

With proving the divinity of Quran, two features of accuracy and wisdom can be proved for Quran that Ikrimah believed in them but in principles monitoring Quran's documental way he believed that before Quran revelation on Prophet (PBUH) was first received by Gabriel from God and he received Quran without and deficiency.

In third phase of this process, Prophet is discussed as the Quranic revelation receiver that Ikrimah had accepted his infallibility as a person who could receive Quranic revelation without any defects as the basis for his interpretation and Prophet also was infallible in announcing Quran verses for people and used to recite verses same as what he had received without any defects. But in next level of Quran's life, Ikrimah takes weird position and shows as if Ahzab surah is distorted in spite of common Quran recitations, its maintenance in early Islam and this surah is shorter in present Quran than Quran which was revealed for Prophet.

Ikrimah's interpretive narration shows that he had the thought of Quran's comprising distortion have been existed in his mind and he believed Quran's comprising distortion in high extent while this thought is not true in many Muslim scholars' point of view.

In next ring of Quran documental way, Ikrimah also doesn't take stable position in a way that sometimes he accepts the agreement about Quran's health in his pre-assumption in his interpretation and sometimes accepting Quran distortion, sees Quran documental way damaged and distorted in Quran collectors.

From principle monitoring Quran documental way, two other sub-principles also were abstracted for Ikrimah which include: Quran's distortion and Quran's multiple recitation that these two principles are rejected according to Muslims scholars.

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### SETTING STANDARDS FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM, AS A SOURCES OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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**Abstract.** Tourism is no doubt one of the largest industries and sources of entrepreneurship in the world. Behind fuels, chemicals and automotive parts, it is fourth in the amount of export income it generates.

Over the recent decades, a plethora of tourism certification programs have sprung up worldwide in an effort to recognize tourism businesses who truly work to reduce negative impacts by using sustainable practices. This worldwide proliferation of tourism certification programs, however, has led to consumer confusion, lack of brand recognition and widely varying standards. Here the best practice standards for tourism certification programs is used as laid out in the Mohonk Agreement, and the recently released Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria, envisioned to serve as the common

set of baseline criteria by which to accredit certification programs, to evaluate four state-level tourism certification programs as case studies in the world. This paper also conjecture what the future may look like for these programs. At the end some notes have been proposed for more researches in the way of tourism standardization.

**1. Introduction.** The current initiative to create a global standard for sustainable tourism has the potential to change the face of the tourism industry. Widely varying standards over the past 20 years as to what constitutes “green” or sustainable tourism has led to accusations of greenwashing, a term used to describe businesses or organizations that claim to use “green” or “sustainable” practices, but don’t actually comply with generally accepted standards. Tourism certification programs worldwide, now numbering more than 80, have become a popular tool providing recognition to tourism businesses that meet a determined set of program requirements. The ecolabel that is provided to a certified business, however, is only as good or as credible as the certification program is. In an effort to harmonize standards and ensure the credibility and legitimacy of certification programs, and hence the certified businesses, a global accreditation body has been proposed that will set minimum standards that sustainable tourism certification programs should comply with. The hope is that through the creation of a single accredited brand that will be recognizable worldwide, consumer preferences will be altered, eventually leading the tourism industry down a more sustainable path aimed at protecting the natural and cultural assets on which the industry depends. Today there are approximately twenty tourism certification programs that operate in the United States, with the majority being state-level programs focused on the lodging sector.

As the industry pushes towards global standards and accreditation, it can be expected that both the procedural frameworks as well as the certification criteria of these programs will come under increased scrutiny.

The purpose of this paper is to provide the tourism sector and all other interested parties with an analysis of select tourism certification programs in Iran based on the experiences from the United States . More specifically this paper aims to:

- explain what tourism certification is, how it works, and what its benefits and challenges are;
- introduce the effort to create a global standard for sustainable tourism certification;
- outline four state-level tourism certification programs as case studies in the US; and
- evaluate how well these programs conform to best practice standards in the industry

A comparison is provided between the overall procedural frameworks for these four case studies to best practice standards in the industry. Additionally, a detailed analysis is conducted on each of the program’s criteria in order to investigate the extent to which these tourism certification programs embrace the triple bottom line principles of environmental, socioeconomic, and cultural sustainability as laid out in the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria.

## **2. Background**

**2.1. The Tourism Industry.** Tourism is no doubt one of the largest industries in the world. Behind fuels, chemicals and automotive parts, it is fourth in the amount of export income it generates (UNWTO 2008). International tourist arrivals continue to grow year after year as more and more countries, especially developing countries, turn to tourism as a development tool and as a source of employment. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, international tourist arrivals grew from 25 million to 903 million between 1950 and 2007. In 2007 export income generated by these arrivals was more than US\$ 1 trillion or about US\$ 3 billion a day (UNWTO 2008). Despite the recent slump in tourism related activities due to the current economic recession, the overall trend for tourism is projected to continue increasing with international arrivals being expected to reach 1.6 billion by 2020 (UNWTO 2008).

The United States is among the lead players in the tourism industry and can be studied as a model in this study. Environmental, social, cultural and economic impacts are felt worldwide by the numerous entities that make up the tourism industry including airlines, hotels, tour operators and travel agents. With the continued expansion of the industry comes the challenge of balancing the economic benefits of tourism development and growth with the need to protect the very things that tourists go to see – clean beaches, authentic communities, landscapes, culture and nature.

For tourism to be profitable and beneficial, it must also be sustainable by providing benefits to the tourists and hosts, while at the same time protecting the resources on which it depends.

**2.1.1. Sustainable Tourism and Ecotourism.** Although sustainable, green and eco- are commonly uttered phrases in the 21st century, many people have trouble defining exactly what they mean in relation to the tourism industry. Standards are not well known or enforced, and there is a thin and vague line between those businesses who are “greenwashing” and those who are truly using sustainable practices.

Sustainable tourism can be incorporated into many types of tourism such as urban, coastal, or nature-based tourism (Figure 1). At the crossroads of nature tourism and sustainable tourism is ecotourism. While nature-based tourism and ecotourism both focus on travel to natural areas, ecotourism is different from nature tourism in that it focuses more on impacts to the environment and human communities than on the activity the tourist participates in. It is not so focused on reducing harm like sustainable tourism is, but rather it strives to improve the environmental, socioeconomic, and cultural environment in the place in which it operates.



Figure 1. Connection between sustainable tourism and ecotourism (Bien 2007)

One of the most common definitions of ecotourism comes from the International Ecotourism Society and states that ecotourism is “responsible travel to natural areas, which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people .” Expanding upon this, Martha Honey, a leading expert and author in the ecotourism field, says that authentic ecotourism must include the following seven characteristics (Honey 2008):

- \_ involves travel to natural areas
- \_ minimizes impact
- \_ builds environmental awareness
- \_ provides direct financial benefits for conservation
- \_ provides financial benefits and empowerment for local communities
- \_ respects local culture
- \_ supports human rights and international labor agreements

**2.2. Tourism Certification.** Certification as defined in the tourism industry is a process by which a logo or seal is awarded to those who meet or exceed a set of criteria that have been set forth by the certification body (Honey 2002). All tourism certification programs to date are voluntary, meaning that they are not imposed on tourism businesses by the government or anyone else. Because the tourism industry is so diverse, offers both products and services, and has such a far-reaching supply chain, certification across the industry is not an easy task (Honey 2001). Most certification programs have therefore focused on certifying lodging facilities which lie at the heart of most tourists’ vacations. A small but growing number of programs certify other sectors of the tourism industry such as tourism operators, tour guides, parks, convention centers, golf courses, transport providers, beaches, etc.

In 2001 it was estimated that there were around 60 “green” tourism certification programs in the world (Honey 2002, WTO 2002). The number of certification programs dealing with some aspect of the tourism industry appears to be growing and in 2007 it was estimated that as many as 80 programs existed (Solimar 2007).

