Success factors for a tourism ecolabel

The capabilities of tourism stakeholders in Belarus in facilitating the success of an ecolabelling initiative

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Abstract

Tourism is an industry with considerable environmental and social impacts; in order to stimulate reduction of these impacts, voluntary recognition schemes i.e. ecolabels and certification programmes have been introduced to motivate tourism businesses to improve their environmental performance, encourage more sustainable practices and patterns in this branch of economy, provide information to tourism customers conscious concerning the environment. Voluntary recognition schemes are believed to successfully complement regulatory economic instruments and provide an adequate incentive to industry to pay more attention to the burdens which they impose on the environment.

Despite a proliferation of tourism ecolabelling initiatives, not all of them are successful. In order to facilitate an effective work of certification schemes, it is necessary to understand conditions in which their success happens. These conditions constitute determinant factors for an ecolabel; if they are understood properly, it helps promoters of certification schemes to achieve the best outcome upon completion of an ecolabelling project.

Determinant factors of success for a certification scheme are closely related to the issue of its stakeholders' involvement in the development of an ecolabel, and in order to ensure that the factors are fulfilled, the capabilities of stakeholders in their addressing should be identified. If they have appropriate capabilities to fulfil the factors of success, an ecolabelling initiative has higher chances to get effectively realized; if not, it may create problems later on. It is important to study if the matching between available capabilities and factors of success exists. It helps to make an optimal allocation of the roles of stakeholders which they would be capable to play in the fulfilment of the ecolabel's factors of success. Therefore this research identifies factors of success for the development of an ecolabel based on the evaluation of capabilities of stakeholders to address these factors.

Based on an extensive literature review, five success factors for a tourism ecolabel and required tourism stakeholder capabilities were identified. The cases of existing ecolabels demonstrated also that there is a clear link between available capabilities of tourism actors, and the potential roles they can play in the development of such a scheme. The value of performing an assessment of stakeholders' available capabilities, prior to the establishment of an ecolabeling initiative, was proven by performing a gap analysis on a case study in Belarus – a country where a tourism certification programme is going to be developed in the near future. Contrary to the initial hopes of this research, the results showed that in this particular case, the conditions for setting up an ecolabel are not mature enough to secure the viability of such an initiative there. Once more, the need for having such a preliminary evaluation of available stakeholders' resources is demonstrated. Further, the study was concluded with suggestions for focused enhancement of stakeholders' capabilities that should lead to a better fulfilment of the certification scheme's success factors.

Executive Summary

Voluntary ecolabelling schemes and certification initiatives are one of the key tools used by policy-makers to give businesses incentives to improve their environmental performance. The primary goal of these instruments is to motivate industry in paying more attention to its environmental performance, encourage sustainable production and consumption practices and patterns in different branches of industry or service through the minimisation of their impact on the environment. Ecolabels are intended to fulfil a number of different tasks, inter alia aiming to provide information about environmental aspects of various products and services thereby accounting both business and consumers' interests. Businesses have a chance to distinguish or positively mark themselves among a variety of competitors and receive market advantages and possible economic preferences from the authorities whereas the customers gain an opportunity to know more about the products and services they choose and about the effect of their choice on the environment.

First ecolabel was developed about two decades ago and today there is a large number of ecolabelling initiatives existent in the world for different product and service groups or categories. However, their success is still limited and only a few of certification schemes can claim to have succeeded. Although many questions have been raised about the effectiveness of these initiatives, little consideration was given to the importance of initial stages in the ecolabel's development. Nevertheless, there are some indications that difficulties in running a certification scheme are caused by insufficient attention to how the assigned roles of stakeholders allocated in the first phases of the ecolabel's setting up are supported by their capabilities.

Tourism is one of the most important branches of global industry which is prolific in ecolabelling schemes. Official sources such as WTO indicate that by 2002 there have been about 60 different voluntary recognition initiatives of various scales; nevertheless, only a few of them are believed to be successful. In order to ensure that tourism ecolabels are well-developed, the factors determining a success of such a scheme should be understood and thoroughly examined at the initial stages of the implementation of such a project or even before its start.

The literature on tourism ecolabelling indicates that there was little concern on studying the significance of the initial stages of implementation of an ecolabelling initiative. However, the insufficient attention to the actions and activities undertaken at the beginning of development of a certification scheme may endanger a success of its further running. Therefore it is important to identify and study conditions which should be created during setting up an ecolabel for its future successful functioning.

As literature shows, an ecolabel's success is closely related to its stakeholders' involvement in the development of a certification scheme. One way of ensuring that is by evaluating what capabilities exist among stakeholders and check their availability for such an initiative. If existing capabilities fit with the required elements for success, it can be said that an ecolabel has higher chances of success; if not, problems can be envisaged during its running. Therefore an evaluation of how the available stakeholders' capabilities match the determinant factors of an ecolabel's success is a helpful tool for making an optimal allocation of roles with higher chances of success for a certification scheme.

Based on the extensive literature review and discussions with tourism practitioners in labelling, five success factors for a tourism ecolabel have been identified with the required capabilities of stakeholders to fulfil them. These factors are multi-stakeholders' participation and cooperation, extensive knowledge on different aspects of development of an ecolabel,

credibility and transparency, funding provision and effective marketing. The usefulness of assessing capabilities as a way of an optimal allocation of stakeholders' roles along the process of developing a certification scheme has been proven by performing a gap analysis on a case study in Belarus. Since these aspects refer to the initial stages of the implementation of a certification scheme, this is an issue of a particular importance for this country because there are indications that an ecolabelling initiative will come into being in Belarus soon. Interviews with the representatives of most of the Belarusian tourism stakeholders have been conducted to evaluate the viability of a tourism ecolabel in the country as a result of the sufficiency/insufficiency of their resources and capabilities in addressing the factors of success for a certification scheme. Contrary to the initial hopes of this research, the results have shown that the conditions for setting up an ecolabel are not mature enough to secure the viability of such an initiative there. The study concludes with suggestions for focused enhancement of stakeholders' capabilities that leads to better fulfilment of the scheme's success factors and consolidates its long-time survival.

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1 Introduction

Tourism is one of the largest and most rapidly growing industries in the world. In 2004 together with associated travel elements it accounted for 11% of the world's GDP and was characterized by more than 750 million of international arrivals (WTO - World Tourism Barometer, 2005). Tourism generates significant revenues and it is the biggest export earner in the world leaving behind such large branches of economy like automotive, chemical, petroleum and food (Kuitert, 2005). By 2000 an estimated 8.2% of all jobs worldwide depended upon tourism and travel with the projections that over the next five years tourism would annually create about 5.5 million jobs more (CPDC, 1999).

Together with positive impacts such as additional investments in infrastructure, employment opportunities and revenues to local communities and economies as well as a broader appreciation for different cultures, customs, traditions and ways of life, tourism activities may also make a considerable negative effect, especially on the environment and indigenous people. It is often implied in the depletion of natural resources, pollution or destruction of natural habitats, intensification of social problems and conflicts, economic leakage from tourism destinations and others (Budeanu, 1999, p.34-43). As a result, a concern on how to reduce diverse impacts of tourism and, inter alia, how to improve environmental performance of this branch of economy has recently arose and laid a foundation into the concept of sustainable development in tourism which has become of a special importance for the last decade. The concept of sustainable development in tourism deals with the idea of meeting social, environmental and economic needs of tourism destinations and its inhabitants protecting and enhancing their opportunities for the future (WTTC, WTO and Earth Council, 1997). In other words, the concept of sustainable tourism has a long-term perspective; it relates to both present and future generations accounting ethical, social and cultural dimensions of tourism activities and striving to be environmentally sound as well as economically profitable and feasible (EDUCATOUR, 2003).

Tourism is one of the industries where a large number of various voluntary initiatives have emerged over the last two decades in order to support the concept of sustainable tourism through the promotion of sound environmental performance and better practices among businesses and consumers of tourism products and services. These initiatives include certification schemes, ecolabelling programmes, benchmarking procedures, codes of conduct, environmental awards, prizes and others. The voluntary recognition initiatives are introduced with the purpose of reducing the negative impacts of tourism activities and increasing their positive value serving as an alternative or supplementary tool to regulatory economic instruments. Today, over 100 different voluntary recognition initiatives of various scales exist in tourism (OECD, 2003). Most of them can be found in Europe with a strong rising popularity of such practices in other parts of the world where they are often regarded as an effective tool to encourage tourism industry to improve its environmental performance, enable domestic tourism products gain recognition among foreign tourists as well as to facilitate the successful penetration of domestic tourism businesses into external markets (Gaviria, 1995). Ecolabels and certification schemes are the most commonly accepted and used voluntary recognition tools; according to some experts they account for the highest number of such initiatives in tourism (STSC, 2003).

1.1 Problem definition

Despite a high popularity of ecolabelling and certification schemes in tourism industry, their success is still limited. Many of them are facing difficulties which arise as a result of inadequate allocation of roles that their stakeholders play. Better chances for success can be attended if the allocation of roles is done according to the available capabilities. However, currently

tourism research has given little attention to this issue. Therefore the subject of matching capabilities and roles of the ecolabel's stakeholders is important and has been put in focus of this study.

1.2 Thesis purpose and research questions

The main purpose of this thesis is to contribute with knowledge on how to make a tourism ecolabel successful through the identification and understanding of factors of success for a certification scheme and studying the roles and capabilities of tourism stakeholders in matching or satisfaction of these factors. The matching of the capabilities of tourism stakeholders in addressing the ecolabel's factors of success is verified in Belarus – the country where a tourism ecolabel can potentially be established in the nearest future. In other words, the thesis aims to conduct a comparative gap analysis of the necessary preconditions for making a successful ecolabel as known from the existent schemes and their availability and applicability in a specific country - Belarus.

The thesis aims to answer the following research questions:

- What are the factors of success for a tourism ecolabel?

- What roles can be allocated to different stakeholders to facilitate the success?

- What capabilities exist in Belarus to develop a successful ecolabel?

The research questions are to be achieved through the fulfillment of the following objectives:

- Understand the dynamics of developing a tourism ecolabel;

- Identify the factors which determine success or failure of a tourism ecolabel;

- Define stakeholders' roles in addressing the factors of success;

- Evaluate the viability of a tourism ecolabel in Belarus as a result of the sufficiency/insufficiency of the stakeholders' capabilities in addressing the factors of its success;

- Make suggestions and recommendations about the ideas of what tourism stakeholders in Belarus should think of in order to make a tourism ecolabel successfully come into being in the country.

The outcome of this research is of use to promoters of tourism ecolabelling initiatives because the knowledge obtained can be helpful in achieving the best results over the process of development of an ecolabel and prevent occurrence of difficulties which may endanger a successful implementation of a certification scheme. Thus, this is a main target audience of the thesis. Apart from promoters of a tourism ecolabel, the outcome of this study can be of interest to environmental and tourism policy-makers in the field of environmental issues and tourism, different stakeholders involved into tourism ecolabelling initiatives, researchers and other public interested in the development of sustainable production and consumption patterns in tourism industry.

1.3 Scope and limitations

This research was based on the analysis of success examples of tourism ecolabels due to the availability of literature on this topic; unfortunately, the information on failure examples was difficult to receive, therefore the main emphasis is made on the interpretation of knowledge obtained from the successfully implemented tourism ecolabelling projects.

This study is not an exhaustive evaluation of the existing certification schemes in the field of tourism industry. It is an attempt to study the process of developing a tourism ecolabel identifying and understanding the necessary factors of its success and capabilities of stakeholders in the fulfilment of these factors. Particularly, the capabilities of the Belarusian stakeholders to address the success factors of an ecolabelling initiative are discussed in this thesis. Finally, it is an attempt to learn what should be done by managers and designers of environmental certification efforts in tourism in Belarus if their capabilities are not sufficient.

This thesis was written from the perspective of promoters and initiators of a tourism ecolabel aiming to help them to successfully develop certification efforts and avoid occurrence of the problems which may endanger the implementation of an ecolabelling initiative.

The particular case chosen to verify this thesis was Belarus due to the fact that there are indications that a tourism ecolabel will come into being in this country soon; as a result, the research conducted can be of a particular interest to its initiators. Another reason which determined a choice of Belarus for a case study lies in the absence of language barriers and a relative easiness to organize the interviews with its stakeholders.

The study looked at the most important stakeholders in Belarus; however, two of them i.e. tourists and media have been left outside because of their poor organization (tourists) and accessibility (media). Nevertheless, the analysis of their capabilities was conducted with the help of the information obtained from other stakeholders and literature. Foreign donors have also not been considered in this thesis as stakeholders of an ecolabel as a result of its primary focus on the country-specific or internal actors.

The outcome of this thesis has conclusions which can be generalized to any ecolabelling initiative plus specific recommendations which are applicable only to Belarus.

The limitations to this study were imposed by the necessity to make interviews with the representatives of particular ecolabeling schemes in order to study how the practitioners have addressed the problem under review for different tourism ecolabels. Since most of them are not easily accessible, the paper is limited by the data obtained from those who found time to talk about the studied issue.

1.4 Methodology

The basic approach utilised for the data collection and writing of this thesis was one of a multidisciplinary nature due to the fact that tourism industry is a very diverse and dynamic branch of economy which involves a number of different stakeholders and operates a variety of definitions.

The ideas utilized in this thesis were generated with the help of inductive approach, starting with general considerations about tourism ecolabelling to specific identification of factors required for success. The research is complemented by a case study which examines the issues under discussion in Belarus.

The study was based on the analysis of primary and secondary sources of information. The primary information was received from six interviews with the practitioners from European tourism ecolabels and nine interviews with the Belarusian tourism stakeholders representing authorities, NGOs, academia and industry. The data were collected by semi-structured interviews that enabled the information to be clarified and elaborated upon; it also facilitated a dialogue and discussion with the interviewees and brought more explicit answers to the questions asked.

The secondary sources of information are represented by various scientific publications as well as by official materials published by the European Commission, OECD and World Tourism Organization. The materials of the recently held conferences, workshops and seminars on voluntary certification in the field of tourism industry had also been used for the purposes of this study.

The analysis of the information obtained was performed in order to get the results and findings for identifying the factors of success for a tourism certification scheme and studying the roles of stakeholders in their fulfilment. The evaluation of the viability of a tourism ecolabelling initiative to be developed in Belarus is also made in this research. Conclusions and recommendations were drawn from the key findings of the study.

1.5 Thesis outline

The thesis consists of seven chapters which are structured in the following way:

Chapter 1 provides an introduction into the thesis. The background of the issue under study, problem definition, purpose of the thesis and its research questions, scope and limitations as well as methodology is presented.

Chapter 2 is devoted to the general overview of tourism ecolabelling initiatives, it gives a definition to this phenomenon, strives to explain its purpose and reasons for the introduction, describes the major benefits of getting certified and discusses the main challenges facing tourism ecolabelling; it also provides a brief summary of the history of tourism ecolabelling initiatives, gives a classification of the existent types of certification programmes and discusses the major tendencies in their development.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the organization-manager of a tourism ecolabel and highlights the process of its development; it overviews the basic structure of an administrative organization responsible for managing a certification scheme and describes the necessary steps and actions required to be undertaken over the process of the development of an ecolabel

Chapter 4 aims to introduce stakeholders of an ecolabelling initiative and explain the main roles of and expectations from their participation; it explores the conditions which become factors of success for a certification scheme needed to be addressed by stakeholders in order to facilitate a successful implementation of such a project.

Chapter 5 introduces Belarus and its tourism market by giving a brief description of the country and its tourism industry, discussing the modern state-of-the-art in this branch of economy, and presenting stakeholders and particularities of a decision-making process in the field of tourism; it also highlights the current status and vision of an ecolabelling initiative in the country expressed by its promoters.

Chapter 6 explores the capabilities of the Belarusian stakeholders in addressing the ecolabel's factors of success; it provides an analysis of their strengths and weaknesses and discusses the possible solutions to enhance these capabilities.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by discussing the major findings of the study and offers some recommendations on the topics of future research.

1.6 Definitions used within the context of this thesis

Administrative organization for an ecolabel: a complex entity, appointed by the stakeholders of the ecolabelling initiative, responsible for running a tourism ecolabel after it has been set up comprising the bodies involved into the awarding procedures, funding provisions and verifying activities (Font, 2001).

Audit: "a systematic and objective evaluation that compares performance of a particular company against a set of standards or criteria" (STSC, 2003).

Certification programme: "a complete system containing all the requirements necessary to follow in order to obtain a certification award or an ecolabel. A certification programme is managed by an administrative organization but the programme itself is larger than the administrative organization or an individual certifier" (STSC, 2003).

Cooperation: "refers to the practice of people or greater entities working in common with commonly agreed-upon goals and possibly methods, instead of working separately in competition" (Wikipedia, 2005).

Credibility: "the believability and trustworthiness of a statement, action, or source, and the ability of the observer to believe and trust the above" (Fogg, Tseng, 1999).

Dissemination: "any process by which information is transmitted (made available or accessible) to intended audiences or target groups" (NICHSR, 2004).

Ecolabel: "a form of a voluntary initiative under which each applicant is assessed against the previously stipulated criteria independently, as opposed to being assessed against other applicants. The ecolabels are given to all those applicants that meet the criteria, not only to the best-performing ones. Ecolabels identify products and services that "are better than..." others available. An ecolabel is generally used interchangeably with a certificate" (STSC, 2003).

Ecolabelling (certification) organization: a manager or managers of a tourism ecolabel appointed to set it up by the initiators of such a project; they must possess sufficient knowledge and competence to take a responsibility for developing such an initiative (Font, Tribe, 2001).

Knowledge: "the awareness and understanding of facts, truth or information gained in the form of experience or learning" (Wikipedia, 2005).

Marketing: "means to make a communication about a product or service in order to encourage recipients of the communication to purchase or use the product or service" (HIPAA, 1996).

Participation: "a process through which stakeholders' influence and share control over development of initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them. It is a process

which can improve the quality, effectiveness and sustainability of projects and strengthen ownership and commitment of the stakeholders" (The World Bank Group, 2005).

SMEs – Small and Medium Enterprises: "enterprises having less than 250 employees and less than 45 million USD in annual turnover" (Taylor, Simpson, Howie, 1998).

Stakeholder: "any person, entity or interest group that has some association with the company either as a shareholder, with a contractual relationship, neighbours, local authorities, government and other representative bodies (Accountability, 1999).

Tourist: "a person who travels for the primary purpose of: business (e.g. consultations, conventions and inspections), other personal business (e.g. shopping, medical or legal appointment or an educational study trip), visiting friends and relatives (e.g. socialising, dining out or home entertainment) and pleasure (e.g. sport, recreation, and sightseeing). As long as such a traveller is visiting (for less than one year) an unfamiliar destination (the host community) from that the person normally resides in, then that person may be regarded as being a tourist" (Hunter, Green, 1995).

