result of this growing threat. Tourism businesses can play a key role in ensuring the protection of local populations at destination by not buying products produced with child labor; not allowing use of tourism premises for sexual exploitation of minors and denouncing these practices to local authorities. |
| B.7 | Equitable Hiring | The business is equitable in hiring women and local minorities, including in management positions, while restraining child labor. | While major international labor conventions and norms address discrimination and child labor, women and local minorities often have unequal access to job opportunities, particularly in management, and child labor is still pervasive in many areas. Equality in hiring policies encourages an equitable distribution of wealth and closes income gaps along gender and ethnic lines. Adherence to international guidelines concerning the employment of children ensures their education, enabling them to be future productive members of their community and enhances their quality of life. |
| B.8 | Employee Protection | The international or national legal protection of employees is respected and employees are paid a living wage. | Treating workers humanely and fairly makes good business sense by establishing stable labor relationships. International and national regulation and conventions (including ILO) establish the minimum baseline for respecting worker's rights. Wages that allow employees to afford – at minimum – provision of basic needs such as food, health care, shelter and education is critical for alleviating poverty and improving the quality of life in the local population as well as increasing productivity and employee retention. |
| B.9 | Basic Services | The activities of the business do not jeopardize the provision of basic services, such as water, energy, or sanitation, to neighboring communities. | Tourism businesses can alter, disrupt or strain community infrastructure and basic services, adversely impacting local users and communities. In some cases, service providers, such as utility suppliers may favor businesses over local populations. Regular communication with local communities is required to ensure that normal business operations enhance the socioeconomic and environmental character of the destination, do not reduce services available to the community or increase their cost. |

| Category C: Cultural Heritage | | | |
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| **#** | **Title** | **Criteria** | **Description** |
| C.1 | Code of Behavior | The business follows established guidelines or a code of behavior for visits to culturally or historically sensitive sites, in order to minimize visitor impact and maximize enjoyment. | Respect for local cultures and historic locations must be observed. Businesses must also understand and actively seek to minimize the impact on built and natural environments caused by increased visitor activity. Education about local people's cultural customs, mores, and beliefs as well as appropriate verbal and non-verbal behavior will contribute to overall appreciation of the site and local community pride. |
| C.2 | Historical Artifacts | Historical and archeological artifacts are not sold, traded, or displayed, except as permitted by law. | Sustainable tourism aims to protect and embrace the uniqueness of a destination. Norms, regulations and conventions exist to protect historical and archeological artifacts from international trade exploitation. With lax enforcement and interested markets, tourism businesses are critical in protecting these artifacts while promoting the area's heritage. |
| C.3 | Protecting of Sites | The business contributes to the protection of local historical, archeological, culturally, and spiritually important properties and sites, and does not impede access to them by local residents. | Cultural and historical heritage are an important component of a destination's attractiveness and should be conserved to ensure their enjoyment for future generations. Collaboration with local residents and preservation bodies ensures that tourism-related activities do not damage sites or prevent local people from visiting or using them. Preservation and enhancement of local cultural and historical assets increase the tourism experience and make the product offering stronger. |
| C.4 | Incorporation of Culture | The business uses elements of local art, architecture, or cultural heritage in its operations, design, decoration, food, or shops; while respecting the intellectual property rights of local communities. | Utilizing aspects of the local culture wherever possible increases ties to the neighboring community and promoting the destination's unique character provides an incentive to preserve unique skills that may otherwise vanish. The communication between community leaders and companies is the key point to ensure a respectful use of local culture (e.g. sacred elements) and avoid possible wrong interpretations, conflicts, and undesirable commoditization. |
| **Category D: Environmental** | | | |
| **#** | **Title** | **Criteria** | **Description** |
| D.1 | Conserving Resources | | |