Most tourism certification programs are operated by governments in developed countries and by NGOs in developing countries (Font and Sallows 2002). The large majority of certification programs are in Europe while there are only a handful in Africa, Asia-Pacific, Caribbean and the Americas. Most of these programs target accommodation facilities and do not include sociocultural or economic criteria (WTO 2002). A few programs like STEP and Green Globe 21 are global programs, whereas the rest certify on a regional, national, or local level.

To distinguish between tourism certification programs, it is useful to divide them into three broad categories: conventional, sustainable, and ecotourism (Honey 2002).

*Conventional tourism certification programs* include large hotel chains, cruises, and high-volume tourist destinations. These programs focus on the internal business rather than on the external community and environmental impacts, and they are mostly concerned with improving eco-efficiency standards whereby a business saves money by implementing practices that reduce water and energy use. They also tend to award certification based on setting up a management system rather than achieving certain standards or benchmarks.

*Sustainable tourism certification programs* should include criteria on the environmental, socio-economic and cultural impacts of a business and often focus on minimizing impact or reducing harm. The criteria are performance-based for the most part and are usually broad enough to attempt to certify various sized businesses and various types of tourism like nature or cultural tourism. Additionally, questions specific to particular issues within a region may be included in the criteria.

*Ecotourism certification programs* go beyond trying to reduce negative environmental, socio-economic and cultural impacts, and gauges if companies contribute positively to these aspects both within and external to the business. They typically certify businesses that operate in protected or pristine areas.

Tourism certification programs can also be grouped into two categories based on the methodology for certifying businesses: process-based programs and performance-based programs (Honey 2002). Process-based programs, or management systems, stress a commitment to improvement, are self-updating, and are generic and transferable across countries. Operating by themselves, process-based programs are not sufficient to ensure environmental and social sustainability because certification may be awarded simply when a company sets up an EMS, not when certain criteria or a certain level of sustainability are met. Additionally, process-based programs focus on the companies' internal operating systems, not on external social or economic impacts. One of the most popular programs today is the EMS (Environmental Management System) ISO 14001 which aims to improve the environmental policy of companies (Honey 2001).

Performance-based programs on the other hand measure achievement based on set standards or benchmarks, require external and regular updating as the industry changes, and tend to be context specific. Advantages of performance based certification include (Honey 2002):

- they are less expensive and more applicable to small and medium size businesses
- they can include checklists that are comprehensible to both businesses and consumers
- they allow comparison among businesses or products
- they can measure performance inside and outside the business
- programs that offer different levels of certification encourage competition and continual improvement

Some certification programs like NEAP (Australian Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Program) or Green Globe 21 are hybrid programs that include both process and performance-based standards; and in fact best practice standards for certification programs state that criteria should have aspects of both a performance and process-based program.

### **2.2.1. Certification Process**

The certification process consists of five main steps: setting standards, completing an assessment of the business, granting certification based on a successful assessment, recognition of the certification, and finally acceptance by the industry and the consumers.

*Standards:* A standard is a documented set of rules, conditions or requirements that are approved by a recognized body. To be eligible for certification, an entity must meet or exceed the set standard for that particular certification. To begin the certification process the tourism provider normally must apply to the program by filling out an application form which is reviewed by the certification body. In addition to the standards, or criteria, by which the sustainability or greenness of the business is measured, some programs have core criteria which must be met by any business that wishes to be certified.

*Assessment:* Compliance with the criteria may be determined by the business itself (self-evaluation), the certification body (second party), or by an independent auditor (thirdparty). While self-evaluation is an important first step in enhancing ownership of the process and helping to educate the business about sustainability practices, alone it does not produce credible certification. Third-party certification is considered to be the most credible as the auditor doesn't have a stake in either the business or the certification program. Performing audits of tourism providers tends to be the mostly costly part of the certification process.

*Certification:* Those businesses that meet the specified certification program standards are given an award, logo, or ecolabel to use for marketing purposes. Some programs certify businesses on more than one level of certification, allowing and usually encouraging the business to improve its sustainability initiatives over time. Monitoring continued compliance with the criteria is an important aspect of certification; however programs vary in the degree to which they do this mainly because of funding or the availability of staff resources. Many programs charge a certification fee that varies with either the number of employees the business has or with the revenue generated by the tourism provider. The money supports administrative functions as well as advertising and promotion of the logo and of the certified companies (Honey 2001). Some programs, usually those with a less stringent certification process and criteria, are free.

*Recognition and Acceptance:* The concept of certification revolves around the idea that consumers will recognize and accept ecolabeled products or services as preferable to noncolabeled ones, thereby giving ecolabeled products a larger marketing share. Given the global nature of the tourism industry, accreditation of certification programs based on international standards seems to be a crucial, but currently missing link, in giving credibility and increased visibility to these programs and their ecolabels.

**2.2.2. Benefits and Challenges.** There are many benefits that tourism certification brings to certified businesses, consumers, local communities, governments and the environment. Businesses that are considering becoming certified are tempted by certification programs with benefits such as being able to use the certification program logo on marketing information and websites, free technical assistance, free promotion through various sources associated with the certification program, cost-savings and the opportunity to market to a new audience. Additionally, through the application process businesses learn how to improve the efficiency of their internal operations and they become aware of how they can reduce their external impacts as well. For consumers, certification offers an environmentally and socially responsible choice and increases the confidence that their tourism operator or destination is indeed sustainable. For governments, certification raises industry standards in health, safety, environment and social stability and lowers regulatory costs of environmental protection (Bien 2007). Tourism certification also helps to ensure

that the industry is held accountable to local stakeholders by aiming to reduce the environmental and social impacts of businesses.

Along with the many benefits of tourism certification come a host of challenges. One commonly cited challenge is that there is currently a great deal of confusion about the existing certification programs due to the sheer number of programs and their widely varying standards. This consumer confusion means that tourism ecolabels still don't hold a marketing advantage. Another challenge is that consumer demand for sustainable tourism certified products is largely unknown, or at the very least, a hotly debated issue (Honey 2002). Some reports seem to show that there *is* strong consumer support for responsible tourism. But despite this support, few people actually demand or inquire about sustainable business practices when making purchasing decisions, and other factors such as safety, distance and cost may still take precedence in tourist's decisions (CESD/TIES 2005).

Also, most certification programs are incentive-led rather than market-led, meaning that the majority of businesses become certified because it will help them to save money and not so much because they believe that they will gain customers by marketing their sustainability practices. In fact, there seems to be a lack of evidence that certified businesses do indeed have an economic advantage over non-certified ones (Rivera 2002).

Foremost among the challenges that certification programs face worldwide 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, are self-sufficient (Rome et al. 2006). Programs always rely on additional sources of funding from government or private sources. On-site audits, a crucial aspect of any tourism certification program, are generally the most expensive part of the certification process. If these audits are eliminated to save costs, the credibility of the program suffers tremendously.

Another challenge for the success of sustainable tourism certification is the difficulty in creating criteria that accurately measure triple bottom line standards of social, economic and environmental sustainability. Socio-cultural criteria are noted as being especially open to interpretation (Font and Harris 2004) and defining ambiguous terms like "local", "benefit" and "participatory" has proven difficult (Medina 2005).

**2.2.3. Tourism Certification in the United States.** The first tourism certification programs were very different from the sustainable tourism standards being developed today in that they focused more on measuring cost, quality and ambiance (and some aspects of health, hygiene and safety) than on environmental or social impacts (Honey 2001). The American Automobile Association (AAA) and the Mobil five-star system were among the first programs in the United States that certified tourism related businesses or entities.

Environmental certification programs became extremely prevalent worldwide in the ten years between the Earth Summit in 1992 and the International Year of Ecotourism in 2002 because of the increasing focus on sustainable development and a call for environmental and social responsibility of all sectors of society from Agenda 21. In the last five years state-level tourism certification programs have become especially popular in the US with 15 programs launching since 2004. Although most of these programs focus on reducing environmental impacts, a few have started to expand their criteria to cover social, cultural and economic impacts as well.