Tour operator (provider): "an operator that provides services that include responsibility for the delivery and/or operation of all facets of the tour" (WTO, 1997).

Transparency: "openness, honesty, and accountability in public and private affairs" (International Monetary Fund, 2005).

Trust: "relationships between people which involve the suspension of disbelief that one person will have towards another person or idea. It especially involves having one person thinking that the other person or idea is benevolent, competent, good, faithful, honest, confident or true" (Wikipedia, 2005).

Verification: "a process of examining, measuring, testing or otherwise determining conformance with requirements specified in the application criteria" (STSC, 2003).

2 Ecolabelling schemes in sustainable tourism industry

After the Rio Earth Summit held in 1992, the concept of sustainable development, its major principles and recommendations presented in the Rio Declaration on the Environment and Development have been widely disseminated among the governments, industrial associations, businesses, academics and communities (Ramm, 2001, p.28). As a result, a wide variety of different paradigms, policies, strategies, frameworks, schemes and programmes designed to move the world in general and specific industries in particular towards more sustainability have been proposed (Honey, Rome, 2001). Due to its significant environmental, economic and socio-cultural impact, tourism has become an important testing area for the development of such initiatives. Two major aspects in relation to promoting sound environmental practices and patterns in tourism industry have been actively discussed by its stakeholders (Warnken et al., 2005, p.367):

- the incorporation of the principles and recommendations on sustainable development into different planning, policy and regulatory frameworks at various levels of tourism industry, ranging from international to local tourism organisations; and

- the establishment of a range of voluntary recognition schemes and initiatives set up and run by different tourism stakeholders concerned with monitoring and rewarding sustainable tourism management practices.

In the latter case, a special role is attributed to the tourism-specific ecolabelling or certification awards which have been viewed as promising self-regulatory mechanisms for improving the industry's environmental performance (UNEP, 1998).

2.1 What is a tourism ecolabel and what is it for?

As a result of its steady growth, tourism industry generates large financial revenues and contributes into the development of local economies. However, this growth has concurrently resulted in the increased impact of tourism industry activities on the environment. At the same time, the parallel rapid development of scientific, technical and managerial solutions to environmental problems has created a number of market opportunities for businesses and their products or services which perform in a sustainable way. In order to ensure that more sustainable products or services as well as businesses offering them are easily recognizable and that a consumer's choice does not harm the environment, a number of different ecolabelling and certification schemes have been set up and developed. In other words, the primary purpose of these is seen as to help guide customers to environmentally, economically and socially responsible tourism businesses and to encourage further improvements and set standards within the representatives of tourism industry (Hamele, 2004).

The ecolabelling initiatives in general and the ecolabelling schemes in the field of tourism industry in particular are often defined as "a voluntary instrument of the implementation of high environmental performance in order to reduce consumption and acquire visibility to a sensitive market" (APAT, 2002). Such a generalized definition is laid into the basis of any ecolabel with possible insignificant deviations depending on the specificity of particular groups or categories of products and services. The European Union (EU) ecolabelling scheme, for instance, defines itself as "a voluntary initiative to promote products and services which have the potential to reduce negative environmental impacts, as compared to the other products and services in the same product or service group, thus contributing to the efficient use of resources and a high level of environmental protection. This shall be pursued through the provision of guidance and accurate, non-deceptive and scientifically based information to consumers on such products and services" (EU Ecolabel Scheme, 2005).

If to simplify, a definition of an ecolabel may sound like "a symbol awarded on a voluntary basis by a certifier to an organization representing its commitment or certain achievements to behave and supply products according to specific standards" (Maccarrone-Eaglen, Font, 2002). However, it is noteworthy to mention that a large number and diversity of ecolabels makes a single definition of them difficult (Kozak, Nield, 2004, p.141).

As it is seen from the definition adopted by EU, an ecolabelling initiative should bring a voluntary nature. It is believed that within a market economy voluntary projects are more efficient and less discriminatory than state-imposed taxes and charges since they may concurrently integrate in a non-compromising way social and environmental concerns with economic growth (IIED, 2002).

2.2 Purpose and objectives of a tourism ecolabel

The primary purpose of ecolabels in tourism industry is to give incentives to its businesses to improve their environmental performance, award the best practices and ensure that its different components (including demand from customers and supply from businesses) perform in such a way that they cause less negative impact on the environment, society and economy.

Thus, the main objectives of the introduction of ecolabels in tourism are often regarded as follows (Hamele, 2001), (Sasidharan, Font, 2001):

- Encourage the representatives of tourism industry to improve their practices in terms of the reduction of environmental impacts associated with the products and services they offer;

- Make consumers of tourism products conscious and committed about the impact they may make on the environment by their choice and decisions;

- Enable customers to be better informed about the performance of tour operators, travel agencies, hotels, services, etc. which they may select;

- Act in favour of those tourism businesses which perform in a higher environmentally friendly and committed manner;

- Guarantee the tourist businesses' external monitoring and reporting to consumers and business-to-business market.

It is noteworthy to mention, that since tourism industry is rather big, some ecolabeling schemes have initially been introduced for those its forms which are characterized by a stronger intention to conserve and preserve natural resources and contribute into the development of local economies i.e. for ecotourism and, alternatively, for a rural tourism (Diamantis, Westlake, 2001).

2.3 Benefits of a tourism ecolabel

An ecolabel has a number of clear direct benefits which can be combined into three big groups: environmental, economic, and social. The implementation of ecolabelling projects allows tourism facilities and services to enhance their environmental performance by following criteria outlined by a particular label. The demanding criteria found in most ecolabelling schemes motivate the actors within tourism industry to focus closely on activities of their business that interact with the environment. The ecolabels may lead to the reduction of water

use, energy consumption, waste generation, and use of materials; they may enable a minimisation of emissions, facilitate a transition to safer and reusable or biodegradable materials, encourage a better waste management and recycling systems, etc.

Although it is quite difficult to establish an explicit cause-effect relationship between getting certified and profits, many businesses are often satisfied with the overall performance and results of being labelled. In many cases they believe that consumer choices are driven by environmental in addition to quality performance. Many practitioners, for example, contend that tourism ecolabels serve as promising marketing tools to attract environmentally conscious consumers and testify a high quality of the certified products and services. Moreover, they believe that ecolabels may lead to the reduction of costs associated with running a particular business e.g. when it comes to water and energy consumption (Meyer, 2005).

Due to a growing public concern regarding environmental performance of a specific business, tourism ecolabels allow the certified representatives of this industry to send a clear message to the public about the fact that their environmental performance is reinforced by an ecolabel with a guarantee of legitimacy and credibility. It is believed that such a message improves the relationships with the public, authorities, NGOs as well as the mass-media. In other words, a tourism ecolabel brings a number of social benefits which are often implied in the form of the improved image of a particular tourism business among its customers and in the positive recognition of this business among other tourism stakeholders.

Another important aspect of ecolabelling is often regarded from the standpoint of indirect benefits which such initiatives may bring. They are usually implied in the form of potential benefits that can occur in the future if an ecolabel comes into being. The raise of the stakeholders awareness of the environmental impact of a particular product or service as a result of the certification or the creation of a product or service benchmark or target that puts a pressure on a non-certified business encouraging it to improve its environmental performance are often mentioned as examples of those indirect benefits of ecolabels (AEAT, 2004), (APAT, 2002).

Thus, if to summarize, there are a number of clear advantages of setting up and running ecolabelling schemes from the standpoint of businesses, customers and authorities. They can be briefly presented as follows (Font, Tribe, 2001), (UNEP, 1998):

Business perspective:

- Create market advantages by receiving a special distinctive mark which helps customers and businesses differentiate one company from all the rest;
- Reduce the costs associated with running a particular tourism activity – water consumption, energy use, etc.
- Gain certain support and preferences from the government or local authorities as a result of getting certified and making improvements which help to protect the environment;

Customers' perspective:

- Get an opportunity to know more about the tourism product or service selected;
- Receive a guarantee that certain products and services are characterized by a high environmental or ecological quality (e.g. destinations) and insignificant environmental impacts (e.g. hotels);

Authorities' perspective:

- Use an ecolabel as an alternative or supplementary tool to regulatory and command-and-control instruments;
- Provide businesses with incentives to voluntarily improve their environmental performance;

2.4. Challenges of a tourism ecolabel

Despite the benefits of a tourism ecolabel discussed above, they remain to be a highly arguable issue especially when it comes to the questions of their effectiveness (STSC, 2003). According to some experts, in spite of the proliferation of different ecolabelling initiatives in the field of tourism, less than one percent of its businesses have joined the schemes by 2000 (Synergy, 2000). By 2001 about 7000 different tourism products have been certified, 6000 of them - in Europe (Maccarrone-Eaglen, Font, 2002); the average number of the certified companies per certification programme is below 50 (STSC, 2003).

Although there is a significantly greater participation in some regions e.g. Nordic countries and Germany than others, the number of the certified businesses remains to be low. The major reasons for this are commonly seen as (IIED, 2002):

- Scepticism about a potential of a particular ecolabel and its market, economic, social and environmental advantages;

- Confusion about the relative merits, costs and savings of different schemes and their criteria;

- Uncertainty about the importance of a high environmental performance to customers' purchasing choice.

In addition to that, although the certified businesses use an ecolabel in their marketing strategies in order to positively distinguish themselves from the competitors, no comprehensive analysis has been conducted to assess the extent to which the ecolabels or other certification schemes may influence the customer's choice and behaviour (OECD, 2003).

2.5. Historical development of tourism ecolabels

Today, there are a considerable number of different ecolabels and certification schemes in tourism. Although the ecolabeling initiatives are quite a recent phenomenon in this industry, their quantity and popularity have rapidly grown for the last decade. The first tourism ecolabel came into being in 1987 and by now, according to different sources, about 60 ecolabeling schemes and certificates dealing with sustainable tourism which have been implemented in practice exist (WTO, 2002, p.55). Figure 2-1 represents the trend in the development of tourism ecolabelling initiatives from 1988 to the present. The reason for such a proliferation of certification schemes lies in the fact that each country is willing to develop its own distinctive mark instead of joining already existent initiatives. As a result, it creates a lot of challenges for ecolabels and diminishes their overall effectiveness.
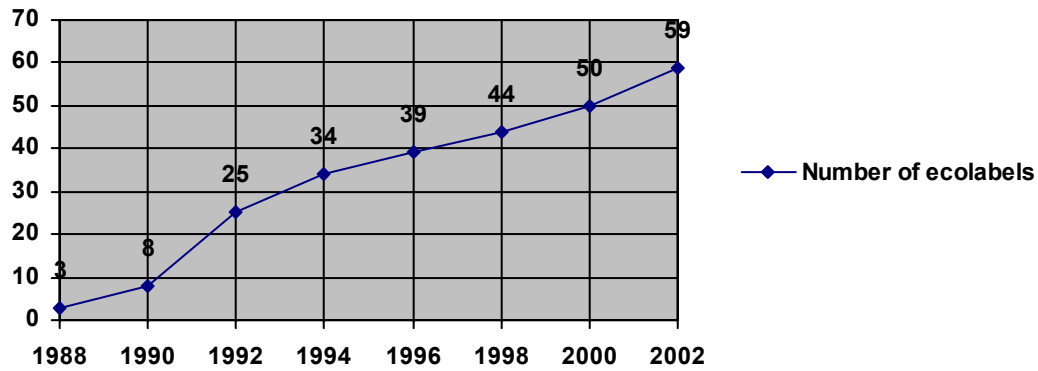
Figure 2-1. Dynamics of the number of ecolabels in tourism industry

Source: Data from Spittler, Haak, 2001; WTO - World Tourism Organization, 2002.

It is noteworthy to mention that not all certification schemes work efficiently - their performance history covers a broad spectrum from a great success to a total failure (CCIF, 2002). Some ecolabels have been abolished, declined and disappeared but new ones appeared and evolved. Some of them have become rather popular and recognized on the large territory whereas there are still a lot of quite small localized labels which may mean a little to anyone except the local customers (Buckley, 2001).

2.6. Types of tourism ecolabels

The tourism ecolabelling initiatives can be divided into several big categories according to different aspects of their implementation. For customers, for instance, it is perhaps the most important to understand what is being certified. Some schemes are to award the industry commitment to improve their current patterns and practices; others aim to certify the implementation of a specific process, such as an environmental management system, while all the rest may label the achievement of the environmental performance objectives of a particular business. Today, a mixture of the process and performance-based certification is getting more and more popular phenomenon (Eco-Africa Information Portal, 2005).

Ecolabels can also be classified into several major types according to the scope and area of their application and recognition, focus groups and products (product or service categories), a type of promoter (promoters) as well as to the relationship between the quality of the environment and impacts on the environment utilized in different definitions of the certified products and services.

2.6.1. Ecolabels focusing on the quality of the environment and environmental impact of tourism activities

Since the quality of the environment is a key issue in tourism industry, the ecolabels are often focused solely on the ecological quality of a particular tourist destination (e.g. the level of cleanliness of water, air or soil in a particular place) paying little or no attention to the negative impacts which can be made by tourist activities developed in a specific area or vice versa. Therefore the suggestion has been made to classify tourism ecolabels according to their relationship with the issues discussed above. The following three types of ecolabelling initiatives are distinguished (Mihalic, 2001):

- Ecolabels focusing on the impact of tourist products or services on the environment of a particular destination i.e. the product or service that makes insignificant or no impact is labelled (e.g. The Costa-Rican Certificate for Sustainable Tourism);

- Ecolabels dealing with a high quality of the environment of a specific destination often regardless of what impact the tourist activities may have on it i.e. the destination with clean water is labelled (e.g. The Landscape of the Year European award);

- Combined ecolabels that concurrently address both issues (e.g. The Blue Flag ecolabel for beaches and marinas).

It is believed that the optimum solution is laid in the use of the so-called combined definition of ecolabels which accounts the major interests of tourism industry and its customers (Mihalic, 2001).

2.6.2. Ecolabels referring to the type of promoter (promoters)

The tourism ecolabels are usually introduced as a result of joint efforts of different stakeholders - governmental bodies and public authorities, businesses and industry associations, environmental and tourism NGOs, tourist and tourist associations, academia, etc.

Although some experts believe that a deep state regulation must be avoided in the process of developing an ecolabelling project in order to guarantee a voluntary involvement of businesses and avoid additional pressure from the authorities (Hamele, 2004), there are a very limited number of practical examples of tourism ecolabels when the government is not involved at all. It is believed to be a specific feature of tourism certification which distinguishes it from other industries that the public sector involvement into its initiatives is high. According to some authors, the governmental or intergovernmental participation in tourism is crucial (STSC, 2003).

Today around 70% of tourism ecolabels are run by private organizations and NGOs (WTO, 2002), governmental bodies are involved into the most part of the initiatives playing a number of different roles; it is believed that there is only one ecolabel - Costa-Rican Certificate for Sustainable Tourism which is totally administered by the government (IIED, 2002).

2.6.3. Ecolabels addressing the focus groups (categories)

Ecolabeling schemes are utilized for a number of focus areas within the bounds of the large tourism industry. These focus areas are usually related to a specific group of users who might potentially apply for an ecolabel. Such areas may include a variety of products and services. The most regular are campsites, holiday farms, hotels, municipalities, guesthouses, youth hostels, tour operators, excursions, tours, restaurants, cafes, destinations, etc.

Currently, the majority of tourism ecolabeling schemes in the world are applied to accommodation businesses (ERM, 2002). In Europe, for example, around 70% of ecolabels are to certify hotels, guesthouses, youth hostels, etc (Figure 2-2). The reason for such a distribution is due to the fact that accommodation sector is the easiest segment of tourism industry to evaluate and measure the environmental performance of its businesses against a set of stipulated criteria; the product is more standardized and the issues are common (STSC, 2003). It is more advanced in environmental performance if compared to other categories of tourism products and services.

Destinations are another important field for tourism ecolabelling. Such initiatives are based on a particular geographically defined area in which the municipality or municipalities strive to implement the concepts and recommendations of sustainable development. The destination ecolabelling scheme aims to promote sustainability within the planning framework for tourism and the associated products and services and to develop sustainability principles for the entire region (Destination 21, 1999).

Some preliminary works have shown that there are a limited number of tourism ecolabeling schemes specializing solely in tour operators; instead, most of them focus on tourism services provided in a particular tourist destination. By 2000 there were only 2 ecolabels which targeted exclusively tour operators and 4 more which mentioned to include tour operating activities in the area of their interest (IIIEE, 2000, p.20-23). The major reason for a relatively low popularity of tour providers with ecolabelling initiatives lies in the field of the difficulties of their certification because many companies sell a range of tours that may include less environmentally sound (e.g. cruise ships or hunting tours) as well as more environmentally friendly and responsible products and services (e.g. bird-watching tours). It means that tour operators usually have a limited control over an individual supplier making it is difficult to measure the level of their sustainability (STSC, 2003). In order to address this problem, the Australian Eco-Certification programme, for example, awards particular individual tours rather than the entire company (Australian Eco-Certification Programme, 2005). It is noteworthy to mention that some ecolabelling initiatives which claim to certify tour operators utilize a broad definition of tour operating services and are also applicable to those companies which specialize in tourism accommodation business upon the condition if they meet certain stipulated requirements and provide other environmentally sound tourism products or services – hotels with horse-riding services, fishing, biking, etc. (Nature's Best, 2005).
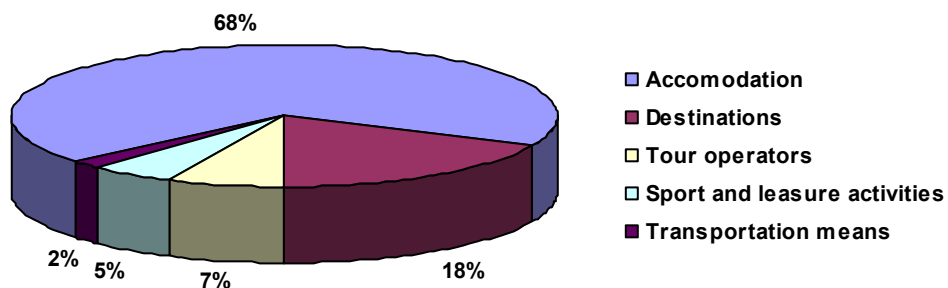
Figure 2-2. Distribution of tourism ecolabels in Europe according to the focus groups

Source: Data from WTO – World Tourism Organization. (2002).

Thus, accommodation sector is characterised by a presence of the majority of tourism ecolabels. Due to a relative easiness in evaluating the environmental performance of its businesses and a growing customers' demand for environmentally sound practices in this segment of tourism, it will supposedly keep the leading positions in tourism ecolabelling market in the future (Kaas, 2005).