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| D.1.1 | Purchasing Policy | Purchasing policy favors environmentally friendly products for building materials, capital goods, food, and consumables. | The economic leverage of purchasing by a tourism business can produce positive impacts by encouraging sustainably produced goods and services. Responsible purchasing is a powerful means to reduce negative environmental impact. This can be done by favoring certified environmentally friendly products and/or regularly evaluating providers that seek to conserve energy, utilize recycled materials, responsibly manage waste, and minimize greenhouse gas emissions. |
| D.1.2 | Consumable Goods | The purchase of disposable and consumable goods is measured, and the business actively seeks ways to reduce their use. | Responsible consumption and frequent monitoring of waste can help businesses achieve cost savings as well as minimize environmental impact of the waste streams produced. |
| D.1.3 | Energy Consumption | Energy consumption should be measured, sources indicated, and measures to decrease overall consumption should be adopted, while encouraging the use of renewable energy. | Energy use is one of the most damaging activities on the planet with adverse impacts degrading air, water, soil quality, human and ecological health. Energy efficiency through sustainable technology and effective waste management is a key strategy to reduce the negative impact. The greatest environmental and financial benefits related to business operations are achieved by frequently monitoring utility bills, effectively training and providing incentives for staff to implement energy efficiency programs, and routine preventive maintenance of mechanical equipment. By applying energy efficient practices to the operations and investing in renewable energy technologies (e.g., solar, wind, micro-hydro, and bio-mass), the Business can help conserve natural resources, promote energy independence, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. |
| D.1.4 | Water Consumption | Water consumption should be measured, sources indicated, and measures to decrease overall consumption should be adopted. | Water is precious and, in many regions, an increasingly scarce resource with many countries facing moderate or severe water shortages. Year round or seasonal water shortages are expected to increase with climate change. Overall water consumption should be reduced to the minimum possible level necessary for adequate operation. Reducing water consumption also has financial and environmental benefits for tourism businesses. |
| D.2 | Reducing Pollution | | |

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| D.2.1 | Greenhouse Gas | Greenhouse gas emissions from all sources controlled by the business are measured, and procedures are implemented to reduce and offset them as a way to minimize climate change. | The principal emissions from tourism businesses are from transportation (especially by air), heating, cooling, electricity use, and methane emissions from sewage and organic wastes. Except for air transport, most of these emissions can be directly reduced by actions from the business. Those emissions that are not reduced can be offset using properly regulated projects. Proper emission management practices will help reduce global warming, promote energy independence from foreign non-renewable sources, and may substantially reduce operational costs. |
| D.2.2 | Wastewater | Wastewater, including gray water, is treated effectively and reused where possible. | Wastewater management reduces aquatic pollution, protects aquatic ecosystems, and reduces risks to human health. Reusing waste water increases the availability of potable water for human consumption (see criterion D.1.4) as well as reduces a business's sewage and treatment costs. |
| D.2.3 | Waste Management Plan | | Waste has become a major pollutant affecting both environmental aspects (land degradation, water quality) and socio-economic factors such as health and public dumps. Reducing potential waste streams, reusing what cannot be avoided and recycling what is not reusable is critical factor in sustainable tourism operations. Minimizing the amount of solid waste that goes to landfills and incinerators helps reduce negative environmental impacts. Additionally, minimizing waste reduces the need for virgin materials and limits the amount of greenhouse gases that are released throughout a product's life cycle (i.e., extraction, manufacturing, distribution, use, and disposal). A lifecycle approach to waste management begins with the purchasing practices (D.1.1 and D.1.2) through coordination with local authorities on appropriate disposal. |
| D.2.3.1 | Plan and Reduce | A solid waste management plan is implemented, with quantitative goals to minimize waste that is not reused or recycled. | |
| D.2.3.2 | Reuse | A comprehensive strategy of reuse exists to reduce waste to landfill. | |
| D.2.3.3 | Recycle | A comprehensive recycling strategy exists to reduce waste to landfill. | |