Today there are approximately 21 tourism related certification programs operating in the United States at the state level or higher. Green Globe 21, STEP and LEED certify businesses worldwide; the Audubon Green Leaf Eco-Rating Program operates in the US and Canada; and Green Seal certifies lodging facilities in the US only.

State-level programs have been especially successful and today there are more than sixteen states with some sort of green certification program for tourism-related businesses. The Department of Environmental Protection in Pennsylvania has a website dedicated to providing information on how to green your hotel and the benefits of doing so. It also lists all the hotels in Pennsylvania that are certified by Green Seal. The North Carolina Green Plan for Hotels website is run by the N.C. Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance (DPPEA) and details a nine-step process for developing a hotel waste-reduction program. It's likely that North Carolina will have some sort of a certification program in the near future as the DPPEA is currently partnering with the Center for Sustainable Tourism at Eastern Carolina University to define a standard for certification. The program will most likely involve self-certification with some "check-backs" (Tom Rhodes, Environmental Specialist, NC DPPEA, personal communication, Feb 2009).

Without doubt there are other state tourism certifications being created as you read this. The Hawaii Ecotourism Association for example, has a peer review process that recognizes companies for their commitment to sustainable travel based on environmental conservation, cultural and historical stewardship, contributions to local community, and education and training. Although this program is not a full certification program, as the website states, it is a "first step in that direction". In 2005, a study was done by a master student at the University of Hawaii about the opportunities and risks of establishing an ecotourism certification program in Hawaii (Bauckham 2004). The results stated that the ecotourism industry in Hawaii was in support of a certification program based on elements of existing certification programs with a few Hawaii-specific considerations to be added. For these reasons, the creation and implementation of an ecotourism certification program in Hawaii seems imminent.

**2.3. A Global Standard for Sustainable Tourism.** Around the turn of the millennium the tourism certification industry began to take notice of the fact that a proliferation of certification schemes had led to consumer confusion, widely varying standards, and a lack of marketing power for individual ecolabels. Like other industries with ecolabels have done, such as agriculture, fisheries and forestry, the tourism certification industry came together to begin to formalize standards within the industry (Buckley 2002).

**2.3.1. Best Practice Standards for Certification Programs.** In November of 2000 the Mohonk Workshop brought together participants from twenty countries representing tourism certification programs from around the world to discuss standards in the sustainable and ecotourism industries. No representatives from Iran certification programs were present. Participants met at the Mohonk Mountain House in New Paltz, New York on November 17-19, 2000. One of the results of the Workshop was an agreement on the components that should be present in any tourism certification scheme in order to ensure its credibility (Mohonk 2000). The certification scheme overall framework that was developed consists of three categories: basis of a scheme, criteria framework, and scheme integrity. Among the elements of a certification scheme that are important to consider are the process in which the scheme is developed, methods of monitoring compliance with the criteria, controlled use of the logo, and the provision of technical assistance to businesses undergoing certification. Another result of the workshop was an informal consensus among the programs about the minimum standards for certifying sustainable tourism and ecotourism providers. Over the years the Mohonk Agreement has proven to be the main guideline for developing new programs and for harmonizing existing ones (Solimar 2007).

**2.3.2. Creation of a Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council.** In 2001, following the Mohonk Workshop, a feasibility study was initiated by Rainforest Alliance to examine the possibility of creating a Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council (STSC). Stewardship councils have been used in the past by other industries to serve as accreditation bodies. Examples include the Marine Stewardship Council for certifiers of sustainable fisheries, the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements for organic foods, and Social Accountability International for socially responsible standards (Honey 2002).

The goal of the STSC would be to research criteria in order to set a global standard for sustainable tourism and ecotourism, to promote high-quality certification programs that follow those best practice standards, and to analyze the potential for a tourism accreditation body, the first attempt ever in the tourism industry (Honey 2002; Font and Sallows 2003). Accreditation is the process through which a license to perform certification based on agreed upon global principles and standards is granted to qualifying certification programs. The council was envisioned as working in a three phase process. The first phase initiated in 2007 was a *Network* phase where the Council served as a central location for gathering information on tourism certification and in turn providing that information, along with ideas about accreditation, to stakeholders. The second phase was *Association*. This stage provided an opportunity to market certified products, gave guidance to those wishing to create certification bodies, and reached an agreement on standards for sustainable tourism criteria. The third phase, stretching between 2009 and 2012, is that of *Accreditation* in which certification programs will be accredited by a body outsourced from the STSC (Font and Sallows 2003).

**2.3.3. Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria.** In 2007, during the end of the Association stage, the Partnership for Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria was created with the intent of developing criteria that would provide a “globally relevant common understanding of sustainable tourism”. These criteria could potentially be used as a framework for accrediting certification programs. The final version of the criteria which indicate *what should be done* by a tourism business, not *how to do it*, are available online (Partnership for Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria website) and are also shown in Most currently, a public consultation of potential indicators which specify how to measure the criteria is underway at the same website.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) were first introduced on October 6, 2008 at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Barcelona, Spain by the Rainforest Alliance, the United Nations Environment Programme, and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (Rainforest 2008). The new global tourism criteria emphasized a triple bottom line approach to tourism including socioeconomic and cultural components in addition to the already common environmental criteria for tourism certification. In total there are thirty-seven criteria listed within four main themes (see Table 3) aimed at maximizing benefits and minimizing negative impacts of tourism. Although the criteria were created initially for use by the accommodation and tour operation sectors, they have applicability to the entire tourism industry.

Despite the many challenges and uncertainties that come along with the creation and implementation of a global tourism accreditation body (Font and Sallows 2002), its formation

is imminent and arguably necessary as the concept of triple bottom line sustainability gains momentum and consumer demand increases.

Table 3. Four main categories of the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria

- A. Demonstrate effective sustainable management.
- B. Maximize social and economic benefits to the local community and minimize negative impacts.
- C. Maximize benefits to cultural heritage and minimize negative impacts.
- D. Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts.

**2.4. Previous Studies of Tourism Certification Programs.** Due to the increasing role of eco-labels, certification schemes, environmental management systems, and codes of conduct in regulating the tourism industry, there is a wealth of information in the tourism literature outlining, analyzing, and comparing these programs. The well known book, *Ecotourism and Certification: Setting Standards in Practice* (Honey 2002) devotes seven chapters to case

studies about certification programs in Central America, Australia, Europe, Africa, Fiji, and one global program. Most of the case studies and analyses in the tourism literature, like in this book, come from international or global certification programs (Synergy 2000, Buckley 2002, Font and Harris 2004, Solimar 2007, Rovinski 2007).

One commonly cited report is the World Tourism Organization study (WTO 2002) that reviewed more than sixty sustainable and ecotourism certification programs around the world. The study aimed to identify similarities and differences amongst the programs as well as outlining factors that made them successful in terms of sustainable tourism development. In 2000 the World Wildlife Fund completed an analysis of Green Globe 21 and other tourism certification programs (Synergy 2000) in which it outlined certification programs, examined the specific requirements of each program, identified lessons learned, and made suggestions about how the programs could be improved. The paper also discussed key aspects of the tourism certification programs and identified which aspects of the triple bottom line each program covered. Other studies on tourism certification programs explore challenges and successes in including socioeconomic criteria in the programs (Font and Harris 2004, Medina 2005). Most, if not all of these analyses relied on a combination of internet research, discussions with individuals involved in tourism certification, interviews with the certification program representatives, email inquiries, and surveys to obtain the information that was needed.

As indicated in the Simple User's Guide for tourism certification (Bien 2007), written by a leading expert in tourism certification, the Mohonk Agreement principles and triplebottom line criteria, like the GSTC, are among the most important criteria used to evaluate certification programs.