2.6.4. Ecolabels focusing on the scope and geographical area of their application and recognition

Various ecolabelling schemes are applied in many countries of the world. Most of them, however, can be found in Europe where the very first ecolabel came into being (WTO, 2002). All the ecolabelling schemes use a number of specific requirements or criteria which must be

fulfilled in order to get a label. Often these requirements are rather different due to the fact that tourism industry is large and the products and services offered within its scope are diverse. Due to this fact it often utilizes a variety of activities and approaches in specific countries and regions which may differ much from the ones used in other parts of the world. What may be regarded appropriate in one country or region can not be acceptable on another territory (ERM, 2002). Therefore, according to the scope of application and recognition of certification schemes (ranging from municipalities to worldwide level), tourism ecolabels are divided by some experts into four categories, namely international (e.g. the Green Globe 2001), national (e.g. the ecolabel adopted by ADAC, Germany), regional (e.g. the Blue Swallow, Germany), and sub-national (e.g. small Swiss ecolabel called Eco-Grishun) (Buckley, 2001). It is noteworthy to mention that some authors distinguish only three major categories in terms of this classification – national, international and sub-national (Buckley, 2001). Most of ecolabeling schemes in Europe belong to national and sub-national types whereas the representation of the international ecolabels is much smaller (Figure 2-3).
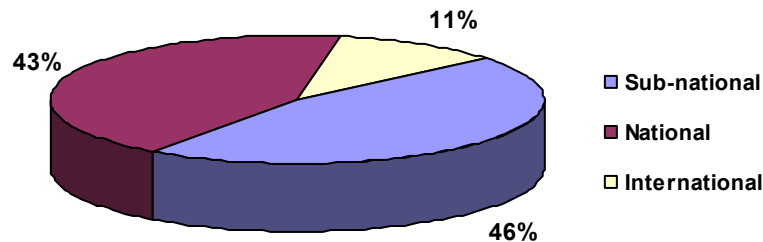
Figure 2-3. Distribution of tourism ecolabels in Europe according to the scope and area of their application

Source: Data from WTO – World Tourism Organization. (2002).

To sum up, the national tourism ecolabels remain to be so popular due to the fact that each country is willing to have its own distinctive award instead of joining another initiative launched by other promoters and often located in another country.

2.7. Harmonisation of tourism ecolabelling initiatives

Due to the fact that there is a plethora of tourism ecolabels, they may often overlap or serve as an alternative to one another. As a result, a serious concern has been expressed by many stakeholders about such a proliferation of tourism ecolabels and about the problems which it may impose on the businesses in deciding what scheme they should apply to and on consumers in understanding what different initiatives mean and how they can be compared against one another (IIED, 2002). Although some practitioners contend that a diversity of tourism ecolabelling initiatives enables their better competitiveness and provides its promoters with an adequate incentive for improvements (Karl, Orwat, 1999), the advantages of the proliferation of tourism ecolabels can hardly outweigh its disadvantages.

In addition to a confusing nature of a big number of tourism certification programmes, it is often quite difficult to say which of them has more merits and advantages. Although many experts believe that future belongs to the international ecolabelling schemes (Kahlenborn, Domine, 2001) the number of national ecolabels is still growing. However, since the fall of the 1990s there had been a few attempts to unify such a big variety and diversity of tourism ecolabelling initiatives in Europe that often brought about confusion and misunderstanding

among the customers of the certified products and services as well as among the businesses willing to get certified.

- **VISIT initiative;**

In 2001 under the aegis of the European Union a new project called VISIT (Voluntary Initiative for Sustainability in Tourism) was launched. It is directed to bring together numerous ecolabeling schemes operating in Europe on regional (sub-national), national and international levels. This project aims to support sustainable tourism concept by promoting ecolabels and strengthening its effectiveness. VISIT has worked a range of criteria, principles and procedures which accounted the demands of the majority of the existing ecolabeling schemes in Europe. This initiative does not mean a new ecolabel but a unification, mutual recognition and visibility of the labels existent today. Nowadays there are 12 ecolabeling schemes in Europe which have accepted the VISIT initiative and unified its requirements, criteria and principles of work (VISIT, 2001).

- **Viabono umbrella brand;**

In 2001 the German Ministry of the Environment took an initiative to set up a special ecolabelling symbol which could function as an umbrella tourist brand for environmentally-oriented services in different segments of German travel and tourism market. Utilizing the combined definition of ecolabels (see 2.6.1) Viabono strives to guarantee that the customers will get a product or service of a high quality in conjunction with its low impact on the environment (Viabono, 2005). Due to impressing marketing campaigns and a wise promotion strategy Viabono umbrella brand has become quite a popular initiative in Germany with ambitious plans to expand the area of its application and recognition in Latvia, Estonia, Slovakia and Poland (Höhn, Meyer, 2004). However, having succeeded in marketing, Viabono has endangered itself in credibility. The initiative conducts verification of applicants mostly on the basis of the so-called "on-desk verification" i.e. through the analysis of the relevant technical documents, reference letters and recommendations from the authorities or environmental NGOs; it also relies on the customer's feedback and strives to reduce to minimum using expensive on-site auditing procedures (Meyer, 2005). As a result, it can be fraught with a loss of credibility especially if such practices remain after extending the area of applicability of Viabono to other countries.

- **Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council (STSC) initiative;**

In 2001 the Rainforest Alliance, an international non-profit organization dedicated to the protection of endangered ecosystems and people and wildlife that live within them by transforming land-use management, business practices, and consumer behaviour, initiated a study of the feasibility of establishing an international Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council (STSC) to promote globally recognized, high-quality certification programmes for sustainable tourism and ecotourism through a process of information sharing, marketing, and assessment of standards (IIED, 2002). The idea was to create an international accreditation body responsible for coordinating the actions of administrative organizations of the existent tourism ecolabels. The Rainforest Alliance conducted a number of workshops and sociological surveys directed to explore the attitude of stakeholders in the field of tourism ecolabelling worldwide to such an initiative. It also aimed to set up the international standards for certification of tourism industry organizations that want to claim to be sustainable. These standards were supposed to be adopted by the existent ecolabelling programmes with the purpose of their harmonisation. In other words, the proposed STSC was planned to work with current certification schemes, not replace them (STSC, 2003). As a result of the feasibility

study conducted, the three phases of the implementation of this project had been proposed; however, at the moment there is no reliable information on the progress of the initiative and its plans for the future.

In fact, all of above three initiatives may pretend to play a role of a consolidator of tourism ecolabelling schemes; however, at the moment the VISIT project apparently possesses the most preferable chances to unify other ecolabels due to the fact that it has a narrower scope of application and has not endangered its credibility.

Nevertheless, despite all these measures undertaken with the purpose of the unification of tourism ecolabels, their effectiveness remains to be a rather questionable issue. Each country usually strives to develop its national tourism brand first which could distinguish it from the others. However, since recently there has been a new positive tendency in the field of tourism ecolabelling – although the national or sub-national certification schemes remain to emerge and be popular, they have started accounting the common requirements and criteria established by the "umbrella" initiatives, namely VISIT, with the intention to become part of such initiatives in the future. According to the practitioners, it may help a new ecolabel reduce the costs associated with developing the certification requirements and criteria by adopting the ones already existent and tested in practice, encourage cooperation between other tourism ecolabels and gain the international recognition of a scheme (Klitsunova, 2005; Kronkvist, 2005).

2.8. Ecolabelling and ISO standards

As part of its ISO 14000 series of environmental standards, the International Organisation for Standardisation - a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies) - has drawn up a group of standards specifically governing environmental labelling. The coverage of ecolabelling issues within the scopes of the ISO standards may become an important factor for the further development of such initiatives. ISO standards may serve as a bonus point into the justification of the ecolabel's need in a particular country since they provide promoters with a clear evidence of the recognition and appreciation of such practices worldwide.

The ISO 14020 family covers the three types of ecolabelling schemes briefly summarized in Table 2-1 (Business and Sustainable Development: a Global Guide, 2005), (ISO 14000 series, 2005):

- Type I is a multi-attribute label developed by a third party;

- Type II is a single-attribute label developed by a producer;

- Type III is an ecolabel whose awarding is based on a full life-cycle assessment.

For the purposes of this thesis ISO 14024:1999 standard called "Environmental labels and declarations. Type I environmental labelling. Guiding principles and procedures" represents a special interest. This standard sets up the principles and procedures for how ecolabels (including those for tourism certification programmes) should be established in terms of the criteria, assessment procedures, and verification so that a particular good or service is compliant with the relevant standard. The overall objective of this standard is to secure transparency and credibility in implementing Type I environmental labelling programmes and to harmonize the principles and procedures applicable to them. There are a number of approaches to ecolabelling and this international standard relates to the Type I ecolabelling initiatives, which are to award the products that meet a set of the previously stipulated

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requirements. Such a label identifies those products which are determined to be environmentally preferable within a particular product group or category. Type I environmental labelling programmes are voluntary; they are usually operated by public or private agencies and can be national, regional or international in nature. This standard includes the selection of product categories, product environmental criteria and product function characteristics needed for better assessing of the applicants or applying products and services and demonstrating their compliance. The ISO 14024:1999 standard also establishes the order of the certification procedures required to be passed for awarding a label. Although this standard was developed specifically for ecolabelling, it is generic enough to have clear applications to sustainable tourism practices (STSC, 2003).

Table 2-1   ISO 14020 family of standards for ecolabelling

Standard	Description	Application
ISO 14020:1998	Environmental Labels and Declarations - General Principles	Sets out nine general principles that apply not only to ecolabelling schemes but to all environmental claims designed to promote accurate, verifiable and relevant information
ISO 14021:1999	Environmental Labels and Declarations - Self-declared Environmental Claims (Type II environmental labelling)	Sets out the requirements for Type II ecolabels, i.e. environmental claims made for goods and services by a producer
ISO 14022:1999	Environmental Labels and Declarations: Self-Declaration Environmental Claims, Symbols	Promotes the standardization of terms and symbols used in environmental claims, e.g. explains such definitions as 'recycled content'
ISO 14023:1999	Environmental Labels and Declarations: Self-Declaration Environmental Claims, Testing and Verification	(Currently under review)
ISO 14024:1999	Environmental Labels and Declarations: Environmental Labelling Type I, Guiding Principles and Procedures	Provides guidance on developing programmes that verify the environmental attributes of a product via a seal of approval
ISO 14025:1999 and ISO 14025 Technical Report	Environmental Labels and Declarations – Type III Environmental Labelling; Environmental management - Environmental performance evaluation - Guidelines	Addresses Type III ecolabelling schemes and offers guidance on technical, formatting and administrative issues

It is noteworthy to mention that tourism industry is characterized by a presence of small firms which cannot easily afford to apply ISO standards, which are costly, time-consuming, often require outside consultants, and are therefore best suitable for large companies. As a matter of fact, more suitable for them are certification programmes that include a set of criteria or benchmarks against which all businesses are judged. Nevertheless, there are a few tourism ecolabels based on ISO 14024:1999 standard e.g. The Green Flag for Green Hotels European certification scheme; a number of certification schemes worldwide utilise its principles and approaches as a useful template e.g. The VISIT initiative (IIED, 2002).

Thus, ISO standards and their dealing with environmental labelling issues may give an impetus to promoters of a tourism certification scheme to develop it in a particular country accounting the recommendations and guidelines of ISO 14000 series; a comprehensive highlighting of different aspects of ecolabelling within the scopes of ISO and conforming to their standards may also serve as an additional proof that an ecolabel may gain a wide recognition and increase a credibility of such an initiative among its stakeholders (Honey, Rome, 2001).

3. Structure and process of development of an ecolabel

The process of management of a certification programme can be divided into two distinct parts with two different organizations responsible for the fulfilment of the tasks attributed to each of those parts. The process of setting up an ecolabel is a responsibility of an ecolabelling or certification organization whose members and selected and appointed by promoters (initiators) of an ecolabelling initiative. Usually this is a team of the qualified managers possessing sufficient administrative, consultation and negotiation skills necessary to build a "framework" of a future ecolabel. In certain cases, promoters of a certification scheme themselves may form an ecolabelling or certification organization responsible for project management. After an ecolabelling initiative has been set up, the process of its running begins that is a responsibility of an administrative organization whose members are selected and appointed by stakeholders of an ecolabelling project. Since an administrative organization takes most of the responsibilities for management of a certification scheme, it is important to examine its structure, duties and functions.

3.1. Structure of an administrative organization

An administrative organization is considered as a complex entity comprising the bodies involved into the awarding procedures, funding provisions and verifying activities. In other words, an administrative organization is fully responsible for running and managing a scheme after it has been set up. The candidatures to an administrative organization should be discussed and agreed upon by stakeholders. The representatives of an ecolabelling (certification) organization which will have carried out the activities connected with setting up an ecolabel can also be involved into an administrative organization.

The basic structure of any administrative organization consisting of awarding, funding and verification bodies is presented in Figure 3-1. It indicates that an awarding body has close links to a funding body whom it negotiates financing with and reports on the progress of an initiative to. At the same time, it actively communicates with applicants registering their applications, processing the application materials provided and preparing the necessary documents on the decision of the label awarded or rejected. An awarding body has direct links to a verification body appointing their members (upon agreement of the candidatures with a funding body), preparing a set of criteria, discussing the order of the conduction of a verification process, and documenting the results of auditing procedures performed by them. A verification body, in turn, is closely connected with the applicants assessing their environmental performance against the criteria and making decisions on their compliance and non-compliance.

3.1.1. Awarding body

An awarding (certifying) body is primarily responsible for (Font, Tribe, 2001):

- promoting an ecolabel to the potential applicants;

- coordination of the application and awarding process and;

- dealing with public relation activities.

Apart from this, it also communicates with a funding body by reporting on the actions committed and their success as well as by making a budget of the costs of the ecolabelling management and applying for financial support. Another important responsibility of an awarding body is to regularly revise the ecolabelling criteria and standards accounting possible

changes in environmental legislation and public demand as well as to collaborate with a verifying body on how these criteria are complied with. In addition to that, it organizes trainings and seminars for potential awardees as well as for those businesses which have already received an ecolabel aiming to further disseminate information about a certification programme and teach the labelled businesses how to achieve its benefits and position themselves on the market. In other words, an awarding body usually combines the functions of a secretariat and an executive committee being the operational arm of a funding body (Font, 2001).
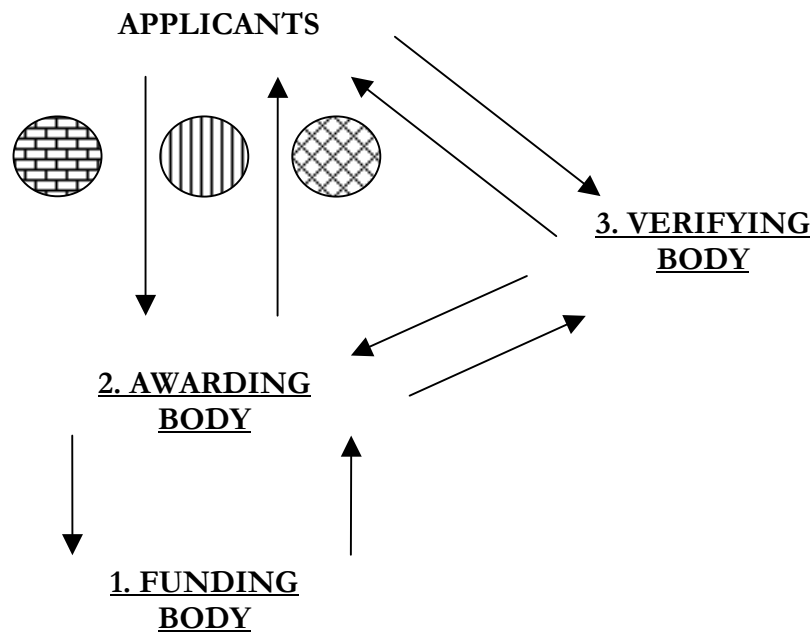
Figure 3-1. Structural elements of an administrative organization for a tourism ecolabel

Source: Adopted from (Font, 2001).

An awarding body usually employs those people who possess sufficient knowledge about tourism ecolabels and particularities of functioning of such initiatives. The number of employees depends on the scope of a particular ecolabelling scheme, its maturity and availability of financing, number of applicants, and may vary from a few persons to a couple of dozens. In many cases the employees work on a voluntary basis or have a part-time job in addition to their regular occupation (Kronkvist, 2005).

3.1.2. Funding body

A funding body is responsible for paying the costs of the development and management of an ecolabel. Usually it consists of a number of different organizations - governmental and non-governmental, industry associations and businesses. The current tendency is to attract non-governmental entities in order to guarantee transparency and credibility of an ecolabelling scheme. A funding body strives to influence the environmental performance of industry through providing an ecolabel with a relevant financial support (Font, 2001). The overwhelming majority of tourism ecolabels has a funding body as a vital part of their administrative organization today. However, some authors predict that the situation is likely to change in the future when the representatives of funding bodies could ask awarding (certifying) bodies for a greater financial independence and self-sufficiency (Font, 2001).

3.1.3. Verifying body

A verifying body is another structural branch within the scopes of an administrative organization. It is to check the compliance of the potential applicants with the stipulated criteria through the conduction of auditing (verification) procedures. Upon completion of the verification procedures a verifying body reports to an awarding body on the environmental performance of the applicants and comes up with relevant conclusions and recommendations in order to justify its decision on granting a label or rejecting the application. Another important responsibility of a verifying body is to conduct the evaluation and periodical monitoring of the certified businesses (Font, 2001). It is noteworthy to mention that the verification procedure is a long, complicated, time-consuming and expensive process which requires considerable amounts of money and highly-qualified specialists.

A verifying body is usually appointed by stakeholders of an ecolabelling initiative as a result of the extensive discussions and approval of the proposed candidatures; it consists of several persons – environmental professionals, experts in a particular tourism business, representatives of local authorities, academia and NGOs, etc. They should be familiar with the verification procedures and recognized as prominent experts in the field of their business or academic activity.

A verification body is recommended to be an independent (or a third party) organization in order to avoid any kind of influence and pressure from the applicants and an awarding entity. Today about 80% of ecolabelling schemes involve the third party experts or independent jury to conduct the verification procedures (WTO, 2002, p.65).

The structural bodies of an administrative organization actively communicate with each other. The openness of communication between them and readiness to listen to the opinion of one another increases transparency of such an entity and builds trust between its members.

To conclude, an administrative organization is an entity whose activities impact the success of a tourism certification programme. Therefore a particular attention should be paid to the professionalism of its members who are to be selected by stakeholders of an ecolabelling initiative.

3.2. The process of development of a tourism ecolabelling project

The process of development of an ecolabel is a responsibility of its promoters; they must appoint the members of an ecolabelling or certification organization playing the roles of project managers. At the end of a project, when an initiative has been set up and started functioning, the project managers may become the members of an awarding body responsible for running an ecolabel (Font, 2001).