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| D.2.4 | Harmful Substances | The use of harmful substances, including pesticides, paints, swimming pool disinfectants, and cleaning materials, is minimized; substituted, when available, by innocuous products; and all chemical use is properly managed. | Chemicals and other non-organic materials slip into the environment during application and storage via evaporation, run-off, spills, leaks and over application. Such practices lead to air, soil and water pollution, adversely affecting the local environment, harming flora and fauna, contaminating water supplies for local communities and causing serious health problems. The misuse and improper handling of potentially toxic substances creates additional threats to the environment and human health. Many "natural" substitutes exist which are not only less impact on the environment and human health, but are often cheaper. Technology has also developed various alternatives. Where no alternatives are possible, the proper storage, handling and use of chemicals will reduce potential impacts. |
| D.2.5 | Other Pollutants | The business implements practices to reduce pollution from noise, light, runoff, erosion, ozone-depleting compounds, and air and soil contaminants. | Environmental pollution can occur from several sources and have long-term, damaging effects on local ecosystems and human populations. The business should regularly perform site audits to identify sources for potential pollution while educating and empowering staff to identify potential pollution during daily activities. Particular attention should be paid to special local conditions, such as damage to coral reefs from sediments, eutrophication of rivers and lakes from runoff, melting of permafrost, and light pollution of marine nesting sites, among others. |
| D.3 | Conserving Biodiversity, Ecosystems, and Landscapes | | |
| D.3.1 | Wildlife Species | Wildlife species are only harvested from the wild, consumed, displayed, sold, or internationally traded, as part of a regulated activity that ensures that their utilization is sustainable. | Tourism businesses sometimes use precious woods, palm thatch, or coral for buildings, furniture, or exhibition. Shops often sell items harvested from the wild, such as black coral or carey (from endangered sea turtles). Restaurants may serve food harvested from the wild. These and other uses may be sustainable or not. Non-sustainable consumption should be avoided and other uses should be in accordance with local regulations and conservation practices. |
| D.3.2 | Wildlife in Captivity | No captive wildlife is held, except for properly regulated activities, and living specimens of protected wildlife species are only kept by those | In general, tourism businesses should not maintain wildlife in captivity – for example as pets or in cages – unless these activities will enhance conservation. In that case, the activity should be in accordance with local regulations and international conservation. |

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| | | authorized and suitably equipped to house and care for them. | |
| D.3.3 | Landscaping | The business uses native species for landscaping and restoration, and takes measures to avoid the introduction of invasive alien species. | Native flora is adapted to local conditions (drought, temperatures, etc.) and local pests, reducing the need for irrigation (reducing water use D.1.4) and chemicals (criterion D.2.4). The character of the natural environment can be preserved by utilizing sustainable landscaping techniques that incorporate local flora. Non-local species that are used should be screened to avoid introducing potentially invasive plants and animals, which have negative impacts on the biodiversity and local ecosystems. |
| D.3.4 | Biodiversity Conservation | The business contributes to the support of biodiversity conservation, including supporting natural protected areas and areas of high biodiversity value. | Tourism activities outside of urban areas generally depend, directly or indirectly, on natural resources. Even those in urban areas can benefit their society by indirect support of their country's natural areas or urban parks. Contribution can range from active participation in projects to financial contributions. |
| D.3.5 | Interactions with Wildlife | Interactions with wildlife must not produce adverse effects on the viability of populations in the wild; and any disturbance of natural ecosystems is minimized, rehabilitated, and there is a compensatory contribution to conservation management. | Tourism activities outside of urban areas frequently interact with plants and animals in the wild. These activities can be passive, such as building construction or trail use, or active, such as hunting and fishing. In all cases, the disturbance created should be minimized and rehabilitated. In addition, compensatory conservation activities should be supported. |