**2.4.1. Qualitative Analysis of Criteria.** One particularly useful qualitative method for evaluating certification programs can be adapted from the tourism planning literature. First developed by Simpson (2001), this method

used an evaluation instrument created by the researcher to determine the extent to which 24 sustainability principles were integrated into tourism planning. Originally the method was used as a quantitative analysis in which there was a panel of assessors scoring the tourism plans. Ruhanen (2004), however, adopted the methodology for a quantitative study in which the analysis was conducted solely by the one researcher. The process uses a three point likertscale, an off-shoot of a technique called categorical indexing, to determine if the criteria are evident, somewhat evident or not at all evident in the documents being analyzed. Although the evaluation of the certification criteria documents were at the discretion of the author, the objectivity of the analysis was maintained because there was only one researcher conducting all of the analyses in the same manner.

**2.4.2. SWOT Analysis.** The SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunity, and Threat) analysis, first used by Albert Humphrey in the 1960-1970s to compare data from Fortune 500 companies, is a strategic planning method used to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of a project. It is a simple method that does not require extensive training to be used successfully. A SWOT analysis helps to identify the internal and external factors of the company or project that are important in achieving a specific objective. The strengths and weaknesses represent the entity's internal factors, while the opportunities and threats represent the factors that refer to the entity's external environments, factors that would still be present if the entity did not exist.

### 3. Methods

For the purpose of this paper, tourism certification programs in the US were recognized as those that:

- are specifically aimed at certifying businesses in the US involved with the tourism industry
- certify at least the accommodation/lodging sector
- certify businesses using *at least* environmental criteria and possibly social, cultural and/or economic criteria

as well

- award ecolabels to businesses that comply with a certain set of standards as developed by the certification program

These programs were identified through literature reviews, a series of internet searches, and through personal communication with professionals in the tourism industry.

Information about the final list of 21 programs was gathered both from program websites and by personal communication (email or phone) with program contacts that were listed on the program websites.

**3.1. Case Study Selection.** Case studies (Poser, 2009) were chosen from among the twenty-one tourism certification schemes found to be state-level operating in the United States which are fairly new and have yet to be outlined in the literature. In addition, numerous studies and comparisons have already been completed on national and global programs as previously noted. Out of sixteen US certification programs operating at the state level, four case studies were chosen which allowed for a more thorough analysis and comparison of programs and their criteria. Although these case studies are not necessarily representative of all the state-level programs, their characteristics represent the diversity of procedural aspects and criteria present in many US programs.

The only state-level certification programs with goals of meeting environmental, social and economic sustainability standards, Adventure Green Alaska (AGA) and Travel Green Wisconsin (TGW), were chosen as two of the case studies. The third program, Virginia Green (VG), was chosen because similar to the first two case studies it attempts to certify tourism providers other than lodging. Unlike AGA and TGW, however, its goals are simply to reduce the environmental impact of tourism. The final case study is Florida Green Lodging

(FGL) which certifies lodging facilities on environmental criteria and distinguishes itself from the other three in that it uses second-party certification rather than relying on self-evaluation by the businesses. Although two of these programs are typically considered to be sustainable tourism certification programs, while two are considered to be green

lodging programs, all four have the potential to become accredited by the forthcoming global tourism accreditation program.

**3.2. Case Study Analyses.** A SWOT analysis was completed (Poser, 2009) for each certification program case study to assist with identifying the internal and external factors important to achieving their assumed objective of credibly certifying tourism businesses and operators according to best practice standards. While Travel Green Wisconsin and Adventure Green Alaska are considered to be sustainable tourism certification programs, Virginia Green and Florida Green Lodging are labeled as green lodging programs which have typically only been concerned with ecoefficiency standards that affect a business' bottom line. Because of the significant differences between these two types of programs, it is not fair to directly compare them, but a discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of each individual program should be useful.

The procedural framework for each certification program was compared to the best practice standards for certification schemes as laid out in the Mohonk Agreement (Mohonk 2000). Two of the original components were left out of the analysis as they overlap with the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria. The components left out include:

The scheme should provide tangible benefits to local communities and to conservation, and criteria should embody global best practice environmental, social and economic management.

This comparison provides both an understanding of how well these programs conform to best practice standards as well as what standards these programs have the most trouble complying with.

Criteria from the certification programs were compared to each individual Global Sustainable Tourism Criterion using a qualitative method that resulted in a matrix-like table. The method used was adapted from tourism planning literature as described above. Although this method was originally intended to be used in tourism planning, it provides a useful way to determine to what extent the GSTC are currently being embraced by these four certification programs.

In order to score how well each of the programs' criteria fulfilled each of the thirty seven GSTC, a three point scale was used. In the comparison, an "X" represented that the program's criteria fully addressed a particular GSTC criterion, "x" represented that the program's criteria somewhat addressed a particular GSTC criterion, and a blank box represented that the program's criteria did not address the GSTC criterion at all. So if for example, a GSTC criterion stated that *water consumption should be measured, sources indicated, and measures to decrease overall consumption should be adopted*, and the program's criteria did not state anything about measuring water use but did have criteria pertaining to decreasing overall consumption, that comparison would receive an "x" indicating that the program addressed the GSTC criterion to some extent, but not fully. The degree to which a criterion was "fully addressed" or "somewhat addressed" was essentially up to my discretion. However since these analyses were all performed by the same person within a relatively short time period, a degree of consistency was maintained.

While the Mohonk Agreement best practice standards and the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria were intended for sustainable and/or ecotourism certification programs, comparing green lodging programs with these standards is interesting for several reasons.

First, the procedural framework for green lodging programs has the same components as any sustainable tourism certification program and should likewise be held up to best practice standards in the industry. Second, the initial intent of the GSTC was to provide standard practices for sustainable tourism for the lodging sector, obviously the target client of green lodging programs. In some instances green lodging programs (like Virginia Green) are expanding to include tourism businesses other than just lodging however, a step that makes them more similar to current sustainable tourism certification programs. And third, while the focus of green lodging programs is improving environmentally efficiency *within* the business, there is some indication that programs may in the near future begin to incorporate criteria focusing on other aspects more in line with sustainable tourism standards.

Information about the tourism certification programs as well as the criteria for each program comes from the triangulation of three sources: the programs' websites (including content on the websites themselves and documents published on the websites such as application instructions, questionnaires and self-assessment forms), the programs' certification criteria (located on websites), and personal communication by email or phone with program coordinators. Information about each program was first sought from the program website and published materials.

Information that could not be found in this material or needed further clarification was summoned through email and phone communication with program contacts. Program coordinators for all programs (except the Adventure Green Alaska program) were interviewed by phone. These interviews were informal and the questions asked varied depending on what information we still needed to know about the program in order to fill in missing gaps.

We were unable to get in personal contact with the Adventure Green Alaska program, however all the necessary information for the analyses was available from the website.

Because the program is so new and had not yet certified any businesses when the analyses were completed, some procedural aspects of the program were inferred based on the information available.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Case Studies: US Tourism Certification Programs**

#### **4.1.1. Adventure Green Alaska**

The Adventure Green Alaska (AGA) certification program was launched September 9, 2008 by the Alaska Wilderness Recreation & Tourism Association (AWRTA), a nonprofit trade association representing over 300 wilderness-dependent businesses and communities.



#### *Qualification for certification*

To be certified, businesses must first meet the following three basic criteria:

- The business complies with U.S. environmental, consumer protection, and labor laws while operating within the State of Alaska or its territorial waters.
- The business has a two-year operating history in Alaska.
- The business is a member of a tourism or community trade association (the Alaska Wilderness Recreation & Tourism Association, convention & visitors bureau, Sustainable Travel International, etc.).

#### *Criteria outline*

AGA's criteria are divided into four broad categories:

- Local Communities and Economies
- The Environment
- Climate Change
- Alaska History and Culture

**4.1.2. Travel Green Wisconsin.** The Travel Green Wisconsin (TGW) certification program, launched in 2007 by the Wisconsin Department of Tourism and the Wisconsin Environmental Initiative, is the nation's first "green" travel certification program sponsored by a state tourism agency. It is a "voluntary program that reviews, certifies and recognizes tourism businesses and organizations that have made a commitment to reducing their environmental impact.