Although there is no common methodology for designing the process of developing a tourism ecolabel, some authors contend that it can be divided into three or four distinct stages or phases (Figure 3-2) each of those has a special value and significance for the final outcome of an ecolabelling initiative.

3.2.1. Phase I (Project Management)

The foremost task of the phase I (Project Management) is to find a suitable manager or managers (ecolabelling or certification organization) who possess sufficient knowledge and competence to take a responsibility for developing such an initiative. According to some practitioners, it is not an easy thing to do since many ecolabelling (certification) organizations

appointed to develop the scheme may lack business-driven management and the associated financing, marketing, and administrative skills (Müller, 2002).

I. Project Management	• Identifying the manager (s) of the project • Understanding the aims of the ecolabel and major principles of its work
II. Positioning and Planning	• Initial information gathering and literature searching about the ecolabelling projects and their outcomes • Identifying potential stakeholders and conducting the delegation of responsibilities • Scoping potential awardees • Defining expected impact of the ecolabel on tourist behavior
III. Development and Consultation	• Environmental impact evaluation • Developing manuals for applicants • Writing manuals and stipulating details of verification procedures
IV. Management and Marketing	• Budgeting the costs of ecolabelling management • Negotiating and identifying the sources of funding • Appointing a potential awarding (certification) body • Developing marketing, promotion and dissemination strategies; conducting information campaigns

Figure 3-2. The major phases of development of an ecolabelling initiative and attributed to them actions to be made

Source: Adopted from (Font, Tribe, 2001).

In order to find a suitable manager for an ecolabelling project, it is important to work out in advance a business plan which should provide the evidence of the industry support of an initiative or their willingness to do so, the evidence of the major stakeholders consensus or, at least, some convincing facts about the start of the process for obtaining such a consensus, the detailed management plan and some plausible financial projections, including a detailed costing and revenue model (Font, Tribe, 2001). Most authors assume that the management of a project can be delegated to a specific organization (e.g. NGO, industry or business association, etc.) which has already got a certain experience of working in a particular segment of tourism and could thereby perform the appointed tasks well or to an educational institution possessing deep knowledge about ecolabels and particularities of their practical application in conjunction with a good familiarity with the major trends, needs and tendencies in the field of tourism industry of a specific region (CCIF, 2002).

In some cases in this phase of a project the potential members of an awarding (certification) body can also be identified. Being involved into an initiative at the initial stage of its development as an organization-manager, it may further be appointed as one of the member

entities involved into an awarding body being responsible for the certification procedures. Such situations may be beneficial for a particular ecolabelling project from the position of the valuable experience acquired by an organization-manager over the period of preparing and setting up an ecolabel that can be productively realized in the further phases of the development of an initiative.

3.2.2. Phase II (Positioning and Planning)

The phase II (Positioning and Planning) is to study the necessary prerequisites for setting up and running an ecolabel that are existent in a particular region (country) and for a specific tourism segment. These may include the detailed research of the targeted sector of tourism in general, the study of the relevant legal and technical documents regulating this segment of industry; the identification of the role and place of an ecolabel between other policy-making instruments available in a particular country or region, etc. In other words, it is important to have a comprehensive knowledge about those aspects and actors of tourism industry which can be possibly influenced upon within the development of an ecolabelling project. This information can be documented and provided by the governmental bodies and other organizations (e.g. research and educational institutions, industry associations, NGOs) involved into tourism and other related industries.

Apart from this, the identification of all possible stakeholders should be done in this phase of the initiative. The relevant measures directed to attract attention from these stakeholders to an ecolabelling project and maintain an open and participatory approach for them must be worked out and implemented in practice. This is a crucial step of a project because without the active stakeholders' participation and their support of an ecolabelling initiative it is doomed to failure. Besides this, it is vitally important to stipulate in advance the expectations which an ecolabelling organization has got concerning each of the stakeholders' contribution into the process of the ecolabel development and regarding what each stakeholder can actually provide an ecolabelling organization with. In parallel with this process, the procedures for scoping all potential awardees with their further thorough documentation and description should be performed. This can be done as a part of the initial market study or as an independent task.

The feasibility study on the potential influence of an ecolabel on tourists and tourism businesses behaviour is recommended in this phase of an ecolabelling initiative. It may help an ecolabelling organization to justify its further actions and identify some measures needed to be undertaken in order to successfully develop a certification scheme in the future. Some contacts with other ecolabelling organizations (preferably in the same focus group or category) should be made with a particular emphasis on the possibilities for cooperation and assistance with a relevant knowledge and information.

It is also recommended at this stage to define the scope and place of an ecolabel between other tourism certification programmes or ecolabelling initiatives which are already existent in tourism industry. In other words, it is also important to not only understand how a new ecolabel will work in a particular region for a specific market, but and how it can be related to other schemes seeking the possibilities for different types of collaboration and cooperation with them (Font, Tribe, 2001).

All actions which should be carried out within the scope of this stage of an ecolabelling project require a financial assistance, involvement of human resources and strong information support. Most of the procedures mentioned above are likely to be performed by an ecolabelling organization itself. It means that it is a key actor responsible for the fulfilment of above needs. However, the certain parts of the tasks can also be delegated to other parties.

The market and feasibility studies for an ecolabel and the procedure of the awardees identification, for example, can be done by educational institutions as a part of their research, study plans and programmes or as a special task appointed by an ecolabelling organization to those stakeholders who possess a sufficient competence and knowledge to perform it. The information or assistance in the access to the information should be provided by the governmental bodies e.g. Ministry of Tourism or Ministry of the Environment. A certain participation in the information provision can be requested from the representatives of local authorities and business associations as well.

3.2.3. Phase III (Development and Consultation)

The phase III (Development and Consultation) includes a number of important steps related to the evaluation of the environmental impact which an ecolabel can make on tourism industry, the outlining and selection of the relevant criteria as well as the preparation of manuals for potential awardees and auditors.

The environmental impact evaluation can be made either by an ecolabelling organization itself under the condition of sufficient knowledge possession or by other parties with a relevant experience in this field (e.g. educational and research institutions). In other words, the responsibility of conducting such a procedure can be delegated to other stakeholders of a project whereas an ecolabelling organization could focus on the fulfilment of other tasks.

The selection of criteria is an important step within the scope of this phase. Usually it is done by an ecolabelling organization in a close cooperation and with exhausting consultations with other project stakeholders. The criteria can either be borrowed from the already existent ecolabelling initiatives targeting the same focus group or category with their further adaptation to local conditions and realities (it may help to substantially reduce the costs associated with this procedure and save time and labour resources) or worked out independently accounting the interests of local stakeholders and specificity of the targeted businesses. The criteria put into the basis of an ecolabel may have a broad and narrow nature depending on the aims of each particular initiative. The broad criteria aim to attract those businesses which have already made certain achievements in terms of their environmental performance whereas the narrow ones are to impose some additional and more stringent requirements on the potential awardees (UNEP, 1998). The drafts of the criteria are usually worked out in collaboration with educational and research institutions under the observation of governmental bodies (e.g. ministries) and tourism or environmental NGOs in order to make sure that the interests of all stakeholders are accounted. This is a necessary condition for all certification schemes is that the development of criteria and standards is accepted by a majority of stakeholders involved. This task is not easy to perform and usually it is accomplished in the best way if stakeholders are offered an opportunity to make an adequate contribution into the development of an ecolabelling initiative in general and into the selection of its criteria in particular (CCIF, 2002). Upon completion of each draft, the criteria should be tested in practice through their discussion and consultation with the representatives of industry and industry associations. This is needed to find out if the industry understands what is expected of them, to compare the criteria with those practices which are already in use and to figure out if the businesses feel whether they could implement them. Moreover, if to make sure that a set of criteria can be met by the representatives of tourism industry before running a certification scheme, it is more likely to achieve positive outcomes from the implementation of such a project (CCIF, 2002). The consultations should also be helpful in the adoption of the criteria and their simplification for the businesses' easier understanding and perception (Font, Tribe, 2001). In addition, such consultations may increase credibility and trust into an ecolabelling initiative and make some long-term contacts and good relationships between its stakeholders.

Thus, the process of criteria selection needs a participation of almost all interested parties. They should find time and human resources to perform this procedure. In particular, the government should show their willingness to support such a project and encourage the businesses to get involved. The active participation of the industry representatives is also a crucial point of this step.

Upon completion of the criteria selection and testing, an ecolabelling organization should work out a comprehensible support manual for potential awardees. This is the issue of a special importance if an ecolabel is to improve the environmental performance of the businesses rather than to certify current good practices. Such a manual may include e.g. the examples of economic benefits and savings associated with the certification, advice on how to internally monitor environmental performance and promote the labelled products and services and can highlight some other aspects of ecolabelling. Writing such a manual should be performed in cooperation with the targeted category of tourism businesses; it can be an extremely time-consuming exercise but it is crucial from the point of view of the successful implementation and recognition of an ecolabelling initiative. It is also recommended to test a manual in practice through the engagement of a small number of businesses into this procedure. These businesses could be involved into an ecolabelling project through their use as visual demonstration facilities for potential awardees who could be provided with a practical insight into possible benefits of the certification. The results of this test should be evaluated and the opinions of the businesses should be accounted in the final version of such a document. In addition to that, a programme of regular trainings and seminars for the certified businesses and those willing to get an award should be worked out. If a manual is mainly to show the awardees how to behave in order to improve their environmental practices and achieve the benefits of an ecolabel, the trainings and seminars should also touch the issues of marketing and promotion of the ecolabelled products and services and the possibilities to increase the tourists' awareness and commitment.

The process of writing a manual involves most of stakeholders – research and educational institutions whose role lies in the provision of relevant information and knowledge support, industry representatives who should be willing to participate in the consultation and testing, NGOs and, ideally, consumer associations who could also discuss the criteria and make an adequate contribution into their testing, adoption and simplification. The participation of the businesses is an essential factor of success in this step. The role of the governmental bodies may consist in providing incentives for the industry's involvement.

Another important element of this phase is to write a manual for verifiers together with the identification of those independent parties who should be responsible for auditing. The selection of verifiers is one of the key points within the scope of an ecolabelling initiative. The verification procedures and the order of their conduction in many cases contribute into building credibility and trust into a scheme. The verifiers should be highly-qualified specialists with a considerable experience in auditing procedures of the enterprises of the targeted market segment and with a positive image and reputation among all stakeholders of an ecolabelling project. In order to make sure that the opinion of the majority of the interested parties is accounted over the process of appointing the verifiers, this issue should be open for discussion. The current tendency is to attract the representatives of different stakeholders into an auditing team. Another option is to conduct verification by internal experts who can be the part-time working members of an ecolabelling organization. This solution is currently a highly disputable issue since it brings about a number of speculations concerning credibility and transparency of such a practice. An ecolabelling organization should decide in this step what kind of the verification procedures it is going to use – on-site, on-desk or combination of

both. Upon selection of the verifiers a draft manual containing basic guidelines for the conduction of audits should also be prepared and discussed with stakeholders.

Thus, the selection of a verification team is a time-consuming procedure. At this stage of an ecolabelling project it is important to identify the competent specialists who could take a responsibility for audits and conduct the consultations with stakeholders in order to inform them about or, ideally, prove the selected candidatures. Perhaps, each of stakeholders could recommend and delegate a candidate who might correspond to the stipulated requirements in order to ensure consistency, fairness and credibility of the process of auditing (Font, Tribe, 2001).

3.2.4. Phase IV (Management and Marketing)

The phase IV (Management and Marketing) finalizes the achievements of the previous steps of an ecolabelling initiative and conducts a number of practical procedures which are likely to determine many aspects of functioning of an ecolabel. The foremost task in this phase lies in budgeting of the costs of ecolabelling management and negotiating regarding funding. At the initial stage of the ecolabel running it is vitally important to enlist a financial support from external sources (international, governmental funds). Without these, an ecolabelling initiative will hardly survive and work successfully. The most essential element in this step is to stipulate the amount and conditions of funding which can be provided by different governmental bodies (i.e. ministries) or international funds. This is a key task of any ecolabelling project which all previous and future work is highly dependant upon.

Together with negotiating funding and budgeting of the expenses, the structure of an administrative body responsible for further running an ecolabelling initiative should be proved and agreed upon.

Another essential element of this phase is to work out a wise marketing, promotion and dissemination strategies and conduct the relevant information distribution and the ecolabel popularisation campaigns. According to some practitioners, if made properly and on a regular basis these procedures may become one of the most important factors determining the story of success and recognition of any ecolabelling initiative (Kaas, 2005), (Meyer, 2005). Here, the crucial role is attributed to an ecolabelling organization in terms of working out the major strategies and directions of the advertisement campaigns with a strong need of a participation of other stakeholders. The sources of mass-media are a key player at this stage. If they belong to the state, the governmental bodies should also be closely involved into the dissemination procedures. NGOs and industry associations are another essential factor of a successful marketing. Most of them can be involved into the conduction of promo- and educational campaigns of different levels utilizing various approaches and sources of the information distribution. The educational institutions may also play an important role in this process through the establishment of specific study programmes and courses (e.g. especially for businesses) touching ecolabelling issues in general and ecolabels in tourism industry in particular.

This phase should also account the necessity to write a final technical report on the particularities of an ecolabelling project setting up and thorough evaluation of its intermediate results and outcome of each implementation stage.

4. Stakeholders of a tourism ecolabel and factors for its success

4.1. Stakeholders of a tourism ecolabel and their specific roles

There are 6 major groups of stakeholders in the field of tourism ecolabelling initiatives which should be involved into the process of its setting up and running (Figure 4-1). The primary role of stakeholders is seen in the provision of an ecolabelling (certification) and, especially, administrative organization with particular types of assistance along the process of the project development. In other words, stakeholders should be allocated certain roles to which they must be ready and capable to play in order to help to successfully realize a certification programme.

It is noteworthy to mention that international donors and sponsors are often regarded as another important group of stakeholders of an ecolabelling initiative (STSC, 2003). However, in this research only internal interested parties are considered; nevertheless, the external stakeholders are also mentioned and highlighted within the scope of this study as important players in the field of tourism certification.

The specific roles of each particular stakeholder of a tourism ecolabelling initiative can be briefly described as follows:

4.1.1. Government and public authorities (including the Ministries of the Environment, Tourism, Agriculture, tourism boards and municipalities of different levels, national standardization offices, etc.)
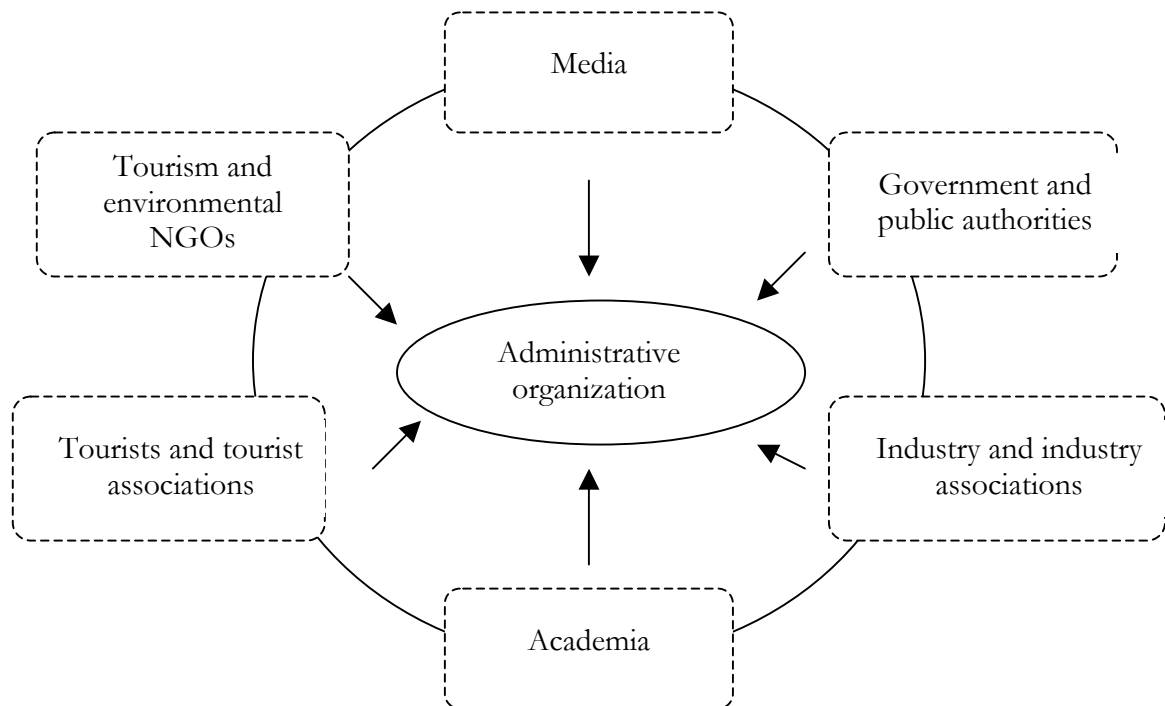
Figure 4-1. Major groups of stakeholders of a tourism ecolabel

The government and its different structural branches used to play a significant role in many ecolabelling schemes. Although some experts believe that a deep governmental involvement

into the development of a tourism ecolabel should be avoided (Hamele, 2004), its total ignorance is hardly possible. The government is often a key stakeholder in an ecolabelling project; it may contribute into the fulfilment of all needs associated with setting up and running such a scheme. Political support is a factor influencing the success of an ecolabel since tourism certification is perceived by the government as one of the tools that the public sector can use as a voluntary incentive to improve its practices, create industry leaders, and test the feasibility of proposals prior to considering them for legislation (STSC, 2003).

In many cases the government plays a role of an initiator of a tourism ecolabelling programme putting an essential effort into its development and further management. Many tourism ecolabels which are believed to be successful are either directly run or financed by the governmental bodies, or significantly dependent on them (Nordic Swan (Sweden), The Green Certificate (Latvia), Viabono (Germany), The European Flower (EU), etc.). Moreover, many of those certification programmes developed by other stakeholders (industry associations, NGOs, etc.) often closely cooperate and/or get essential political and financial support from the government of a particular country (e.g. most Italian and German tourism ecolabels). According to some experts, about 65% of the ecolabelling projects run today have a significant level of the governmental involvement (STSC, 2003). It is believed that the government may be particularly helpful in ensuring that cooperation between different stakeholders is existent (Ayuso, Fullana, Montcada, 2005).

