

Paradoxes in Certification Programs: a Case Study of Green Globe in Barbados

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Introduction

Certification programs can be used as powerful tools to assist in the conservation of natural resources while also helping improve the well-being of host communities.

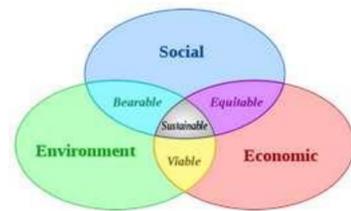
With the rise in popularity of ecotourism and responsible travel amongst tourists, tourism businesses are increasingly being asked to achieve higher levels of environmental and socio-economic performances towards host communities. To inform consumers of their 'commitment towards conserving biodiversity and fostering social well-being', companies tend to adhere to certification programs and use the latter's ecolabel for marketing purposes (WTO, 2004)

By joining these programs, companies are required to maintain and constantly improve their performances throughout the years, in return helping to reduce negative environmental and socio-cultural impacts in host communities.

Problem

Key principles for sustainability: Environment, community and local culture

Current certification programs tend to have a strong environmental focus, despite the increased recognition that socio-cultural impacts are important components to achieve proper sustainability (Font & Harris, 2004; Medina, 2005).



GOAL: Evaluate the necessity of including socio-cultural criteria in existing certification programs.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- Are certification programs a good approach to achieve more sustainable modes of operation in the tourism sector?
- How do hotels adhere to both environmental and socio-cultural indicators, and to what levels?

Methodology

Green Globe, an international certification program, and the accommodation sector of the **South Coast of Barbados** were chosen for this study.



Participants

- 10 Green Globe certified hotels
- 10 stakeholders from different tourism associations and governmental agencies.
- 25 community members from the South Coast.

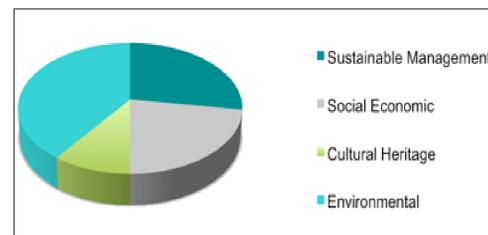
Data Collection

- Research conducted in May and June 2011 in Barbados
- Semi-structured Interviews with all the participants
- Observation and analysis of secondary sources (newspapers, local documents on tourism, books)

Findings:

About Green Globe:

- Only 5% of community members were familiar with Green Globe
- About 80% of hotels and tourism stakeholders agree that certification provides them with a goal to work towards
- About 90% of hotels and tourism stakeholders find Green Globe support to be insufficient and very expensive
- About 95% have not seen any marketing advantages
- With Green Globe, companies need to adhere to at least 51% of indicators, no matter which ones. The majority of indicators tend to be in the environmental category.



Percentage of indicators per category (Green Globe, 2011)

Adherence to environmental and socio-cultural indicators

• About 95% of hoteliers acknowledge the importance for hotels to help the local community and promote its culture amongst tourists

• Despite this recognition, hotels still mainly adhere to environmental performances due to their perceived potential for savings: "one year, the hotel saved \$150, 000." (Environmental officer, 2011)

Some actions taken by hotels to achieve indicators:

Environmental Performances

Recycling: recycling bins on hotel premises, donate old material (telephones, furniture, electronics) to charities, refurbishing old furniture.

Conservation of resources: magic eye for A/C, signs in room offering the option to change towels/linens daily, energy efficient light bulbs

General activities: Buying eco-friendly cleaning products, helping with beach clean-up, planting trees

Social Performances

Donations: food, money, room nights, old furniture, discounted rates to staff and their families

Adoption of local schools and youth programs

General: Buying food from local farmers, hiring local people, encouraging artists to sell products at the hotel

Cultural Performances

Promote local festivals and activities: Crop Over festivities, Oistins Fish Fry, local farmers markets, opportunity for artists to sell art at the hotel

Promote local food: encourage customers to eat at local restaurants, incorporate local cuisine in their menus

Promote local culture: displaying local artists' paintings in the lobby, play local/regional music in the lobby

Conclusions

About Green Globe

The process has been improving over the years, but there is more progress to be made. However, it still "provides you with a goal to work towards." (Hotel respondent, 2011)

"It is a good start but Green Globe has some complications that need to be revised." (Tourism stakeholder, 2011).

Hotels and socio-cultural indicators

It is easier and cheaper to achieve environmental standards when given the choice.

However, all interviewees agree: to achieve proper sustainability, it is important to achieve both environmental and socio-cultural standards. This approach will help protect all aspects of the tourism product and help build healthy nations for future generations.

"Although tourism is an undeniable factor of economic development, it is also sometimes a threat to natural and cultural heritage because of the deterioration and even pillaging it inflicts. We should, therefore, find the means to achieve a common management of this heritage, harnessing the economical potential it entails to the best of our possibilities, while, at the same time, taking care of its integrity"

(Director General of UNESCO at the conference 'Sustainable Hotels for Sustainable Destinations, 2008)