#### *Certification process*

To become certified a business must fill out a registration form (which asks for baseline environmental performance data), complete a checklist of questions stating whether the business already implements the practice or when it expects to implement the practice, and pay a yearly certification fee. Applications are reviewed by the Wisconsin Environmental Initiative. If the business meets all requirements, they receive use of the TGW logo and a website profile.

#### *Qualification for certification*

To earn certification, the business must fulfill 3 basic requirements:

- The business is in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations. Each Travel Green Wisconsin applicant should be a model of regulatory compliance as well as environmental excellence.
- The business will allow certification documents to be posted on the Travel Green Wisconsin Web site. In addition, the business will make these documents available to the public, customers, and others upon request.
- The business is required to obtain at least 5 points in Section A, Communication and Education.

According to the TGW Outreach Coordinator (Will Christianson, personal communication, March 2009), the "expected date of completion" option for fulfilling the criteria is the result of an effort to create a checklist that was "meaningful and achievable" for the businesses. It hopefully encourages them to commit to being a sustainable business and it gives them an additional opportunity to set goals for the future. Under the Wisconsin Travel Green scheme, businesses can essentially become certified by fulfilling about 21.6% of the available points (this does not include any extra credit points they may receive). Because some of the criteria are worth more points than others, the exact number of listed criteria fulfilled can be slightly more or less than 21.6%.

#### *Criteria outline*

TGW's criteria are divided into nine categories:

- Communication and Education (Customers, Employees, Public)
- Waste Reduction, Reuse, and Recycling
- Energy Efficiency, Conservation, and Management
- Water Conservation and Wastewater Management
- Air Quality
- Wildlife and Landscape Conservation and Management
- Transportation
- Purchasing
- Local Community Benefits

**4.1.3. Virginia Green.** Virginia Green (VG) is a statewide program whose mission is to reduce the environmental impacts of Virginia's tourism industry. The program began in the Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) Office of Pollution Prevention (OPP) and is run as a partnership between the DEQ, the Virginia Tourism Corporation, and the Virginia Hospitality and Travel Association. In addition to lodging, the Virginia Green program also certifies attractions, restaurants, convention centers, conference centers, visitor centers & rest areas, events, and travel & partner organizations (any organization or business that is associated with tourism including vendors, tour companies, service providers, convention & visitor bureaus, hotel and B&B associations, etc). In addition, certification is coming soon for wineries and golf courses.

#### *Certification process*

To receive the Virginia Green status, the business must complete the application that corresponds to their business category and email it to Virginia Green. The application consists of checking boxes to state that the business complies with certain core criteria. In addition, the business is asked to give more detail about the specific green

activities they practice under the core criteria categories. There is no fee for certification. Virginia Green reviews the application and if the business qualifies they will be profiled on the Virginia Green website and given use of the logo.

#### *Qualification for certification*

For each business category there is a list of five core criteria that the business must comply with. As long as the business fulfills these criteria and works for or with the tourism industry, they are eligible to receive Virginia Green status.

The minimum requirements for Virginia Green Lodging Participants are:

- Offer optional linen service – sheets and towels are not automatically changed every day
- Recycle and reduce waste – strive to at least provide the opportunity for guests to recycle cans, bottles, etc.; facilities should have a written explanation available for the recycling opportunities they provide, and staff should be able to address this with guests
- Use water efficiently – facility must have a plan for conserving water that should consider water-saving faucets, showerheads and toilets, leak detection and effective landscape watering plan
- Conserve energy – facility must have a plan in place that encourages the replacement of lighting and equipment to energy-efficient alternatives
- Offer a green events package - facility must offer a “green” or “environmentallyfriendly” package for conferences, meetings and other events and at a minimum must be able to provide recycling at such events and be willing to work with “environmentally-aware” customers on other techniques to reduce waste

#### *Criteria outline*

The Virginia Green criteria are slightly different for each type of entity that is certified. For example the required criteria for restaurants include eliminating the use of Styrofoam and recycling grease, while the required criteria for hotels include an optional linen service. In all cases the core criteria for certification are rather vague and interpretation is mostly left up to each business as to whether or not they comply with it. The criteria are currently being “redefined” and made more specific, however. For example, facilities will soon have to list who their recycling vendor is rather than simply claiming that they recycle (Rachel Bullene and Sharon Baxter, VGL, personal communication, March 2009). The core criteria for VG Hotels and Lodging Facilities are the same as the minimum requirements listed above.

**4.1.4. Florida Green Lodging.** Florida’s Green Lodging (FGL) program was established in 2004 by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) with the stated intent of “recognizing and rewarding environmentally conscientious lodging facilities in the state”. The program promotes three key benefits that a facility will earn when it becomes designated: it will save money and reduce utility costs, it will have the ability to market to a new audience (the new audience is expected to be eco-friendly travelers explicitly stated as being associated with ecotourism), and it will have free advertising from the FGL program. On its application page it states, however, that the “main purpose of the designation program is to encourage hotels to understand and improve their environmental performance rather than simply implement a few green practices.” As a response to criticisms claiming the criteria aren’t strict enough, the FGL Program Coordinator argues that FGL is the first step for many of these hotels and it is important to keep in mind that the hotels’ first priority always has to be the guest (Karen Moore, Green Lodging Coordinator, FGL, personal communication, March 2009).

#### *Certification process*

In order for a property to become Florida Green Lodging designated, the first required steps are to identify an Environmental Champion (a liaison between the program and the lodging facility), obtain approval from the appropriate management, and create a Green Team with members from different operational areas of the lodging facility. The Green Team then needs to complete and submit an Environmental Self-Assessment form. An on-site visit from a trained FGL assessor to ensure that the facility meets the program requirements is the final step in becoming a designated Florida Green Lodging facility. If the facility meets the required criteria, it receives use of the FGL logo and advertising on the website. The application process and certification are free for all levels of certification.

#### *Criteria outline*

The criteria for FGL have recently been updated, but the administrators are waiting to implement it until it can be compared to new government standards that are expected to be released shortly. In the future the criteria may be updated to include standards that take into account a hotel’s carbon footprint and its impact on wildlife species (Karen Moore, Green Lodging Coordinator, FGL, personal communication, March 2009). For now though, the criteria categories are as follows:

- Communication
- Water Conservation
- Energy Efficiency
- Waste Reduction
- Clean Air Practices

**4.2. Comparison of Case Studies to Mohonk Best Practice Procedural Standards.** The following analysis is based on a comparison of the procedural aspects of each case study to the best practice standards laid out in the Mohonk Agreement.

Overall the AGA, TGW and FGL programs fulfill the majority of best practice standards - 15, 14 and 12 respectively out of 17 total.

Below is a summary of the results of the comparison between four of the best practice standards and the four case study programs.

- The scheme should establish control of existing/new seals/logos in terms of appropriate use.
- The scheme should include provisions for technical assistance.
- The scheme should be designed such that there is motivation for continual improvement of the certified business.
- To ensure integrity the certification program should be independent of the parties being certified and of technical assistance and assessment bodies; it should also require audits by suitably trained auditors.

### 4.3. Comparison of Case Studies to the GSTC

The following analysis is based on a comparison of the case studies' criteria to the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria.