The government's participation in the process of developing a tourism ecolabel may be implied both in direct and indirect forms. In the former case the government may **encourage other stakeholders to get involved** into a scheme **providing them with relevant incentives and support** (e.g. softer credits, grants and loans). In the latter case the governmental bodies may take a direct participation especially in the procedures of **funding** an initiative, **information gathering**, and **marketing** a scheme. According to some specialists, marketing campaigns developed by public authorities and national tourism boards can be successful in promoting the certified products and raising the customers' awareness of the ecolabelling initiatives. For example, a tourism board in Queensland, Australia, has helped to increase the tourists' awareness about Australian Eco-Certification Programme's certified products and services having conducted a series of marketing events (Tourism Queensland, 2002). Apart from this, some authors believe that government-run certification programmes may have an advantage over the privately run ones implied in the form of partial **subsidization** and **easier applicants' access to free consultations** (STSC, 2003).

In certain cases the government may increase credibility of an ecolabel under the condition if other stakeholders are under suspicion and distrust among potential applicants and tourists exists. However, it is noteworthy to mention that in certain situations a deep involvement of the government may have a totally opposite outcome and reaction (SED, 2005, p.6). It usually happens if it has recommended itself as a corrupted entity with a little or no desire to collaborate with other stakeholders in the field of tourism industry in a particular country.

To sum up, the government may play an important role in a tourism ecolabel. Funding of the initiative, marketing assistance and encouragement of other stakeholders' participation are among the main merits of the governmental involvement into a certification programme.

4.1.2. Industry and industry associations, trade-unions

The active participation and interest from the representatives of tourism industry is a crucial factor determining success of a tourism ecolabel (Müller, 2002). It is obvious that if industry is not willing to get involved, it is hardly possible that an initiative will succeed. In order to attract attention from industry and its particular representatives, the government and an

ecolabelling organization (and, further, an administrative organization) should provide them with relevant incentives as well as with comprehensive information about the goals, objectives, benefits and advantages of an ecolabelling project.

The industry is a key stakeholder when it comes to the preparation of the ecolabel's criteria, their discussion and appointment of the verifying team and the members of an awarding (certifying) body. If industry is ignored at these stages of the initiative, it is highly possible that a scheme will not be appreciated by them in the future.

Apart from the role of the potential applicants and clients of an ecolabelling initiative, industry and its different associations can make a ponderable contribution into the process of **funding** a scheme, its **marketing** and promotion. A great number of tourism ecolabels had been initiated and run (including the provision of financing) by the industry associations (e.g. The Green Key, (Denmark); Blaue Schwalbe, (Germany), etc.); it is believed that the active industry participation also **raises credibility** of a scheme and may help to build trust between other stakeholders and, especially, between its applicants (Ayuso, Fullana, Montcada, 2005). Certain assistance in the process of information gathering and documenting the tourism market of a particular country may also call for the contribution from the representatives of tourism industry.

However, according to some experts, it is rather questionable if the majority of tourism businesses in a particular country are able to actively participate in the process of developing an ecolabelling initiative. The problem arising here is due to the fact that most tourism businesses belong to the so-called small and medium enterprises (SME); moreover, according to some experts small businesses make up approximately 97% of total tourism industry in the world (IIED, 2002). Therefore it is obvious that it is quite problematic for SMEs e.g. to make ponderable financial investments into the development of an ecolabel or to find enough time and labour resources to participate in all its discussions and organizing activities (STSC, 2003). Nevertheless, it is important to engage as many tourism businesses as possible; this is a responsibility of an ecolabelling organization and, further, an awarding body for how to make it in practice.

Thus, the representatives of tourism industry are a key player for an ecolabel. They are not only the potential applicants and thereby the target consumers of its services but also those participants who can contribute in funding an initiative, its marketing and credibility building.

4.1.3. Tourism and environmental NGOs

NGOs play a leading role in many tourism ecolabelling initiatives; they are regarded by many practitioners as strategic partners of certification programmes (Müller, 2002). In some cases NGOs had been those entities who started promoting ecolabelling projects (e.g. the Nature's Best, Sweden); moreover, they are those stakeholders who may take a responsibility for the fulfilment of most of the needs related to the development of a scheme. The NGOs are often chosen to set up and run an ecolabelling project particularly if the certification is applicable to the specific target groups of tourism products and services e.g. tour operators (Ayuso, Fullana, Montcada, 2005); it is believed that it **increases transparency and credibility** of an initiative and **helps to build trust between its stakeholders** (Wurzel et al., 2003). Another important reason of appointing NGOs as managers of an ecolabel is connected with the fact that it is easier for them to **apply for external financial support** if the internal funds are limited. NGOs may also contribute into the **development of marketing strategies** and conducting dissemination campaigns; they often possess sufficient negotiations skills to convince other stakeholders to join an initiative as well as to communicate with the already existent ecolabelling schemes regarding possible information and knowledge support. In turn, NGOs

may benefit from the participation in tourism certification programmes because in this case they could have a voice in setting standards and criteria as well as could receive support in developing sustainable tourism and ecotourism projects (STSC, 2003).

Despite a number of advantages related to the participation of tourist and environmental NGOs in the process of setting up and running an ecolabel, there are a few drawbacks which should be highlighted as well. The foremost problem is the possibility of conflicts between the representatives of tourism industry and NGOs. The complete support of the latter entities by promoters of an initiative may often entail the selection of standards, requirements and criteria too severe for industry to accept (CCIF, 2002). Therefore it is important to make sure that those both key stakeholders are ready to discuss, negotiate and find a compromise which could satisfy all of them. In other words, certification schemes should aim to develop their standards and criteria as collaboratively as possible with due respect to the opinions of other players.

Another potential problem is hidden in the level of the competence of NGOs to run an ecolabel if they are chosen to accomplish this role. In many cases promoters and developers of an ecolabelling project lack a comprehensive knowledge about the goals, objectives and needs of such a scheme. Therefore it is crucial to make sure that the selected NGO is a professional entity in its field which possesses sufficient knowledge on how to develop a certification programme or is good at maintaining business contacts with other ecolabelling initiatives which could help with these issues if needed.

To conclude, tourism and environmental NGOs are important stakeholders of an ecolabel when it comes to building its credibility, ensuring transparency and maintaining trust between the parties involved. This is a key responsibility allocated to NGOs participating in an ecolabelling initiative. They can also help in funding and marketing a scheme; collection of the information required for an ecolabel is another role which NGOs are capable to play.

4.1.4. Tourists and tourist associations

Although tourists are not such a strategic stakeholder of an ecolabelling scheme as the government, industry or NGOs, their involvement and active participation may result in a tangible contribution into the level of success and recognition of a scheme. The foremost responsibility of tourists is **to support an ecolabel by buying the labelled products and services** (STSC, 2003). The demand for the certified products and services determines the industry's appreciation of an ecolabel as a strong marketing tool. Therefore tourists should be aware of the goals of a certification scheme; they should impose stringent requirements and standards on tourism businesses demanding more environmentally sound products and services. Tourist associations may be helpful in lobbying the introduction of a tourism ecolabel which would account their interests and demands, conducting preliminary sociological and marketing surveys, educating tourists, discussing principles and criteria of a certification programme and participating in the process of appointing the members of the awarding body and auditing team (STSC, 2003). In addition to that, tourist associations can be involved into marketing campaigns aiming to **increase the customers' awareness of an ecolabel** and certified products and services as well as to avoid confusion and raise the recognition of an initiative in the future. Although in most cases this is a long-term goal because consumers are usually hard to reach and convince, the tourist associations may play a significant role in fulfilling this difficult task. This is an issue of a particular importance due to the fact that consumer awareness of tourism ecolabelling remains to be low (STSC, 2003). Moreover, in most cases tourist associations can contribute into the process of building credibility and trust into a scheme.

To sum up, the primary role of tourists for an ecolabel is implied in their readiness and willingness to buy certified products and services. Their demand may serve as an important incentive for businesses to get labelled.

4.1.5. Educational and research institutions, academia

The representatives of academia are very helpful stakeholders for running an ecolabelling scheme. Although in most cases they cannot provide promoters of an ecolabel with any kind of tangible support (e.g. funding), they are capable to contribute with other types of assistance essential for setting up and developing an initiative. Among these, the cost effective **research and provision of the background information and specific knowledge on an ecolabel and market for an ecolabel** in a particular country or region is crucial (STSC, 2003). The educational institutions may be involved into the process of justifying the need for a tourism ecolabelling initiative, selecting standards and criteria, and evaluating the impact which a scheme cam make on the tourist and industry behaviour. In addition to that, the representatives of academia may closely participate in the procedure of developing a manual for potential awardees and verifiers of an ecolabel; moreover, they can be directly involved into the auditing process by means of training the verifiers or proposing a relevant candidature for their appointing. The educational and research institutions may also **increase transparency** of a scheme delegating their representatives to an administrative body of this initiative. In certain cases academia may serve as a promoter of a particular ecolabel (e.g. Biosphere Hotels – Quality for Life, Italy); however, such practices are not very popular yet (Ayuso, Fullana, Montcada, 2005). Finally, the educational establishments may actively **participate in promotion campaigns** organizing trainings and seminars for potential applicants, assessing the savings and economic benefits of the certification with further publishing and dissemination of this information and running the study courses and programmes related to ecolabelling issues and environmental impacts of tourism.

Thus, the representatives of academia serve as important providers of information for a certification scheme; primarily, they should be involved into the activities directed to conduct market surveys, outline criteria of an ecolabel and prepare manuals for applicants and auditors.

4.1.6. Sources of mass-media, journalists

Mass-media is a stakeholder which contributes into **marketing, promotion and raising the consumer awareness campaigns** (STSC, 2003). Since, according to some practitioners, the issues of effective marketing of an ecolabel are a key factor of success for such a scheme (Meyer, 2005), the participation of and cooperation with media is essential for any certification programme. The involvement of mass-media can be facilitated either through direct contacts with them or with the help of the government which can use its own sources of media or encourage the private ones to collaborate under the condition of the provision of certain preferences and financial support.

To sum up, the <u>major</u> roles of stakeholders which they can play in the process of setting up and running a tourism ecolabel can be presented in the form of an incomplete matrix (Table 3-1). The incompleteness of this matrix is determined by the fact that, according to the existent experience, only governmental bodies, industry and industry associations, tourist and environmental NGOs as well as educational institutions are known as initiators of the certification programmes in the field of tourism (Ayuso, Fullana, Montcada, 2005). Although it is theoretically possible to have tourist associations as promoters of an ecolabelling scheme, such occasions have never happened in the history of tourism ecolabels before.

Since there are 4 known stakeholders who can start promoting an initiative, the matrix is presented in such a way that if one of them takes a lead fulfilling a range of the necessary tasks attributed to an initiator (i.e. searching initial funding, preliminary information gathering, consultations with other stakeholders, etc.), all the rest make another type of contribution in order to successfully develop an ecolabel.

In many cases it is possible to have a specific stakeholder who may play many of the roles needed to successfully realize a tourism certification programme. For example, the government may provide an ecolabel with financial assistance, help in marketing and information collecting. NGOs may contribute into funding and marketing of a scheme as well. The matrix represents the roles of stakeholders according to the significance of their contribution i.e. the particular roles are attributed to those stakeholders who have the highest potential and capacity to play them. For instance, if the government takes a lead in an ecolabelling initiative, the industry and industry associations may more likely provide funding than NGOs which are to contribute into building credibility of a certification programme then. However, when the lead is taken by NGOs, the government is a stakeholder who has the higher chances and richer resources to give financing for a scheme; the industry and industry representatives are to help building credibility in this case. Due to the fact that tourist associations and sources of media have clear roles – participation in discussion of different aspects of an ecolabel and its support by buying as well as assistance with marketing respectively, and, in most cases, they cannot significantly contribute into the fulfilment of other tasks, they are likely to play the same roles regardless of who takes a lead in a certification programme.

Table 4-1   The stakeholders of a tourism ecolabelling project and their <u>major</u> roles in its development

	Government	Industry and industry associations	NGOs	Academia	Tourists and tourist associations	Mass-media
Government	*Initiator*	financial support	credibility	knowledge	discussion	marketing
Industry and industry associations	financial support	*Initiator*	credibility	knowledge	discussion	marketing
Tourism and environmental NGOs	financial support	credibility	*Initiator*	knowledge	discussion	marketing
Academia	financial support	credibility	knowledge	*Initiator*	discussion	marketing

Thus, in the optimal case, the roles of the ecolabel's stakeholders can be distributed in such a way as presented in figure above. However, for different reasons, in most cases it is hardly possible to meet an optimal allocation of resources evenly assigned to all the parties involved. Therefore in real situations the stakeholders may play several roles in order to address the missing capabilities of other actors and make an ecolabel successful.

4.2. Factors of success for a tourism ecolabel

Over the period of setting up and running an ecolabelling initiative a number of needs occur. All of them should be satisfied in order to create favourable conditions for the successful implementation and development of such a project. Therefore each particular phase or step of a certification scheme is characterised by a set of necessary actions which should be undertaken by different stakeholders in order to fulfill these conditions. In other words, at the initial stage of the development of a tourism ecolabel it is important to not only identify the conditions which become factors of success and are thereby required to be satisfied but also to define the actions which should be undertaken and the adequate roles of the stakeholders in order to address these factors. It may help to achieve the best outcome upon completion of a project. The Figure 4-2 gives a summarized introduction into the factors needed to be addressed for a successful development of an ecolabel and the involvement of stakeholders required to fulfill these factors. A special emphasis should be given to the factors constituting key factors of success for a certification programme i.e. those factors ignorance of whose fulfillment may endanger a final outcome of a scheme and even lead to its failure.

The literature relating to successful tourism ecolabels and interviews with the practitioners in environmental labeling have indicated that there are five factors of success for a certification scheme. These are multi-stakeholder involvement, a comprehensive knowledge on how to develop a project, credibility and transparency, financial and marketing issues. All of these factors are important and need to be fulfilled in order to achieve the best results; however, according to some experts, credibility is a key factor of success for a tourism ecolabel followed by funding which is an issue of a special importance as well (Backman, 2005), (Kaas, 2005), Meyer, 2005). In order to ensure a successful implementation of an ecolabelling initiative, these two factors should be addressed at the initial stage of its development whereas all the rest can be fulfilled later on, along the process of its setting up and running.

4.2.1. Stakeholders' participation and cooperation

The important element along the entire process of the development of an ecolabelling initiative is the stakeholders' interest, deep involvement, and active participation in the conduction of such a scheme together with their readiness to productively cooperate and find compromises with one another in order to successfully realize this project.

The distinctive feature of the stakeholder's participation and cooperation in a tourism certification programme is connected with a voluntary nature of such an initiative and lies in the fact that its major players need a reciprocal support from one another. For instance, the only political will expressed by the government is not enough to convince the businesses to get involved; and vice versa, if the industry is willing to participate but the government does not provide any support it will also hardly lead to any favourable results. The balance of power is changing in this case i.e. it does not belong exceptionally to the government or somebody else; other stakeholders may also possess the power implied in the form of their willingness/unwillingness to participate. In other words, if support is not provided from the majority of the project's stakeholders, cooperation will never happen. Thus, the important element building cooperation in the field of tourism ecolabelling is hidden in the mutual commitment of its stakeholders. They should have interest in an initiative and strive to show other stakeholders what interest they may have in it. If stakeholders are aware of the fact that a certification programme will succeed only upon the condition of their participation and cooperation, a project will likely to be successfully realized.
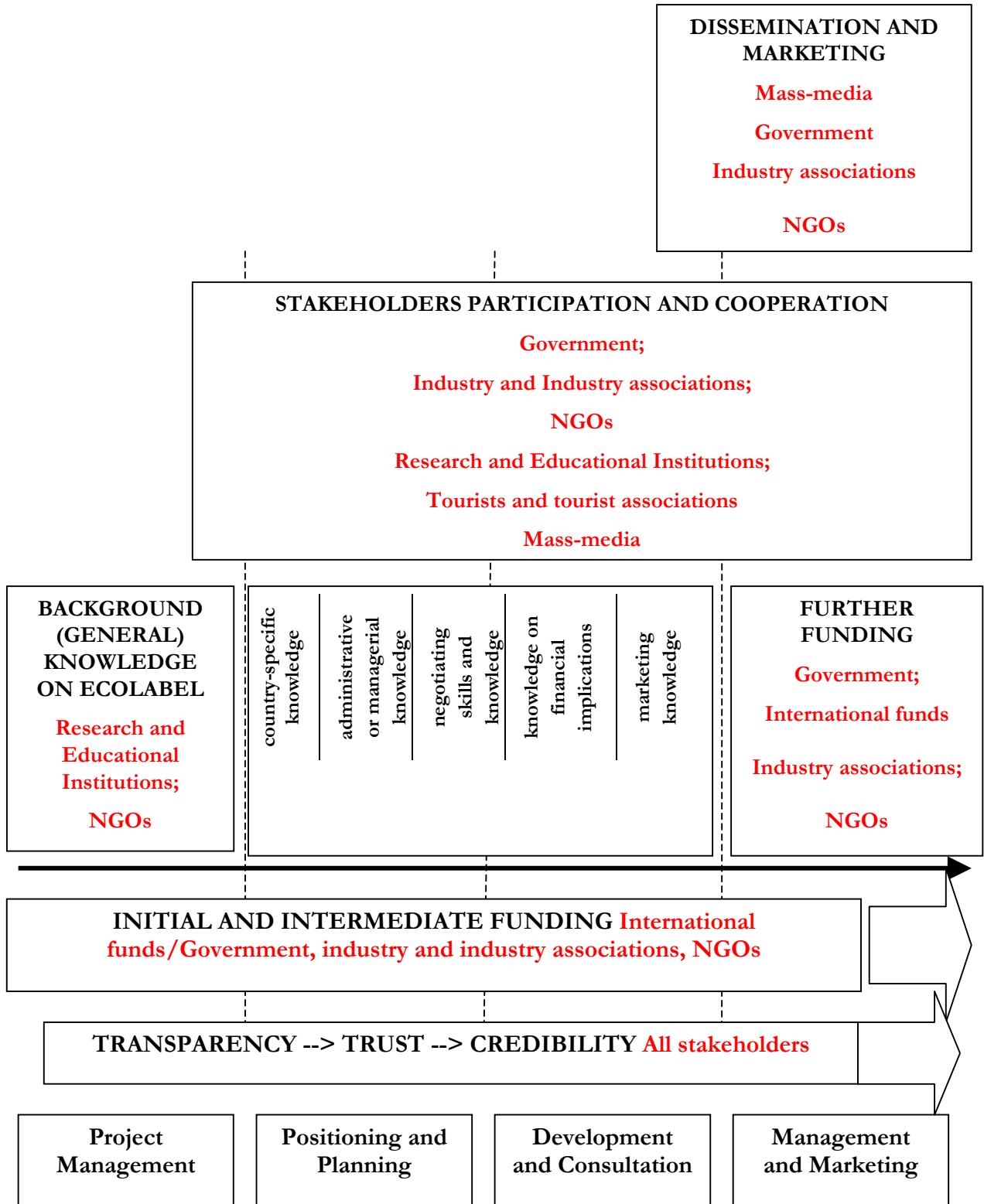
Figure 4-2. The involvement of stakeholders to fulfil the factors of success for a tourism ecolabel

There are 6 major categories of stakeholders in the field of tourism ecolabelling (see 4-1). Ideally, all of them should be involved into the discussions of a certification project and details of its implementation (STSC, 2003). To ensure that an ecolabel is to work, the interests of all stakeholders must be accounted and responsibilities should be stipulated. Although it is questionable if such a requirement can be fully met since there are a number of examples

testifying about a tense and confronting nature of negotiations upon the process of the development of an ecolabelling initiative between different stakeholders and especially upon the discussion of the criteria of a scheme (Nadaï, 1999), it is necessary to put a special effort to reach an optimum outcome in order to solve this issue and come to the equilibrium that could satisfy all the players.