## Appendix VI: Blue Flag Criteria in Full

| Blue Flag Destination Criteria | | |
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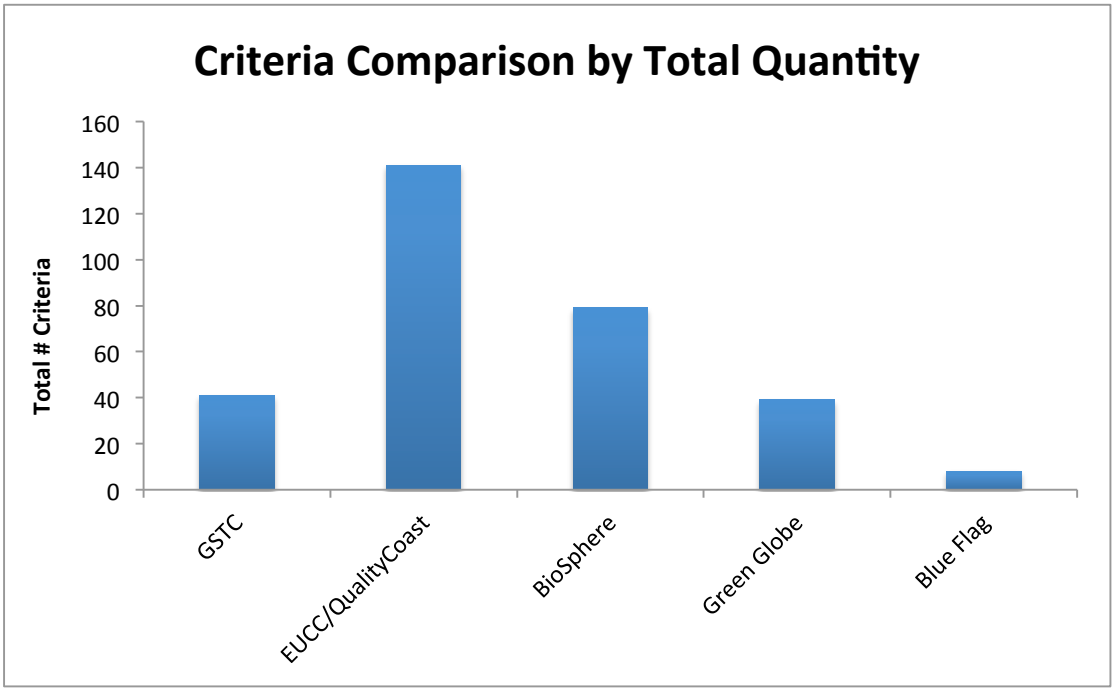
| **Criteria for Coastal Communities:** | | |
| **The following aspects are evaluated:** | | |
| 1 | Microbiological quality of the ocean's water | 35% |
| 2 | Quality of potable water | 15% |
| 3 | Quality of coastal sanitation areas: | |
| 3.1 | Garbage and garbage containers | 10% |
| 3.2 | Treated industrial waste | 5% |
| 3.3 | Treated run-off water | 15% |
| 4 | Environmental education | 10% |
| 5 | Security and administration | 10% |
| **Categories for Coastal Communities:** | | |
| **The following rating system applies to criteria met:** | | |
| 1 | One Star | If the criteria achieved is between 90% and 100% |
| 2 | Two Stars | If the criteria achieved is 100%; Motorized vehicle restrictions; Horse and domestic animal restrictions brought in by visitors or locals; and maritime current signals if they exist |
| 3 | Three Stars | Complying with that under Star Two; Security and rescue teams during the high season; and regulatory plan or plan of action regarding conservation zones. |
| 4 | Four Stars | Complying with that under Star Three; Easy access and security measures for those with disabilities like showers and public sanitation; Separation and recycling of solid waste; Constant security and rescue measures; Local emergency committee; and member of the "sanitary quality seal" program. |

## Appendix VII: Criteria Comparison by Total Quantity

Note: Not scaled with expert suggestions.



## Appendix VIII: Nodes, Child Nodes, & Descriptions

Note: Number associated with child node represents the number of times it was coded, or found within a program's criteria.

1. **Business Involvement** – Includes local and foreign business entities, and their role in a local destination's community and its economy.
    1) Access (3)
        i. Ability for local peoples to contribute to business; local business presence
    2) Certification (3)
        i. Businesses being certified by a program
    3) Community Safety (7)
        i. Human safety concerns for community
    4) Energy Efficiency (2)
        i. Businesses taking initiatives to implement energy efficiency measures
    5) Equal Employment (9)
        i. Employment opportunities in any business for local peoples
    6) Local Products (11)
        i. Support for sale of locally produced items
    7) Sustainable Seafood (1)
        i. Sale of only sustainable seafood
    8) Tourism Business (10)
        i. Business focused on the maintenance of sustainable tourism within the region; local or global
    9) Visitor Satisfaction (1)
        i. Business concern with the satisfaction of tourists
    10) Waste Management (1)
        i. Businesses taking initiatives to reduce their waste and implement waste diversion measures
2. **Education** – Includes marketing and visitor education.
    1) Community Education (1)
        i. Education of local peoples; includes training
    2) Impact (2)
        i. Information provided regarding tourism impact
    3) Multilingual (4)
        i. Information provided in multiple languages
    4) Nature Education (6)
        i. Education on conservation, flora and fauna of region
    5) Promotional Materials (12)
        i. Marketing provided
    6) Waste (1)
        i. Education on waste diversion habits
3. **Governance** – Policies and politics regarding the area in question; legal control.