Table 7. Comparison of case studies to Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria

		Adventure Green Alaska	Travel Green Wisconsin	Virginia Green Lodging	Florida Green Lodging	
		AGA	TGW	VGL	FGL	
<b>Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria</b>						
<b>Sustainable Management</b>	A.1 Sustainability management system	X				
	A.2 Legislation and regulations	X	X		X	
	A.3 Personnel receive periodic training	x	x	x	x	
	A.4 Customer satisfaction	x	x		x	
	A.5 Promotional materials					
	<b>Buildings and infrastructure:</b>					
	A.6.1 Comply with local zoning					
	A.6.2 Respect the natural or cultural heritage		x	x		
	A.6.3 Sustainable construction		X	x		
	A.6.4 Persons with special needs					
A.7 Interpretation of natural areas & culture	X	x				
<b>Socio economic</b>	B.1 Community development	X	X			
	B.2 Local employment	x	x			
	B.3 Local purchasing	x	X	x		
	B.4 Support local small entrepreneurs	x	X			
	B.5 A code of conduct	X				
	B.6 Commercial exploitation policy	x	x			
	B.7 Equitable hiring	x	x			
	B.8 Legal protection of employees	x	x			
	B.9 The activities of the company	x				
<b>Cultural</b>	C.1 Code of behavior	X				
	C.2 Historical and archeological artifacts	x				
	C.3 Protection of sites	x				
	C.4 Uses elements of local art	x	x			
<b>Environmental</b>	<b>Eco-efficiency</b>	D.1.1 Purchasing policy favors	X	X	X	x
		D.1.2 Disposable and consumable goods	x	X	X	x
		D.1.3 Energy consumption	x	x	X	X
		D.1.4 Water consumption	x	X	X	X
		D.2.1 Greenhouse gas emissions	x	X	x	x
	<b>Natural resources</b>	D.2.2 Waste water		X		x
		D.2.3 Solid waste management plan		X	X	X
		D.2.4 Use of harmful substances	X	X	X	x
		D.2.5 Business implements practices	x	x	x	x
		D.3.1 Wildlife species	x			
	<b>Biodiversity protection</b>	D.3.2 No captive wildlife is held	x			
		D.3.3 Native species for landscaping	X	X		
		D.3.4 Biodiversity conservation	x	x		
		D.3.5 Interactions with wildlife	x	X		

Two different summaries of the comparisons between the programs' criteria and the GSTC are provided below. Figure 3 indicates what percentage of the GSTC are either explicitly addressed (represented in the above Table by "X") or somewhat addressed (represented in the Table by "x") in the programs' criteria. So for example, the AGA program's criteria mentions 50% of the Sustainable Management criteria from the GSTC; and the TGW and FGL programs' criteria addresses 100% of the eco-efficiency criteria.

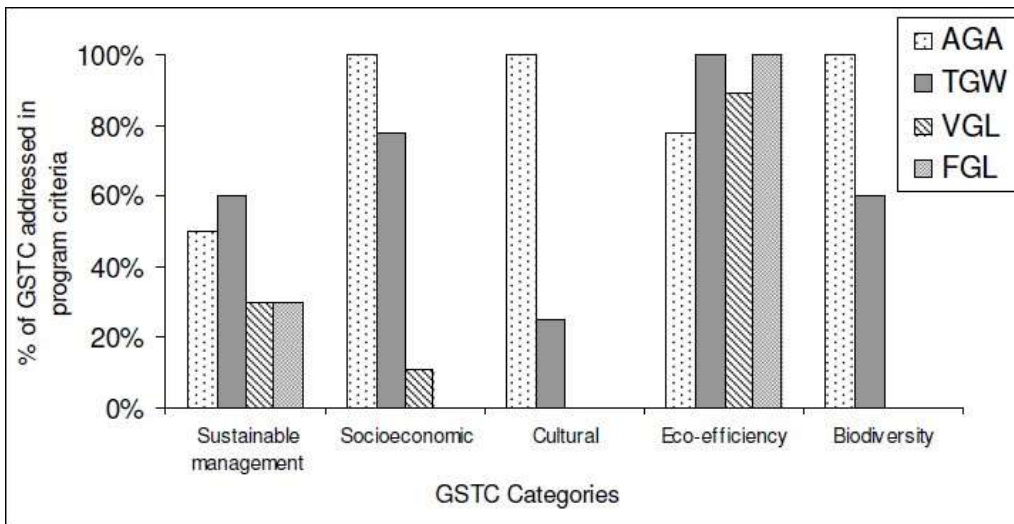


Figure 3. Percent of GST Criteria addressed in program criteria

Evident from this summary is that all four programs address most of the eco-efficiency criteria and at least some of the sustainable management criteria. Neither the VGL nor FGL programs address any cultural or biodiversity criteria. The socioeconomic criteria addressed by VGL is for local purchasing.

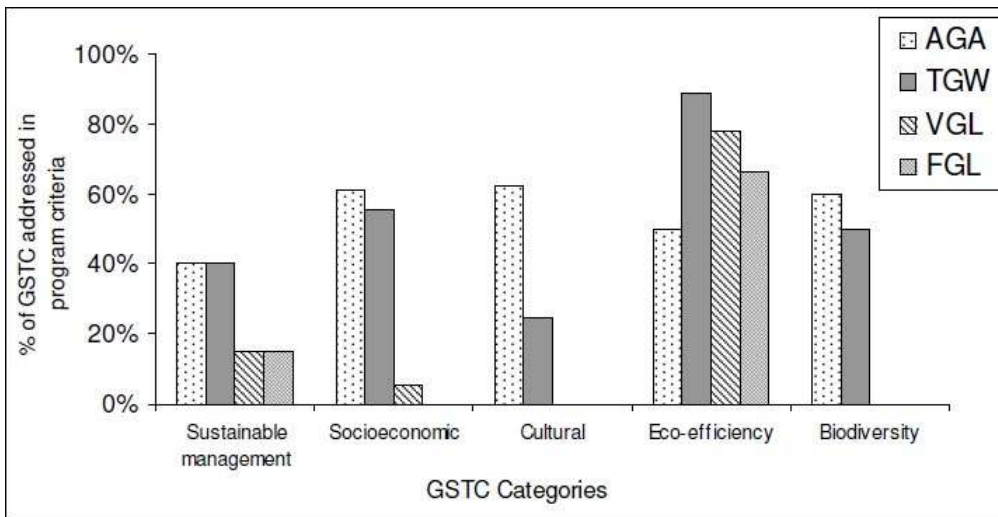


Figure 4 is a summary of the same data but here *the extent* to which the programs' criteria address the GSTC is taken into account and expressed. For this summary the "X"s in Table 9 were converted to 2's, the "x"s were converted to 1's, and blank boxes equaled 0. Percentages represent the number of points the program's criteria received out of 74 total

This summary essentially represents how well the programs' criteria complies with the minimum standards for sustainable tourism as laid out in the GSTC. For example, in the ecoefficiency category, AGA's criteria mentions reducing water and energy use, but does not require that it be measured as the GSTC do. AGA therefore does not completely comply with those criteria and receives a lower score in this summary (Figure 4) for the eco-efficiency category than in the first summary (Figure 3).

It is also interesting to note those Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria that none of the four programs address in their certification criteria. These criteria are:

- A.5. Promotional materials are accurate and complete and do not promise more than can be delivered by the business.
- A.6. Design and construction of buildings and infrastructure:
  - A.6.1. comply with local zoning and protected or heritage area requirements;
  - A.6.4. provide access for persons with special needs.

GSTC that were only addressed in one of the four programs are:

- A.1. The company 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.
- B.5. A code of conduct for activities in indigenous and local communities has been developed, with the consent of and in collaboration with the community.
- B.9. The activities of the company do not jeopardize the provision of basic services, such as water, energy, or sanitation, to neighboring communities.

- C.1. The company 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.
- C.2. Historical and archeological artifacts are not sold, traded, or displayed, except as permitted by law.
- C.3. 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.
- D.3.1. 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.
- D.3.2. No captive wildlife is held, except for properly regulated activities, and living specimens of protected wildlife species are only kept by those authorized and suitably equipped to house and care for them.

## **5. Discussion for Iran**

**5.1. Best Practice Procedural Standards.** All certification programs, no matter what they are certifying or what kind of criteria they use, should follow some set of best practice standards in terms of operational and procedural aspects. The fact that almost all of the Mohonk Agreement best practice standards are present in at least one of the case study programs indicates that these standards are achievable for a certification program. The only standard that none of the programs fulfill is the one suggesting that certification bodies should be independent of the auditors and the certified parties. This raises a red flag about the feasibility of future certification programs being able to comply with this particular criterion. Given the staff and financial restraints of these programs, it seems unlikely that a program will be able to comply with all of these standards collectively.

Following is a detailed explanation of four of the best practice standards that surveyed programs had difficulty complying with.