Stakeholders should be thoroughly identified and notified about an ecolabelling project at the initial stages of its development or, ideally, even before its beginning in order to ensure that they have enough time to think about their participation, contribution, potential drawbacks and benefits of their involvement and stipulate the roles which they would be capable or willing to play. It is a responsibility of an ecolabelling organization to identify and contact the major interested parties; however, other players may also facilitate this process through the provision of particular stakeholders with relevant incentives and encouragement to be involved (e.g. governmental bodies, local authorities, industry associations may invite other interested parties which they have a certain influence upon).

A close stakeholders' cooperation is of a special importance for an ecolabelling project in the phase of the development of its criteria, identifying the members of an auditing team and electing the responsible parties to an awarding (certifying) body. At this stage stakeholders should be able to productively work with one another and must possess good negotiation skills which could help them to find the fastest compromise. Stakeholders should be flexible enough to make sure that the interests of other parties are also accounted and respected.

The activities associated with seeking the sources of funding and working out realistic marketing strategies also require deep stakeholders' involvement and cooperation. A full or partial financing of an ecolabelling scheme as well as a relevant assistance with the dissemination of the ecolabel's materials and information can be obtained from the different tourism stakeholders (governmental bodies, industry associations, NGOs, etc.) in the form of direct (money needed to cover the so-called fixed costs – salaries of the personal, office administration costs, etc.) or indirect funding (the engagement of the government-owned mass-media, the distribution of the advertisements and newsletters through the industry or industry association's networks and memberships, etc.). The possibilities and amounts of each stakeholder's contribution into above activities should be stipulated and agreed upon at the initial stages of an ecolabelling project. Other participating parties of an initiative should be informed about a type and level of the involvement of their colleagues and encouraged to support and assist their actions.

The issue of raising reliability of a particular tourism ecolabel is also believed to call for active stakeholders' cooperation and participation. The more authoritative and diverse players in the field of tourism industry are involved into an initiative, the higher chances for such a project to get a positive appreciation and trust among potential applicants and other interested parties.

To sum up, the active stakeholders' participation and cooperation is a crucial issue of any ecolabelling initiative. The national broad-based stakeholders' coalitions have the best records for developing tourism certification programmes. Two examples frequently cited are the Australia's Eco-Certification Programme and The Blue Flag ecolabel, which had been developed as a result of the multi-sector discussions among the governmental bodies, the private sector, namely industry, industry associations and NGOs, and academics (STSC, 2003). With little or no support from the major interested parties or with a poor readiness to come to a compromise while negotiating about the particularities of running a scheme, an ecolabel may be fraught with a failure or face the problem of distrust and a lack of credibility into a project from the representatives of tourism industry and public. As a matter of fact, it becomes

obvious that the factor of the stakeholders' cooperation is closely linked to other ecolabel's factors determining success of a certification scheme, namely, credibility, marketing and funding. If all the players are interested and involved, this is a crucial factor for success of any certification scheme. Apart from this, the active participation of stakeholders in the process of developing a tourism ecolabel may have a very beneficial impact on further relationships and cooperation between them (Bass, Font, Danielson, 2001).

4.2.2. Knowledge

The availability of necessary knowledge and accessibility to the comprehensive information on how to set up and develop an ecolabelling initiative is a crucial point for promoters of any certification project. Generally, it is a responsibility of the members of an ecolabelling organization to obtain this knowledge; however, other stakeholders are also expected to make an adequate contribution into the procedure of information collecting. Among others, the representatives of academia, tourist and environmental NGOs are expected to play an important role as a result of their scientific experience and existent professional contacts. The governmental bodies and public authorities of different levels should create favourable conditions to make the process of information gathering and provision easier. It particularly concerns a market study for an ecolabel and a procedure of scoping the potential awardees. Such statistical information is quite difficult to obtain without a governmental and industrial support.

Knowledge needed for setting up and running a tourism ecolabel can be basically divided into several complementary categories. The **background or general knowledge** deals with the fundamental details of functioning an ecolabelling initiative answering the questions what it is, how it works, why it is needed, how to manage it, what impact it may have on different stakeholders and what position it may occupy among other available economic tools and instruments and among other existent tourism voluntary initiatives in a particular region or country. In other words, this information is needed to justify the importance of a certification programme and its expected outcome. In order to get this information, a general familiarity with the concept of tourism ecolabelling and a thorough work with various literature sources on this topic are required. Besides this, a valuable knowledge can also be obtained from the already existent certification projects under the condition of good relationships and contacts with their initiators and promoters. The information collected within the scope of this category can be helpful in anticipating and avoiding the problems which may arise within the process of running an ecolabel as known from practical experience of other initiatives (CCIF, 2002).

Within this category of knowledge, a special attention should be paid to the information related to the preparation and selection of the ecolabel's criteria, writing manuals for applicants and verifiers as well as to the organization of trainings for the certified businesses and potential awardees. These activities are important parts of the development of an ecolabel determining its success, recognition and a level of credibility.

As a rule, the *criteria or standards* for a certification programme are borrowed from the already existent tourism ecolabels covering those product or service groups which are targeted by an initiative with their further amendment and adoption to the regional conditions. However, in certain cases the procedure of criteria selection may require additional knowledge about their compliance with legal and technical frameworks regulating environmental and tourism issues in a particular country, current environmental performance of local businesses and their readiness and capability to accept the imposed requirements and standards (Müller, 2002). The process of criteria selection calls for a close cooperation between stakeholders; knowledge available from them should be used in a final outline of the ecolabel's standards.

The *manual for applicants* should contain sufficient and understandable information on what benefits the certification may provide, how to practically implement these benefits as well as how to market the labelled products and services. The process of writing such a manual is hard-working and can be time-consuming. It is recommended to involve other stakeholders, namely research and educational institutions, representatives of industry and NGOs into the preparation of such a document. The participation of the industry seems to be a crucial element in this phase since a manual is intended to satisfy their needs and demands. Therefore an extensive discussion of the draft versions of such a manual with the representatives of the targeted sector of tourism industry is required. If the manuals worked out by the already existent ecolabelling schemes are available, applicable to the targeted market and can be obtained, it is advised to use them as an example for creating a new manual used by the applicants of an ecolabel which is intended to be developed.

In addition to the manual for potential applicants, the document prescribing the order of the conduction of the *verification procedures* should also be prepared. This process requires a diverse knowledge attracted not only from the specialists in the field of tourism and environmental protection, but also from the professionals in economics, auditing, agriculture, etc. depending on the scope of an ecolabelling initiative and the area of its application. The preparation of a manual for verifiers can also be conducted in collaboration with other stakeholders possessing adequate knowledge and experience in this field (academia, NGOs) and should be consulted with the representatives of industry and government. As a rule, a template required for writing such a manual can be borrowed from the already existent ecolabelling initiatives with its further adoption to the country- and industry-specific conditions and realities.

The *trainings* needed to be organized for the labelled businesses and those willing to get certified is another activity demanding a comprehensive knowledge on how to do it, what kind of materials use and how to make businesses get interested. Here, cooperation with other stakeholders as well as some background knowledge on how it is being done within the scopes of other ecolabelling initiatives is also required.

After the background information about a tourism ecolabelling initiative has been collected, the need for specific knowledge required to develop a particular certification project in a specific region or country occurs. This **country-specific knowledge** is implied in a comprehensive description of the targeted market of an ecolabel, documentation of the potential applicants and scoping stakeholders of an initiative which should be contacted and involved. This information is to be obtained by an ecolabelling organization with the help of the governmental bodies, industry associations and NGOs which may possess some data required or facilitate its receipt. The government, for instance, can provide relevant statistics on the number of tourism businesses, their major fields of focus, etc., whereas tourist NGOs may dispose important information on the contacts which should be made in a particular region in order to attract other stakeholders.

The third category of information is related to the process of managing an ecolabel constituting thereby **administrative or managerial knowledge**. Among others, a special attention should be paid to the preparation of a well-developed business or management plan and a strategy that is a responsibility of an ecolabelling organization appointed to develop a certification programme. This plan should highlight the major activities expected to be undertaken in order to run an ecolabel and the roles delegated to each member of an ecolabelling organization. Apart from this, a business plan should also prescribe the measures directed to monitor each particular activity and report on the final and intermediate results of a project. Usually, such a business plan is prepared by an ecolabelling organization itself; however, it should contact the professionals who already possess a relevant experience in this

field for reducing the time needed to write a plan, saving labour and financial resources and getting some missing information (CCIF, 2002).

The forth category of knowledge is associated with the negotiations, discussions and consultations required to be conducted with stakeholders of a certification scheme in order to make them interested, get involved and actively participate into an initiative. Therefore **negotiation skills and knowledge** are crucial for the fulfilment of this task; the relevant experience in these issues should be one of the necessary requirements and prerequisites for managers of a certification programme i.e. an ecolabelling organization. The effective utilisation of this knowledge should result in the evidence of the stakeholders' involvement into a project and their cooperation (CCIF, 2002). Some important negotiating experience can be borrowed from other stakeholders of an ecolabel (e.g. NGOs) who have already participated in such procedures while performing different tasks within the scopes of other projects. For example, NGOs may possess knowledge on how to approach a particular stakeholder (e.g. local public authorities) as a result of their previous communication with them.

One of the important categories of information needed to develop a tourism ecolabelling scheme is made up by **knowledge on financial implications** which is associated with a creation of a plausible model on how to get funding or generate revenues for an initiative. This is a responsibility of an ecolabelling organization to document all the sources where financial assistance for a project can be obtained from, it should also work out a plan of necessary actions and schedule the procedures of application as well as to negotiate funding with potential donors (CCIF, 2002). Other players of a certification programme (e.g. NGOs) may provide an ecolabelling organization with some information on the sources of funding; moreover, the experience of other ecolabelling initiatives should also be accounted.

Finally, the dissemination and marketing strategies are an essential element of an ecolabelling scheme constituting a category of **marketing knowledge**. A realistic framework and schedule of the actions proposed to popularise and advertise a project should be worked out and thoroughly described by an ecolabelling organization. This information should be part of its working experience; besides this, marketing plans and strategies can potentially be borrowed from other tourism certification schemes as well as from stakeholders of an ecolabelling project e.g. industry associations (CCIF, 2002).

Thus, the factor of knowledge and information availability is an essential factor influencing a success of a tourism ecolabel due the complexity of the information required and difficulties in its obtaining. The competence of an ecolabelling organization and its capability to obtain relevant information is a crucial point in the fulfillment of this factor. It is also evident that the factor of knowledge availability is closely linked to the factor of the stakeholders' participation and cooperation since some types of information required can only be received if other stakeholders are closely involved.

4.2.3. Credibility, transparency and trust

Credibility is a key issue of any tourism ecolabelling initiative (Backman, 2005). The reliability and trustworthiness are a crucial factor determining a business success and a long-term survival of a certification scheme (Font, 2001). If the representatives of tourism industry and its other stakeholders do not consider it to be credible, it is hardly possible that they will ever join it. According to some experts, credibility is a vital requirement for any tourism ecolabel; without credibility the system does not have a market, it cannot convince the clients and demonstrate its intentions (Kaas, 2005). Moreover, only credible tourism ecolabels providing

concise information to the businesses and customers on the environmental soundness of particular products and services can promote sustainable practices and patterns (STSC, 2003).

Credibility is closely connected with transparency of an ecolabelling project which is, basically, the most important tool for its building. Transparency of a certification scheme is implied in its openness, honesty and availability of the information about all the activities to public. If the ecolabel's activities are totally transparent and can be easily observed, participation is open to all the parties interested and unlimited access to the information provided, it increases belief into such a scheme. In fact, transparency may facilitate the stakeholders' involvement into a certification project because they are willing to know who develops a scheme, where the money comes from, who stands behind the criteria, etc. before joining an initiative. When comprehensive information about these aspects of an ecolabel is available, it may give an incentive to participate (IIED, 2002).

Trust is another issue closely related to credibility. Moreover, it stands next to the factor of success connected with cooperation and participation of the project's stakeholders because when trust between them is absent, it is hopeless to count on their active and productive involvement. In other words, stakeholders should show their trust into an ecolabel and believe one another; in fact, their readiness and willingness to voluntarily participate into an initiative and cooperate can serve as an indirect proof of the existent trust. Trust may be formed between particular actors within a certain period of time as a result of the mutual projects carried out and tasks accomplished.

Credibility, transparency and trust should be put into the basis of an ecolabel at the initial stages of its development. If an initiative has given cause for certain doubts, it will be quite difficult to change its overall negative image in the future. There are a number of actions which may help to increase credibility and transparency as well as to raise trust into a certification project. These actions can be briefly summarized and presented as follows:

- o   Accessibility to and availability of information;

The comprehensive information about a certification scheme in general, its goals and objectives, management structure and competency of the managerial staff, stakeholders and the ways of their involvement, sources of funding and the procedures of selection of standards must be easily accessible and available to businesses and public. According to some experts (Rangan, 2002), it is especially important to guarantee a free public access to the information related to the sources of the ecolabel's funding in order to avoid the suspicion on the conflict of interests which may arise in the case if financing for a certification scheme comes from those who are supposed to be certified i.e. from the representatives of tourism industry. Thus, the availability of the information on an ecolabel and particularities of its development is an important instrument for building its credibility, maintaining transparency and creating trust.

- o   Open participatory approach and the diversity of stakeholders involved;

As known from the previous discussion (chapter 4.2.1), one of the factors of success for any tourism ecolabel is a multi-stakeholders involvement and creation of favourable conditions for their active participation and cooperation exist (Bass, Font, Danielson, 2001). At the same time, participation of various stakeholders into the process of setting up and developing an ecolabel as well as the encouragement of their active participation as members of an administrative organization are the key factors determining a level of credibility of an ecolabelling project. The openness of an initiative to all stakeholders is of a special importance

when it comes to the discussion and testing its criteria, requirements and standards, developing the applicants and verifiers manuals, budgeting expenses, negotiating funding and selecting the members of an administrative organization. At this stage of the development of a scheme the public and business input should be encouraged and appreciated. It is noteworthy to mention that among all stakeholders many specialists pay a special tribute to environmental and tourist NGOs for their considerable contribution into raising a public and business trust into an initiative (Wurzel et al., 2003). In general, the entire process of the development of a tourism ecolabel should be as much transparent as possible and open to all interested parties including public (Rangan, 2002).

- o Agreement upon verification procedures and members of an auditing team;

The process of appointing the members of an auditing team, the types of verification procedures and the order of their performing are a crucial element which builds the ecolabel's credibility and transparency and maintain trust between its stakeholders. It is believed that a certification scheme should require audits to be conducted by the third-party, suitably trained auditors. To make sure that the interests of all stakeholders are accounted, the process of appointing and assessing the proficiency and suitability of auditors should be explicitly prescribed. Moreover, each group of stakeholders should have a right to delegate a candidate whom they consider as the most suitable and professional specialist for performing such activities. Each candidature should be discussed and a final decision should be made upon the agreement reached by the majority of the interested parties. The activities carried out and decisions made by auditors should be thoroughly documented and open to public. All this is believed to increase transparency of an ecolabelling initiative putting an additional stone into the basis of its credibility and creating reciprocal trust between its stakeholders.

Currently, some tourism ecolabels use internal verifiers for auditing procedures. It helps to reduce the costs associated with performing the verification which is, as a rule, quite expensive due to heterogeneous nature of tourism activities required to be audited (Ayuso, Fullana, Montcada, 2005). However, there are certain doubts if internal verification can increase credibility of a particular scheme (CCIF, 2002). On the contrary, it may be fraught with a fraudulent behaviour and lead to distrust into an ecolabel. According to some practitioners, this decision is acceptable only upon the condition if there has been already a trust formed by a certification scheme for many years of its running. In other words, they contend that internal verification does not influence negatively the overall image and credibility of an ecolabelling initiative if promoters of a scheme have recommended themselves as a reliable organization whose internal auditors are well known and appreciated as outstanding professionals in their field by stakeholders of an ecolabel (Kaas, 2005; Meyer, 2005).

- o Regular monitoring and reporting within the process of the ecolabel development;

In order to build credibility and transparency, it is important to not only provide an easy public and business access to the information about all the activities and procedures performed within the scopes of its different phases but also to regularly report on the decisions taken, results achieved and progress made. It can be done in the form of publishing newsletters and minutes and their distribution to all the stakeholders involved. Participation of mass-media and other stakeholders into the process of dissemination of such information should also help to raise credibility and transparency of an ecolabel and build trust between its parties (Rangan, 2002).

Among other recommended ways to build credibility for a certification scheme, a possibility to link them to the existent international standards e.g. ISO or EMAS should be mentioned. The

German Eco-camping scheme, for example, requires its applicants to implement the first steps of the EMAS system within the scopes of its criteria (SED, 2003, p.10). Although linking ecolabels to management systems can be expensive for the industry, it is still considered important when reviewing ecolabelling initiatives. Moreover, compliance with the international standards in environmental labelling and following their guidelines while developing an ecolabel is believed to help to ensure transparency, increase trust into a certification programme and facilitate its recognition abroad (Honey, Rome, 2001).

To sum up, credibility and connected with credibility transparency and trust are a key factor of success for any tourism ecolabelling scheme. It is closely connected to other factors determining success of a certification project, particularly to the factor of the stakeholders' participation and cooperation, and should be paid a special attention to over the process of setting up and running an ecolabel. The absence of credibility, transparency and trust can bring an initiative to failure; moreover, it may compromise stakeholders of a scheme negatively influencing their overall image and reputation.