1) Equal Employment (5)
    i. Legislation to promote just employment
2) Local Access (3)
    i. Local peoples' access to government and decision-making
3) Local Authority (12)
    i. Local government's presence
4) Planning, Siting & Zoning (7)
    i. Legislation to protect areas from illegal building or site allocation
5) Protection (28)
    i. Of the people, visitors, and property of destination
6) Sustainable Agriculture (1)
    i. Legislation in place to protect sustainable agricultural endeavors

4. **Management** – Actual references to administrative organizations to manage tourism related or other activities within the region. Authority.
    1) Chemicals (1)
        i. Management of chemicals released in destination
    2) Cultural Heritage (23)
        i. Management teams to protect cultural heritage, including artifacts
    3) Energy Efficiency (4)
        i. Management teams to promote energy efficiency measures
    4) GHG Emissions (5)
        i. Management of emissions
    5) Marine (16)
        i. Marine area management
    6) Solid Waste (5)
        i. Management of waste produced in region and subsequent diversion tactics
    7) Tourism Strategy (16)
        i. Management of actual sustainable tourism strategy to ensure compliance
5. **Monitoring** – Actual monitoring and inventorying of practices within the destination; data aggregation and verification.
    1) Air Quality (6)
        i. Monitoring air quality and pollution; making data available
    2) Certification (4)
        i. Monitoring the effects of certification to ensure compliance
    3) Community Satisfaction (4)
        i. Tourist satisfaction monitoring; surveys
    4) Economic Contribution (1)
        i. Monitoring of economic activity generated by sustainable tourism measures
    5) EMS (2)
        i. Environmental Management Systems monitored to improve methods and promote sustainability compliance
    6) Energy Efficiency (6)

        i. Energy use and renewable energy monitoring
    7) GHG Emissions (3)
        i. Monitoring GHG emissions from the region and reporting them
    8) Infrastructure (1)
        i. Ensuring infrastructure of region is maintained
    9) Light Pollution (4)
        i. Monitoring light pollution complaints and associated animal behavior
    10) Local Products (5)
        i. Keeping tabs on local product generation and sale
    11) Noise Pollution (10)
        i. Monitoring noise pollution complaints and associated animal behavior
    12) Solid Waste (6)
        i. Monitoring waste produced by region and diversion numbers
    13) Species Harvesting (2)
        i. Keeping tabs on species numbers and trade
    14) Visitor Impact (7)
        i. Monitoring how sites are physically affected by tourists
    15) Visitor Satisfaction (8)
        i. Monitoring tourist satisfaction; surveys
    16) Waste (5)
        i. Monitoring general waste buildup
    17) Water Consumption (5)
        i. Evaluating water consumption patterns so as to learn how to better manage water resources
    18) Water Quality (21)
        i. Maintaining current studies on the quality of water in the region, both marine and for drinking
6. **Natural Areas** – Information regarding biodiversity, flora and fauna of destination. Environmental perspective.
    1) Challenges (2)
        i. Obstacles regarding the protection of natural areas
    2) Conservation (14)
        i. Conservation efforts to protect flora and fauna of region
    3) Infrastructure within Natural Areas (3)
        i. Ensuring protection of existing infrastructure in natural areas, and prohibiting unnecessary building of new infrastructure in said areas
    4) Invasive Species (3)
        i. Protecting against introduction and proliferation of invasive species
    5) Marine Protection (2)
        i. Protecting marine regions
    6) Natural Area (9)
        i. Maintaining designated natural areas, such as national parks
7. **Recreation** – Activities for tourists.
    1) Biking (1)

        i. Mention of cycling opportunities
    2) Hiking (1)
        i. Mention of hiking opportunities
    3) Off-Road Vehicles (1)
        i. Mention of opportunities for off-road vehicle activities
    4) Sustainable Recreation (1)
        i. Mention of recreation opportunities that promote sustainability
    5) Underwater (1)
        i. Mention of underwater activities such as scuba diving
8. **Transportation** – All mentions of transport within destination.
    1) Access (1)
        i. Local and tourist access to safe public transportation
    2) Sustainable Transportation (7)
        i. Mention of sustainable transport mechanisms in region available to local peoples as well as visitors