### *1. The scheme should establish control of existing/new seals/logos in terms of appropriate use.*

Establishing control over the use of logos (or ecolabels) is important in ensuring credibility and trustworthiness of the logo brand. All of the programs indicate on their website that in the event a business is unwilling or unable to meet the program requirements, they will be required to give up the right to use the certification name and logo. This may be easier said than done, however, due to the inability of the certification program to actually monitor and enforce regulations at all businesses. Additionally, since most of the programs rely on self assessment and customer feedback, the programs may not know if the logo is being used inappropriately unless a customer makes a report. Like the Wisconsin program, most programs assume that if their logo is being used inappropriately, or by a business that is not certified, they will hear about it by word of mouth. Both Florida and Wisconsin mentioned that they thought about trade marking their logos to ensure better control, but neither has done so.

In order to ensure the control and appropriate use of program logos the following procedures should be considered: a credible assessment of businesses prior to certification, a recertification period including a check-up on compliance, random spot checks of businesses, solicitation of customer comments by the certification program about business practices, and provision of clear instructions to the certified businesses on appropriate logo use. Given that all of these procedures, except the last one, require substantial staff and financial resources, it is no surprise that programs have difficulty establishing control of their logos.

### *2. The scheme should include provisions for technical assistance.*

Technical assistance may be provided to both certified businesses so that they may improve their sustainability practices, and to non-certified businesses so they may become eligible for certification. Support is offered in person by way of site visits, over the phone, or on a website. A few state-level certification programs are administered by environmental government agencies and therefore already have the expertise to assist businesses with improving their business practices related to eco-efficiency standards.

For these four case studies technical support and assistance is typically only offered to businesses as a way to improve their eco-efficiency standards. As demand for ethical products and services increases and tourism businesses start to incorporate triple bottom line sustainability practices into their operations, however, outside support and assistance will also be needed to help measure and mitigate social, cultural and economic implications of businesses – aspects considered much more difficult to measure than environmental impacts.

### *3. The scheme should be designed such that there is motivation for continual improvement of the certified business.*

It is important that certified businesses are continually working to improve their sustainability practices in order to stay updated with the most current practices. In some of the schemes, businesses are certified initially with fairly non-demanding criteria in order to promote initial acceptance to the program and gain their commitment to sustainable practices.

Over time, however, the businesses should show improvement in order to remain certified and to demonstrate continued commitment to the program. There are a number of different ways that programs have been designed to encourage improvement of certified businesses. One of the most common ways is to offer different levels of certification. Being able to attain a more prestigious (or “greener”) level of certification provides the incentive for businesses to improve their sustainability practices. This program aspect does have its limitations in encouraging improvement, however, especially for those businesses already certified at the highest level.

As shown by the all studies presented here, there are other ways a program may encourage improvement among certified businesses. A scale of greenness rather than various levels of certification is one example. With this technique it is important to set minimum certification requirements high enough so that all businesses granted use of the

logo meet some set of sustainability standards. Other procedural aspects of a program that encourage businesses to improve include monitoring or recertification, requiring businesses to state what sustainability practices they have implemented since the last certification period and make goals for the coming year, provide reimbursements or financial incentives to businesses for implementing sustainable practices, and ensure businesses sustainability practices or level of certification is visible to the public to encourage self-induced competition among businesses.

4. *To ensure integrity the certification program should be independent of the parties being certified and of technical assistance and assessment body; it should also require audits by suitably trained auditors.*

Certification programs should be independent of the parties being certified. It seems reasonable that the initiators of sustainable or ecotourism certification programs will be those with the most expertise in the industry – the owners of tourism businesses. However having certified parties who are also involved with the certification program can reduce the credibility of the program.

Third-party certification whereby an assessment of the business being certified is done independently of both the applicant and the awarding body is a key aspect of any credible certification program. In addition, the assessors must be adequately trained so that the method is reliable and equivalent for each business. Because the cost of this type of certification is high, often times certification programs will be forced to use either self-evaluation or second party certification. Although allowing self-assessment of businesses does not give much credibility to the program or the ecolabel, it does have its advantages in that it keeps operating costs low thereby keeping costs of certification low, it encourages admission to the program, and it promotes ownership of the process. The claim that self-assessment certification programs are beneficial because they are a good way to teach eco-efficiency practices to businesses may not be as strong anymore, however, as there are plenty of other ways available to get this same information (Rome et al. 2006).

For those programs that use self-assessment as the primary means through which certification is granted, there are other techniques that can at least be used to help ensure businesses are in compliance with the program's criteria. These techniques include: spot checks, telephone interviews, requiring businesses to submit names of independent references verifying their application, requiring they submit examples of marketing materials, and making each business' certification application available to the public.

This example and the fact that so many certification programs currently use self-assessment begs the question, is it really realistic for programs to use third-party assessment? And therefore would it be realistic for an accreditation body to require this as a standard for accreditation?

Experts in the tourism certification field seem to think that the risk of losing credibility by allowing self-assessments isn't worth the savings from less frequent, or non existent audits. "Many so-called certification programs coming on line (i.e. Green Wisconsin) that rely solely on self check 'audits' are in reality nothing more than statements of self commitment and suitable only for awareness-raising purposes rather than quality assurance. As programs downgrade audit procedures to reduce costs, their reliability diminishes" (Rome et al. 2006,p11). It seems probable then that regular, independent (third or at least second-party) audits of businesses will be a requirement for tourism accreditation. Held under increasing scrutiny, tourism certification programs, even those without much of a prospect for accreditation, will have to find a way to include these independent audits.

**5.2. Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria.** As previously mentioned, the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria are envisioned to serve as the common set of baseline criteria with which to accredit certification programs and as the "minimum standard that any tourism business should aspire to reach in order to protect and sustain the world's natural and cultural resources". Also evident from the analysis of these four case studies is that the minimum criteriarequirements for certification are fairly lenient. Even in those programs' criteria that contain many of the GSTC, only a portion (and sometimes an extremely small portion) of the criteria listed on the application are required to be fulfilled in order for a business to be certified. In setting minimum criteria requirements a program must keep in mind that if they set them too high, or they are too complicated, businesses won't be able to enter the scheme; however if they are set too low, the risk of greenwashing prevails.

As previously noted there were a few GSTC that were either not addressed in any of the four programs' criteria, or were only addressed in one of the programs' criteria.

Explanations for why these particular GSTC are missing from the programs' criteria as well as why particular categories of criteria are missing from certain programs all together may include the following reasonings.

1. It never occurred to the certification program's designer to include it.

A.5. Promotional materials are accurate and complete and do not promise more than can be delivered by the business.

Criterion such as A.5 would be easy enough for a certification program to add if it wanted to and also fairly easy to assess a business' compliance with.

2. The criterion simply isn't applicable to the type of business that the program aims to certify.

B.5. A code of conduct for activities in indigenous and local communities has been developed, with the consent of and in collaboration with the community.

C.1. The company 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.

For a lodging facility in the US, these criteria might not have any significance and therefore they would not be included in a certification program's criteria whose main audience are US hotels. Given that the GSTC are global criteria it can be expected that not all GSTC will be completely applicable to every location or circumstance. It is assumed that the accreditation standards would take this in account when working to accredit certification programs.

3. The criterion/criteria category was not applicable to the mission or intent of the program.

It is obvious from a quick review of US state-level tourism certification programs that the intent of the majority of the programs is to save businesses money by implementing ecoefficiency standards. These programs are incentive-based, focus on internal business aspects rather than on how the business impacts its external environment, and were developed by either hospitality associations or environmental government agencies. Considering this, and that social and cultural criteria are relatively new to certification programs in the US (compared to environmental criteria), it is no big surprise that socioeconomic and cultural criteria were not a part of the green lodging programs' criteria.