4.2.4. Funding

It is clear that financing is needed at any stage of the development of a tourism ecolabel. This is a factor determining a future destiny of a scheme, its success, recognition and even a life-span. Therefore one of the crucial tasks prescribed to an ecolabelling organization and, further, to an awarding (certifying) body of an administrative organization is closely connected with budgeting the ecolabel's expenses, negotiating funding, seeking alternative sources of financing and working out a plausible strategy or model directed to generate own revenues in order to make a project financially-independent and self-sufficient. In other words, it is vitally important to identify and evaluate all possible costs for a certification initiative, define a financial structure of a scheme as well as to figure out the sources of funding and the most effective ways of utilization of the revenues gained (Maccarrone-Eaglen, Font, 2002).

In order to reduce costs of an ecolabelling initiative, three major approaches are feasible: it is possible to cut expenses associated with its development (e.g. employ the members of an awarding body on a part-time basis), increase the incoming funding (e.g. to apply for additional financing from another donor source), or substitute the existent financial costs with other types of expenses (e.g. upon preliminary agreement to delegate a duty to accomplish some of the tasks required financing within the scopes of a certification project to other stakeholders which are capable to fulfil them; in turn, to perform something for these stakeholders to pay back such a favour). In other words, if managed properly, the problems related to costs of a certification programme can be avoided or their acuteness can be considerably reduced. Therefore this is the issue of a special importance for an ecolabelling organization and, further, for an awarding body to study the possibilities of funding in advance exploring the potential sources of financing and their approximate capacity. A special emphasis must be given to the revenues generated as a result of the activities undertaken within the scopes of an ecolabelling scheme itself. If these are properly identified, documented and developed, there are higher chances for an ecolabel to survive and become financially independent.

According to the phases of the development of an ecolabel and associated with them needs for financing, funding can be formally divided into the following three categories – initial - required to set up an ecolabelling initiative, intermediate - directed to perform some small intermediate tasks within the scope of setting up a scheme and further financing - needed to run an ecolabel after it has been set up.

The **initial** financial assistance is needed for the conduction of activities within the scopes of phases I-III and, partly, IV of an ecolabelling project (see figure 3-1); as a rule, it is provided by its initiators and cannot be divided into any specific smaller steps. If a certification scheme is promoted by a NGO or industry association independently from the governmental bodies, some preliminary financing can be received either through the international sources or from the budget of such an organization or association. If a project is backed by the public authorities, the relevant financial assistance should be applied for through them. Ideally, both options (international funding and funding provided by promoters of a certification programme) should be utilized by an ecolabelling organization to finance an ecolabelling scheme. It is noteworthy to mention that today about 30% of all tourism ecolabels is financed through the public (governmental) sources; other 30% are supported by private investments whereas all the rest rely on the mixed sources of funding (Yunis, 2004). Another important detail is that external funding (money which an ecolabelling organization and, further, an awarding body receives from the international sources or through its promoters) usually covers the so-called "fixed" ecolabel's expenses (salaries, office payments, telecommunication, supplies and some others if stipulated in advance) whereas all the rest costs are recommended to be reimbursed by the revenues generated by an ecolabel itself through the certification (registration), membership fees and other commercial tourism activities (Font, Tribe, 2001).

It should be mentioned that today the international donor sources play an important role in financing the basic activities connected with setting up and running an ecolabelling initiative. A number of international funds exist where financial assistance can be received from (e.g. EU LIFE III programme, Eurasia Fund, ECEAT, etc.). Among these, the EU LIFE III project has a special line on the provision of a financial support for tourism recognition schemes (EU LIFE III, 2005). For example, it accounts for 50% of financial assistance given to develop The Green Certificate ecolabel, Latvia (Green Certificate, 2005).

The governments (including public authorities, Ministries of Tourism and Environment, national tourism associations, etc.) often play a vital role in providing a financial support for many tourism ecolabelling schemes, especially at the initial stage of their implementation (WTO, 2003). National environmental funds, for instance, can serve as a potential source for certification funding. The governments can also provide a co-funding in coordination with other partner organizations, like NGOs or tourism associations. The Green Certificate ecolabel (Latvia), for example, is financed by the EU LIFE III project with co-funding provided by the central government (30%) and by the Latvian Country Tourism Association (20%) which is also partly a governmental organization (Green Certificate, 2005).

However, external (especially international) funding cannot be regarded as a permanent source of financing since its providers may ask a tourism ecolabel for a higher level of self-sufficiency at any time (Font, 2001). Therefore it is recommended to rely on the diversified sources of funding and, particularly, strive to develop some activities which might help a certification scheme to generate its own revenues.

The initial funding is needed to cover the following major costs:

Phase I and II (Project Management, Positioning and Planning): writing an initial report on a tourism ecolabel, its impact on the industry and consumers behaviour (justification of its use). Such a report is required in order to convince other stakeholders (particularly government and industry) in the ecolabel's value and significance. This task can be performed either by an ecolabelling organization itself or with the help of the representatives of academia, tourism and environmental NGOs. In order to reduce costs related to writing this report, the already existent ecolabelling initiatives can be contacted and asked for information assistance. Another

essential activity performed within the scope of these phases which is needed to be financed is connected with making a list of potential awardees and evaluating a possible market demand. Research and educational institutions, tourism and environmental NGOs, consumer associations can also be involved into the process of performing this task. The details and amount of financial assistance allocated as an award to other stakeholders for fulfilling this need (who pays for this, how the payment is made, etc.) should be stipulated in advance.

Phase III (Development and Consultation): working out, selecting and testing a set of criteria of an ecolabel which the applicants should comply with. Another issue needed to be supported financially in this phase is related to preparing and writing a manual for awardees and verifiers. According to some practitioners, the process of developing the criteria and establishing all relevant documents for applicants and auditors is quite time-consuming and labour-intensive; it may take up to three years involving exhausting work with various statistical data and materials as well as requiring intensive negotiations with stakeholders (SWAN, 2005). The savings can be made if the criteria are borrowed from other ecolabelling initiatives targeting the same product or service group as well as if other stakeholders, namely academia and NGOs, are involved into the process of preparing and writing such reports and manuals.

Phase IV (Management and Marketing): employment of managers responsible for further running an ecolabel and starting marketing and dissemination campaigns. An awarding (certifying) body requires covering **administration costs** (salaries for personnel, rent and telephone fees, mailing expenses and other miscellaneous costs connected with running an initiative and communication of its members with other structural branches of an administrative organization (funding and verifying bodies), stakeholders of a scheme and public). The amount of money allocated to cover these expenses depends on the size of an awarding body (at least 2-5 employees), number of offices and a type of employment of its members. In certain cases an awarding body can be run by volunteers or people employed on a part-time basis. This is made in order to reduce expenses related to this category (Kronkvist, 2005). It is noteworthy to mention that for some ecolabels costs of office space and administration may constitute up to 40-50% of their total expenses (GEN, 2002). The costs of marketing of a tourism ecolabel and its promotion may constitute up to 30-40% of the overall expenses of an ecolabelling scheme especially at the initial stages of its development.

To sum up, it is noteworthy to mention that expenses needed to be covered within the scopes of those phases of the ecolabel development related to setting up an initiative (I-III, party IV) require a significant financial assistance. It is usually received either through the international sources of funding or from the budget of initiators of a project. An ecolabelling organization and, further, an awarding body can hardly afford itself to make a large contribution into the reimbursement of some of these costs at this stage of the scheme's development. However, after an ecolabel has been set up, it may get more possibilities to generate revenues which should be utilized to reduce dependence of a certification programme on the sources of external funding.

Intermediate funding brings an optional nature. It is intended for performing some smaller specific tasks within the scopes of the stages I-III of an ecolabelling project under the condition if additional financing is available (e.g. for a sociological study among tourists regarding their attitude to the labelled products and services; detailed market study of the tourism industry in a particular country or region, etc.). This funding can be provided to an ecolabelling organization or to NGOs or educational institutions by particular stakeholders who might be interested in the conduction of a specific sociological or feasibility studies; the amounts of financing are usually small and bring the irregular nature (Kronkvist, 2005).

Further funding is required to run an ecolabelling scheme after it has been set up. As a rule, it is provided either by the international funds (for a certain period of time) or by the authorities, NGOs and industry associations. It is noteworthy to mention that starting from this stage, in addition to this external funding, an awarding (certifying) body gets a possibility to make its own profits through the certification (registration) and membership fees collected from the applicants. These are the most important sources of internal revenues for any tourism ecolabel. According to the practitioners in the field of tourism certification, at present a few ecolabels are financially sustainable through the certification and membership fees (STSC, 2003); such sort of financial self-sufficiency is only possible when a critical mass of certified parties is reached (Hulvik, 2005; Mayer, 2005; Kaas, 2005). The payments may vary considerably in amount and depend on the size of particular businesses, their annual turnover, geographical location, type, etc. (Geitz, 2001). Today, for example, The European Flower and Nordic SWAN ecolabels charge application fees up to 2000 EURO whereas The Green Certificate (Latvia) requires businesses to pay only approx. 14 EURO (SWAN, 2005; Green Certificate, 2004). Each ecolabelling scheme has its own way on how to determine the amount of payment; however, it is recommended to conduct a research on the willingness-to-pay and/or cost-benefit analysis of the certification among different businesses (WTO, 2004).

After an ecolabel has been set up, its awarding body can also start developing commercial tourism services that may bring extra funding to support its operations. It can be implied in the form of participation in tourism publishing business, acting like tourism agencies, booking accommodation, selling tours and providing extensive marketing (e.g. the Viabono umbrella brand (Germany) charges for bookings made through the Viabono web-portal; The Green Certificate (Latvia) set up a travel agency which provides promotion, booking, sales for participating rural accommodations that pay membership fees for a variety of services as well as to other tourism businesses in the country and abroad) (WTO, 2004).

Another possibility to generate revenues for a tourism ecolabelling initiative is to organize and actively advertise trainings, workshops and seminars for the certified businesses and potential awardees. It may provide an awarding body with another source of additional profits. The format, regularity and registration fees for such trainings are defined by the members of an awarding body and depend on the scope of a specific ecolabel, a number of the labelled businesses and the availability of specialists who might conduct these events.

However, despite the availability of different sources of internal revenues, most of tourism ecolabels today are still dependent on external financing. According to the practitioners, it may take up to 2-5 years for an ecolabelling scheme to become self-financing (Hulvik, 2005; Mayer, 2005; Kaas, 2005). The most important is to get external financial assistance at the beginning in order to cover initial expenses and develop a wise marketing and promoting policy afterwards attracting applicants and thus generating extra revenues for an ecolabel.

Further funding is needed to cover costs associated with the verification procedures and marketing and public relations campaigns. These are the crucial points of any ecolabelling initiative which aims to become successful.

- **Verification costs;**

The verification procedures are often very costly for a tourism ecolabel. Therefore there have been a number of attempts to reduce these expenses without loosing credibility of a scheme. Currently, most tourism ecolabels cover costs of verification by the certification (registration) and membership fees paid by the applicants. In order to reduce the expenses related to the conduction of the verification procedures, a few solutions have been worked out. One way of

cutting costs is to raise the certification and membership fees or charge the applicants for the initial application package (Australian Eco-Certification Programme, 2005). However, in many cases this approach does not seem to be feasible because most applicants for an ecolabel belong to the so-called small and medium categories of businesses (Ayuso, Fullana, Montcada, 2005). Therefore it is often rather expensive for them to pay some extra fee for getting a certificate (Sasidharan, Font, 2001) The most interesting (and, at the same time, highly discussed) solution to this issue is to replace expensive on-site verification by the verifying procedures conducted on desk which usually include analysis of the so-called justification materials provided by an applicant (e.g. bills from the energy and water companies testifying about a reduction of the resources consumption corresponding to the standards set up by a scheme). In this case an ecolabel may significantly reduce costs of the auditors' traveling and time spent on verifying. The Viabono umbrella brand relying mostly on this type of the verification procedures and customers feedback managed to significantly reduce expenses of this category. Currently, this ecolabelling initiative conducts on-desk verification (up to 90%); only in specific cases the involvement of external auditors is done (Meyer, 2005). The problem which arises here deals with credibility of such an approach. However, some practitioners believe that this issue can be addressed by requiring submitting reference letters from the public authorities and recognized environmental or tourism organizations which could prove the correctness of the information provided. Moreover, some of them contend that internal verification can be more creditable from the business perspective than external especially if some of the external auditors (e.g. government) discredited themselves due to different reasons (Kaas, 2004).

Other potential solutions to the problem of reducing verification costs deal with the collaboration of a particular certification programme with other ecolabelling schemes existing in the country (i.e. sharing the expenses for auditing) as well as with those parties who could conduct verifying procedures at a lower price (universities, research institutions, etc.). Another important point is to train internal auditors under the approval of their candidatures by major stakeholders with their further involvement not only into the process of verifying the applications for an ecolabel but also into the procedures related to auditing the companies willing to implement ISO or EMAS standards. It may help an awarding body to generate additional revenues allocated for the fulfillment of other tasks. Internal verifiers are trained today by more and more number of ecolabelling schemes; it is believed to be an effective approach to address the problem of costs associated with verification (Kaas, 2005).

- **Marketing and public relations costs;**

An ecolabelling scheme has to market a label in order to attract attention and recognition from the potential applicants and promote the certified products and services. This procedure accounts for a significant percentage of the awarding body's expenses because most of the activities carried out within its scopes are usually costly unless an awarding body has a special agreement with other stakeholders in the field of mass-media and communication that enables it to make advertisements at lower prices. Today, most tourism ecolabels use internal and external sources of funding to conduct marketing and advertisement campaigns (Sasidharan, Font, 2001).

One of the most important categories of expenses related to marketing and promotion of an ecolabelling scheme is costs of translation. This is a crucial issue for those ecolabels which pretend to get international recognition and are willing to be as much successful as possible. The Nature's Best ecolabel launched in 2002, for example, did not have sufficient monetary funds to translate its website and printing materials into English until early 2005. As a result, some businesses expressed their displeasure by this fact because it was a reason of loosing

clients from neighbouring Denmark and Germany who used to be one of the most important categories of users of the certified products (Legind, 2005).

In order to reduce costs associated with marketing and information dissemination activities as well as for the purpose of raising their effectiveness, a number of different possibilities exist. The Internet marketing, for example, can be a powerful tool for promotion; moreover, it is often cheaper than other marketing activities. The cross-promotion and shifting responsibility for marketing to the third parties is considered as another potential possibility to reduce marketing costs. In this case an awarding body concludes a special agreement with a recognized and authoritative organization having an outstanding experience in the field of mass-media (publisher, TV company, newspaper, etc.) thus making it responsible for marketing and promotion of an ecolabeling scheme (Meyer, 2004). The Green Certificate (Latvia) generates some additional revenues as a result of the agreement with four certified businesses (pensions) which function as demonstration facilities for the potential awardees (Green Certificate, 2004). The Viabono umbrella brand cooperates with a lottery (Bingo) promoting itself among its customers and making some extra profits (Meyer, 2004).

To conclude, funding is an important factor of success for any tourism ecolabelling project. Without consistent financial assistance a certification scheme will never survive. It has to be mentioned that most tourism ecolabelling projects are run at a loss, particularly at the initial stages of their implementation (Font, 2001). However, this is quite a natural phenomenon constituting the so-called intermediate loss which is typical for any initiative that pretends to be pilot in a particular country or region. When it comes to a tourism ecolabel, the foremost reason for its loss lies in the fact that at the beginning of implementation of such a project not so many businesses are willing to get certified; their involvement depends on the fulfilment of other factors associated with a successful development of an ecolabel, namely with the maintenance of a high level of its credibility and transparency as well as with the effective conduction of marketing campaigns. Thus, at the initial stages of a certification programme, when the business involvement is rather low, it is doubtful to count on great revenues generated as a result of the application and membership fees paid. At the same time, costs associated with a process of setting up and running an ecolabel, especially such procedures as criteria preparation and discussion, manuals writing, dissemination of information, etc., are quite high meaning that a project will be run at a loss until the business interest and their participation reaches such a level when the revenues generated are sufficient to cover most of the scheme's expenses (Hulvik, 2005; Mayer, 2005; Kaas, 2005).

Finally, in order to make sure that an ecolabel will be financed, it is important to negotiate in advance the potential sources of funding and their approximate capacity as well as to attract the stakeholders to contribute into solving this problem. It is also crucial to work out a comprehensive strategy of generating internal revenues for a scheme. The issue of funding is closely related to other factors of success for an ecolabelling initiative. It is especially linked to the problem of credibility, transparency and trust as well as to the issue of marketing.

4.2.5. Dissemination and marketing

Marketing plays an important role in tourism ecolabelling. It determines a level of recognition of a particular certification scheme in a specific country or region. In order to make an ecolabel successful, the business interest and customers demand must exist. Therefore, in order to make sure that businesses and tourists are familiar with the concept of an ecolabel, its potential advantages, benefits and impacts, the extensive dissemination campaigns should be conducted (Meyer, 2005).

According to some experts, SMEs constituting a considerable part of tourism businesses do not see advantages in getting certified (STSC, 2003). Therefore the marketing campaigns should particularly aim at showing them how the certification can become a powerful marketing tool to attract new customers interested in the products of a high quality and with a low environmental impact. In addition, they believe that there is often a little customer knowledge about certification which should be raised through dissemination and promotion campaigns.

Due to all mentioned above, marketing is an issue which should be paid a special attention to over the process of developing and running a tourism ecolabel. Until recently the problem of effective marketing has been quite sharp for many tourism ecolabelling initiatives mainly due to the fact that most of them are run by environmental experts, not marketing specialists (STSC, 2003). However, the situation is gradually changing; more and more practitioners are recognizing effective marketing as a key point for success of any certification programme (Kaas, 2005).

Marketing of a tourism ecolabel can be performed into two phases. The first deals with **initial dissemination** of information; it is conducted with the purpose of attracting attention from stakeholders of an initiative and popularise the idea of ecolabelling. This task should be performed by an ecolabelling organization at the initial stages of a project (phases I-III, partly IV). Within the scopes of this task, assessment of the business demand for the certification services and analysis of causes that affect this demand should be made. It is also important to define what stakeholders -- consumers, businesses, public authorities, industry and ultimately particular countries and regions need and expect from an ecolabelling initiative (IIED, 2002).

After an ecolabel has been set up, the role of **further marketing** campaigns increases. Here, marketing should aim to increase recognition of an initiative not only on the regional, but also on the international level. At this stage of a certification programme marketing can usually be performed through the ecolabel's official website, printed media (newspapers, magazines, newsletters, advertising brochures, folders, postcards, press-releases, etc.) and other types of media used (television, radio, Internet). Networking and sharing of information on the best practices among stakeholders of an initiative with its further dissemination is often regarded as an effective measure to promote a scheme (STSC, 2003). Another important possibility for marketing and promotion of an ecolabelling project in this phase is participation of its representatives and practitioners in exhibitions, conferences, tourism forums and fairs of different ranks. The latter option can be quite expensive because it includes not only paying the admission or registration fees for conferences or similar events but also requires covering travel expenses. However, costs of marketing and public relations are unavoidable for an awarding body because these activities make a considerable contribution into the fulfilment of other factors of success for a particular ecolabel, raise attention from the applicants and increase recognition of a certification programme among the consumers of the certified products and services (Meyer, 2005).