One explanation given by Honey (2002) as to why socioeconomic and cultural impacts of hotels on surrounding community are not adequately addressed in some programs is because these impacts are less "profound or apparent in large cities in developed countries than in rural or developing countries". Additionally, social criteria such as requiring that businesses purchase local goods and services or requiring local people to be hired may not bode so well in countries where this type of activity may be seen as a barrier to trade or as a violation of legislation protecting equal employment rights for all citizens (Font and Harris 2004). Surprisingly, however, three of these programs include criteria about local purchasing and two mention local hiring. This push to include socioeconomic criteria comes from the fairly recently developed concept of corporate social responsibility. Under these principles a business is forced not only to deal with issues impacting its bottom line, but also with issues that impact consumers, communities and local governments (Font and Harris 2004).

There is some indication that green lodging programs, once focused entirely on ecoefficiency standards, may begin to incorporate biodiversity criteria in their programs.

**5.3. Looking to the Future.** Given the impending tourism accreditation body and the current situation with tourism certification around the world, there are a few future scenarios that seem possible.

Whether these programs are more of the green lodging sort or the sustainable tourism sort depends on who initiates them and where the funding comes from. An advantage of this scenario is that at a state-level, certification programs can be customized to reduce impacts and deal with issues specific to that state. A challenge is that in order to become accredited, gaining much needed recognition and credibility, most of these programs will have to undergo procedural changes and introduce new criteria requirements.

The prospect that the current US green lodging programs will reform their criteria enough to be considered for sustainable tourism accreditation seems slim. A more likely scenario for the green lodging programs is that their criteria and standards will eventually converge under a new Green Meeting and Event Standard created under EPA which is currently in development. This will affect lodging facilities because they are a central component of many meetings and conferences.

Another future scenario is that a national tourism certification program is created whose standards are in line with the GSTC and other requirements for becoming accredited, as well as with the particularities of the Iranian tourism industry, the political system, and the legislation and regulations. This scenario perhaps fits more in line with what Alex Naar (Coordinator for Sustainable Tourism Initiatives, Center for Sustainable Tourism, East Carolina University, personal communication, March 2009) thinks will occur – that there will be "more participation in certification programs, but less programs". The likelihood that a national sustainable tourism certification program will be created solely for the US also seems doubtful due to a lack of leadership at a national level for true sustainable tourism.

Sustainable tourism certification will only reach its potential if and when consumers demand sustainable tourism products and services. As previously noted, consumer demand for sustainable tourism continues to be a topic of great debate. For those consumers that *do* already demand sustainable tourism though (like LOHAS - Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability - consumers), credibly certified tourism products and services are needed, but in some instances are not available. For example, it has been estimated that less than two percent of hotels in the US participate in a green hotel certification program (Petruzzi in Honey 2008 p.436), therefore making it difficult for consumers to find a green certified hotel, or a sustainable tourism certified company, even if they wanted to. In addition to my research on certification programs in the US, WEspoke with a few tourism businesses such as whitewater rafting companies and international tour operators in order to learn about their thoughts on tourism certification. It quickly became apparent that not only is there a lack of awareness among consumers about certification, but also among tourism businesses. Many businesses either don't know enough about certification to want to pursue it, don't know where to go to get certified, or become lost in the plethora of programs to choose from. The education of tourism businesses is therefore a necessary step in ensuring a successful future for tourism certification. A few suggestions include:

- Increase awareness and understanding of sustainable tourism certification among tourism businesses
- Assist businesses in: understanding the options they have for tourism certification and the strengths and weaknesses of those options, deciding what type of program would be best to pursue, and learning how the typical certification process works
- Provide a step-by-step process on how to incorporate triple bottom line principles (like the GSTC) into tourism business practices



**6. Final Conclusions.** A tourism accreditation body that will essentially certify the certifiers is on the horizon and is expected to give much needed visibility and credibility to existing tourism certification programs and their ecolabels. Once accreditation procedures and standards are finalized, certification programs will have the option to undergo the accreditation process. If US certification programs want to be considered for accreditation, it will be necessary for them to reexamine their procedural practices as well as the criteria that they use for certification. Many programs will have to make significant changes including implementing independent audits of businesses, expanding the content of their criteria, and increasing their minimum requirements for certification.

Although those programs that choose to continue certifying businesses solely on incentive-based eco-efficiency criteria will not be eligible for sustainable tourism accreditation, they will potentially play an important role in helping to push the industry towards more environmentally friendly practices. Even if certain tourism certification programs do not plan on becoming accredited, they should still expect to come under increased scrutiny as best practice standards and triple bottom line criteria become better known among the industry and among consumers.

Given the increasing interest in concepts like corporate social responsibility and ethical tourism, it seems inevitable that consumers will start demanding more from all sectors of society in terms of reducing or mitigating their environmental, social and cultural impacts. It therefore seems wise for all tourism certification programs to consider the new accreditation standards when revising their programs, and especially when scheming to create a new program all together.

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## THE BIRTH OF “WHITE MARRIAGE” AS ONE OF THE UNWANTED CHILD OF 1979 POST REVOLUTION

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**Abstract.** The purpose of this essay is to identify some of the main reason for couple’s cohabitation in Iran, where sexual relations outside of marriage are un-Islamic and subject to legal punishment. Many observers point to youth’s deteriorating economic condition, youths deviation from religious and traditional values, their lack of believe in Marriage, desire to experience relations without being legally bounded to marriage responsibilities, increased numbers of divorced men and women, influence of western culture, insecurity, lack of trust to sustainable marriage, marriage customs and ect as main reasons for emergence of so called “white marriage”. Official view it as foreign import practice denouncing sharia based family laws, and ultraconservative parents describe it’s practice unethical, immoral and insult to Iran’s marriage customs & norms, while new generations are turning backs on tradition and state-promoted values. Here I have tried to explore few of above variables contributing to emergence of cohabiting outside wed log in addition to how government and parents are filled with overwhelming sense of outrage over youth’s crossing over legal and traditional boundaries and furthermore, conservative parent’s frustrations over their own inability to understand children of information century. The birth of “White Marriage” as an unwanted child of 1979 Post Revolution has no place in Iran and it can’t be institutionalized in ultraconservative religiously bounded society where moderates refuse to shelter it too.

**Key words:** White marriage, Cohabitation, Sharia laws, Traditionalism, Youth’s Deviation from Religion, Conservatism, Traditional Marriage.

**Introduction.** Nowadays in Iran, there is a certain degree of unwillingness to accept sharia based marriage laws. Iran’s cohabiting couples outside of wedlock defy religiously oriented marriage costumes and traditional norms and conditions that are believed to be driving factors for youth’s lack of commitments for marriage in Iran. Traditionally at wedding night the presence of hymenal blood on the couple’s white bed sheets is evidence of women’s virginity which is very important in Islamic world for couple reasons 1- women must stay virgin until marriage and second, it’s compliance with Sharia laws, both of which are deeply valued in conservative Islamic societies. Women in Islamic nations believed to be primary preserver of Islam as wife and mother. Their proper conducts of behavior in accordance with Islamic laws are important. Form Hardline Mullah’s perspective cohabiting outside wed log is an insult to Islamic marriage principles. They often reacted to this growing trend of un-Islamic behavior harshly. First of all they interpreted it as western import concept denouncing Islamic family values and piousness to its ideology.

Family is center to Islamic ideology. It is the foundation to Islamic society where people deeply respect religious laws that regulate family functions. Any form of living together for unmarried couples outside of Sharia Law not only is unethical but also illegal and subject for punishment. It is a practice that Islamic society shows zero tolerance. This newly developed social phenomenon had created an awkward situation for governmental officials that have no idea how to deal with it. They have faced with growing trend of couples living together without officially being married; creating un-Islamic form of life style similar to western type that has been criticized and condemned by Islamic scholars for many decades. The growing impact of western culture on Islamic society and prevailing youth’s tendency to adopt western life style is becoming very difficult to Iranian official and conservative Muslim families to deal with. Ironically, western lifestyle that often labeled as bad prescription for family life is being praised by youths in Iranian society, a society that has been taking so much pride for its ardent pious Muslim parents that views religious norms as guarantor of sustainable family life. Currently, majority of youth are moving away from traditional marriage