Today most ecolabelling schemes use printing media to market its activities (42%). Participation in the conferences and seminars is also a very popular tool to promote an ecolabel (22%) followed by marketing on website (20%) and use of other types of media (WTO, 2002, p.66). In order to increase the effectiveness of promotion, the active involvement of an awarding body in all above activities is necessary. Furthermore, if an ecolabel aims to target a foreign market, promotion through the initiative's web-site is an essential element for achieving this goal. The active participation of the representatives of a certification programme in different specialized tourism events is also a key factor of effective

marketing. Despite its costliness, it may give a better dissemination effect and bring new stakeholders into an ecolabelling initiative.

The condition of stakeholders' cooperation and participation is closely linked to the issue of effective marketing and dissemination. The sources of media are the important stakeholders of an ecolabelling initiative which may be very helpful in performing this task. They can also be encouraged to participate in the promotion process by the government and public authorities especially if some of them belong to these entities. The governmental bodies of different rank can also be active players in marketing and promotion of a tourism ecolabel. Their help is essential from the point of organizing different public relations events open to public and journalists where the presentation of the initiative's major achievements and successes can be regularly made (Müller, 2002). The representatives of academia may also contribute into marketing of an ecolabel through academic publications and conferences devoted to the issues of tourism ecolabelling.

It should be mentioned that a level of the fulfillment of factors of the ecolabel's success is identified by evaluating the stakeholders' capabilities to play particular roles in their addressing. The evaluation of capabilities is made on the basis of investigation of different aspects associated with specific factors of success and presented in Table 4-2. Stakeholder's participation and cooperation is determined by a number of tourism actors willing to join an initiative, knowledge – by the availability of study courses and materials on environmental labeling, credibility – by an image and reputation of particular actors and projects, their initiators and participants, trust – by the willingness of stakeholders to believe each other, funding – by the amount of money allocated to finance tourism and environmental protection projects, marketing – by existent experience and availability of instruments to perform such a task. The research conducted to evaluate above aspects of success factors can identify sufficiency/insufficiency of the stakeholder's capabilities to play particular roles in their fulfillment.

Table 4-2   Basic framework for evaluation of the stakeholders' capabilities to fulfil the factors of success

Factor	Evaluation is based on
Stakeholder's participation and cooperation	Number of tourism actors willing to join an initiative
Knowledge	Presence of study courses and materials on environmental labeling
Credibility, transparency, trust	Positive reputation of particular actors and projects; availability of information on the progress of a project; reporting on performance; willingness of stakeholders to believe each other
Funding	Amount of money or availability of funds allocated to finance tourism and environmental protection projects
Marketing	Existent marketing experience and availability of instruments to market

To conclude, there are five factors determining success of a tourism ecolabel. All of them should be properly addressed if promoters of a scheme are willing to achieve the best outcome from an ecolabelling initiative. It should be mentioned that all the factors are closely linked to each other and should be fulfilled by joint efforts of the project's stakeholders.

5. Belarus and its tourism market

5.1. General information

The Republic of Belarus is situated in the central part of Eastern Europe (Figure 5-1). The country occupies the territory of 207 600 square kilometres (ranked as the 13th in Europe and the 6th among the member-states of CIS) and borders on Russia on the north and east, Ukraine on the south, Poland on the west, Lithuania and Latvia on the northwest. The distance between the northernmost and southernmost points of Belarus is 560 kilometres; between the westernmost and easternmost is 650 kilometres (Atlas of the Republic of Belarus, 1998).

The territory of the country is relatively flat constituting a glacial plain complicated by a number of hills and divided by river valleys. The average altitude is 160 meters with the highest point in the central (345 meters) and the lowest – in the western part of Belarus (80 meters). Most hills are situated in the central and north-western parts of the country whereas the southern territories are occupied by a big square of unique swampy lowlands covered with forests. The northern part of Belarus is characterized by a big number of lakes which have a glacial origin and boast of their cleanliness (National Agency for Tourism of the Republic of Belarus, 2003).

Figure 5-1. Belarus on the map of Europe

Source: Adopted from Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in USA, 2005

The climate of Belarus is moderately continental; winters are mild and humid, often with long thaws, summers are gently warm. The coldest month is January with average temperatures from 4.4 to 8.4 Celsius degrees below zero; July is the warmest month of the year with average temperatures varying from 17 to 19.7 Celsius degrees above zero. The average annual level of precipitation is between 550 and 700 mm (Atlas of the Republic of Belarus, 1998).

The population of Belarus is around 9.8 million people (census of 1999), mainly Belarusians (81%). Other nationalities represented in the country are Russians (approximately 11%), Poles

(4%), Ukrainians (2.5%), Lithuanians and others. The average density of the population is about 47 inhabitants per 1 square kilometre; urban population constitutes about 71% (National Atlas of Belarus, 2002).

From administrative point of view, Belarus is divided into 6 regions (oblast) comprising 118 districts (rayon) and the capital city of Minsk (Figure 5-2); it has 110 towns and 25 thousand rural settlements. The capital of the country is Minsk with the population of about 1.73 million people in 2003. Of 110 towns, 7 cities are with the population size from 100 to 200 thousand residents and 6 cities — with the population size from 200 to 500 thousand residents (Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in USA, 2005).

Figure 5-2. Administrative division of the Republic of Belarus

Source: Adopted from Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in USA, 2005

Belarus has a favourable economic-geographical location; the country is characterised by the well-developed transport network and highly-qualified labour resources. In times of the former Soviet Union up to 80% of the products manufactured in Belarus were exported either to other republics or abroad. Despite a serious economic crisis occurred after the break-up of USSR which resulted with a particular acuteness in the total loss of all economic links with former business partners, the country managed to successfully overcome its major tendencies and achieved a certain improvement in all macroeconomic characteristics. Today the annual growth constitutes about 6-8% of the country's GDP. The leading branches of economy are machine-building, chemical and light. One of the most important problems of the industrial complex of Belarus is a poor development of its material-technical resources. Investment policy of the state cannot provide a required level of renewal of the basic industrial funds. In specific branches of economy, the depreciation of equipment is close to 80% that increases a risk of technogenic accidents. Agriculture remains to be the least economically profitable and socially prosperous branch of the Belarusian economy mainly due to the low rates of privatization, strong traditions of collective farming, and permanent outflow of the rural population to towns (Filimonau, 2004).

Belarus suffered much from the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster happened on April, 26th, 1986. About 21% of the territory of the country with the population around 1.6 million people have been contaminated with radioactive substances. Today, the most polluted area (situated on the very south of Belarus occupying approximately 8% of the territory) is restricted for any form of use (except research activities); a special radioactive-ecological reserve (Palesski) has been created here (Atlas of the Republic of Belarus, 1998).

Belarus is characterized by a rich natural and historical heritage. The square of the areas covered with forests varies from 8 to 65%, with the average index 37.8% (National Atlas of Belarus, 2002). The country has 0.94 hectares of wooded land and 136.1 cubic meters of timber reserves per capita that is almost 2-fold higher than on the average in Europe (Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in USA, 2005). The huge forested areas in Belarus and Poland form the belt of the so-called "puschas" (dense forests), that is a unique phenomenon for the entire European continent. On the south of Belarus, there are the well-preserved natural swampy territories. They occupy about 5.4% of its square and have a vital significance for Europe as a corner of the untouched nature and habitat for many rare species (Davydik, Yatsuhno, 2004). There are approximately 11 000 lakes and more than 20 000 rivers and brooks with the total length of about 91 000 km; the total area of natural protection constitutes 7.6% of the country. The biggest wild life reserves of the European significance are Belavezhskaja Puscha national park, Braslauskija azery national park, Narachanski national park, Prypjatski national park, and Bjarezinski state biosphere reserve. The existing system of the protected territories is regarded as a basis for the national environmental network which could become an essential part of the European eco-network in the future (National Agency for Tourism of the Republic of Belarus, 2003).

Due to its eventful and glorious past, Belarus may offer the tourist's attention a great variety of historical monuments ranging from the burial mounds and archaeological sites of the Stone Age, castles and palaces of the times of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Commonwealth of Both Nations (political and economic union between the Polish Kingdom and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania), catholic and orthodox churches, monasteries and cloisters of different age to the monuments of World War I and II. Although a big damage has been inflicted to Belarusian cultural and architectural heritage over the period of communization (many churches have been destroyed as a result of the official atheism policy developed by the Soviet authorities), wars and post-war reconstruction works (most damaged buildings have been demolished despite their invaluable historical significance) (Gabrus et al., 2003), there are many places in the country possessing a high tourist attractiveness and worthwhile to visit and experience. It has to be mentioned that the Mir castle (Hrodna region) and Belavezhskaja Puscha national park (Hrodna and Brest regions) have been put on the heritage list of UNESCO as wonderful examples of Belarusian unique cultural and natural heritage. In July, 2005 a decision to include the architectural-cultural residence complex in Neswizh (Hrodno region) and a network of the 19 geodesic stations constituting the so-called Struve meridian arch scattered through the entire territory of Belarus was made. Moreover, there is an intention to put the central avenues of Minsk as the best example of Stalinism architecture as well as the Augustouski channel (Hrodna region) as a unique hydro-technical construction and transport artery of the international significance into the list of the world's heritage monuments (National Agency for Tourism of the Republic of Belarus, 2003).

As a matter of fact, today Belarus is regarded by many specialists as the country with a relatively high potential for the development of tourism activities. However, the lack of tourism infrastructure required to create favourable conditions to attract attention to Belarus from foreign tourists, substantial differences in prices which should be paid for tourism products and services by foreign visitors compared to the citizens of the country (e.g. hotels

and museums charge foreign tourists twice or triple price) as well as a low quality of the services provided considerably diminishes its value. In addition to that, the current political regime existent in the country does not favour the tourism development in Belarus, particularly when it comes to the inbound tourism activities. The policy of self-isolation developed by the official authorities and their unwillingness to cooperate with western democracies pushes the country back and significantly reduces its chances to occupy a suitable niche in the European tourism market. Despite a number of efforts undertaken by tourism companies and associations directed to raise the interest to Belarus and attract some foreign investments into this branch of economy, most of them failed due to the unpredictable political decisions and the overall hostility of foreigners to the state. Another strong reason determining the unwillingness of some tourists to visit Belarus is hidden in its image as the country contaminated much with radioactive substances as a result of the Chernobyl disaster. Although this statement does not correspond to the reality (under certain circumstances this misfortune may even stimulate the development of non-traditional types of tourism in the country), it significantly contribute into building the negative attitude of some tourists to Belarus.

5.2. Decision-making in Belarusian tourism

First of all, it is noteworthy to mention that the government plays a very important role in all sectors of the Belarusian economy. Tourism is not an exception to this rule; on the contrary, according to some specialists it is one of the most regulated segments of the Belarusian market. The government is a key player whose participation and deep involvement in any tourism initiative can hardly be ignored. Moreover, it will never allow any other tourism actors to develop a particular project of the regional or republican and, sometimes, even local level without exhaustive consultations and a mandatory approval of by its representatives (Klitsunova, 2005). It especially concerns those initiatives which are supposed to be launched with foreign financial assistance. Since the current Belarusian government is always suspicious to any kind of external funding being afraid of the fact that this money will be used to support the activity of opposition, it strives to control any initiatives which are developed within the help of the partners from abroad. There is a special department in the government responsible for the registration and checking the nature of foreign funding obtained in the form of grants or donor aid. In the case if the source of funding is not reliable according to the practitioners from this department, the grants can be cancelled and the organization receiving this funding is cautioned. Usually it takes up to one year to check the character and nature of the foreign financial assistance and make a decision on its approval or rejection (Klitsunova, 2005)

The Ministry of Sport and Tourism is the main coordinating body responsible for decision-making in the field of tourism in Belarus. It consists of a number of smaller organizations which fulfil the different tasks related to sport and tourism activities in the country (Figure 5-3). Among these, the National Agency for Tourism and the Department of Tourism of the Ministry of Sport and Tourism are they most important players. They work in a close cooperation with the regional and local branches of the Ministry (called the Departments of Physical Culture, Sport and Tourism of Executive Committees) who take a responsibility on the regional and local levels. There is a state-owned tour operator – "Belintourist" (Belarusian Foreign Tourist) applying all the concepts and guidelines developed by the ministry and its structural bodies; this is one of the biggest tour providers in the country used by the authorities as an example of the best practices in Belarusian tourism.

It has to be mentioned that until recently the Ministry of Sport and Tourism has paid more attention to sport activities rather than to tourism. The situation is gradually changing nowadays as a result of the shift in the state priorities and the acknowledgement of a high significance of tourism industry for the Belarusian economy by the authorities. However,

today the position of the Minister is occupied by the specialist in the field of sport; according to some practitioners he is still prone to support sport initiatives rather than tourism (Makouski, 2005).

The Ministry of the Environment does not regard tourism as the area of its competence; however, they are open to joint projects which are related to the environmental aspects of tourism activities. It is noteworthy to mention that there is a special inter-departmental committee in the government responsible for coordinating actions between the Ministry of Sport and Tourism and other ministries.

The Ministry of Agriculture is not regarded as a stakeholder in the field of tourism industry in the country. Although the rural tourism and, inter alia, organic agriculture practices are gradually developing in Belarus, these issues are not paid any attention to from the ministry's officials. The foremost reason for such a situation lies in the fact that there are a number of other problems in the Belarusian agriculture, which is still undergoing a deep crisis, that call for immediate solutions e.g. slow privatisation of agricultural enterprises, depreciation of technical base, etc. As a matter of fact, the rural tourism issues are not considered as priorities for the ministry even in the nearest future.
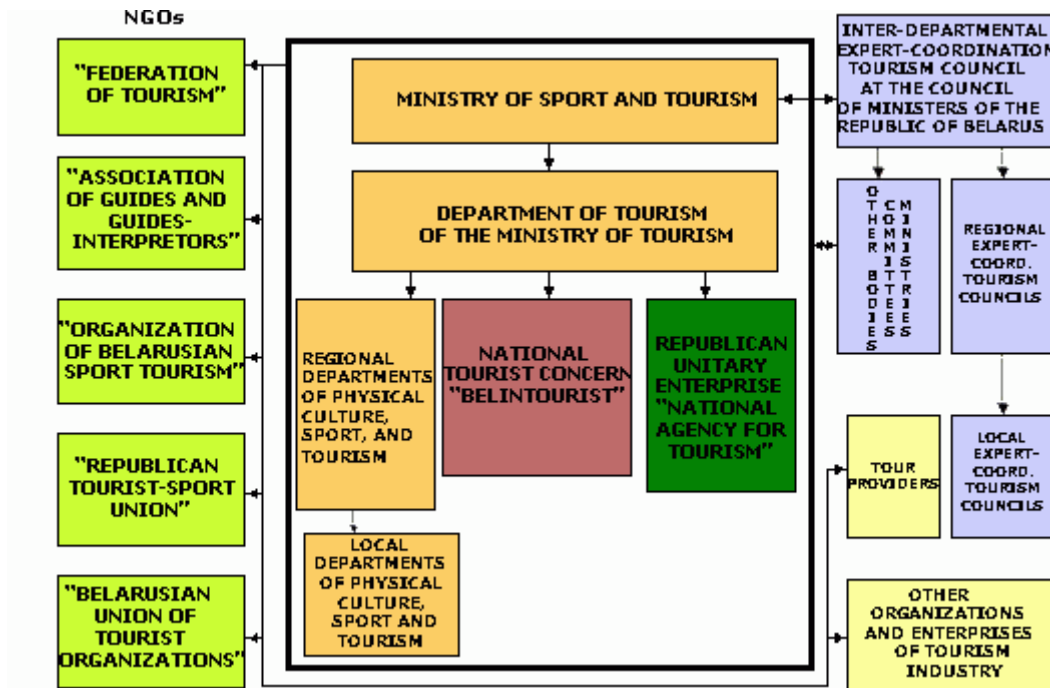
Figure 5-3. Management structure of tourism in the Republic of Belarus

Source: Adopted from NPTD, 2005

The management structure of the Belarusian tourism also consists of the 5 big NGOs. They contribute into preparing qualified specialists e.g. guides and interpreters, strive to defend the rights of tour operators and are supposed to participate into the discussion of the new decisions in the field of tourism made by the ministry. It has to be mentioned that according to some experts, these NGOs are refereed to the type of the so-called pro-governmental organizations which are often highly dependent on the authorities and act in their favour (Kuzmenkova, 2004).

The Belarusian State Institute of Standardization and Certification should also be mentioned as one of the players in the field of tourism industry in Belarus. Although it is not referred directly to tourism and therefore has not been included in its management structure, it is nevertheless appointed to certify Belarusian tourism businesses, namely hotels and tour-operators (Bokut, 2005). It is noteworthy to mention that it is the only organization in the country accredited by the authorities to perform any procedures related to certification. It is also the only entity commissioned to conduct verification and auditing services (Klitsunova, 2005).

The aspects of tourism development are included into the Law on Tourism of the Republic of Belarus adopted in 1999. It addresses the principles of the official policy of the state in the field of tourism, regulates the relationships between its stakeholders, defines their rights and stipulate reciprocal obligations, etc. (Tourism Law, 1999).

Apart from it, tourism is underlined by the National Programme for Tourism Development of the Republic of Belarus which is valid for each 5 years. It is usually prepared by the Ministry of Sport and Tourism in cooperation with leading tourism specialists representing tour operators, academia and public authorities of different levels. The programme prescribes a number of actions directed to develop in Belarus a modern, effective and competitive tourism industry which might considerably contribute into the country's economy (NPTD, 2005).

In 2004 the National Strategy of the Sustainable Socio-Economic Development of the Republic of Belarus was prepared by a broad team of experts. It determines the framework of the development of Belarus from the sustainability point of view. The National Strategy pays a special attention to tourism industry in Belarus recognizing its significance for the country's economy and determines how to develop it on a sustainable basis (National Strategy of the Sustainable Socio-Economic Development of the Republic of Belarus, 2004).

5.3. Tourism in Belarus: current status

The modern situation in the field of tourism industry in Belarus witnesses the fact that it does not play such an important role in the economy of the state as in other countries. Despite a relatively high tourist potential, Belarus occupies a modest position in the world tourism market and considerably falls behind of the neighbouring states.

Today tourism industry in Belarus focuses mainly on the outbound tourism services whereas the inbound and internal tourism remains to be less developed and demanded in the country. The profits generated by tourism in Belarus constitute 0.1% of its GDP i.e. 110 times less than as a whole in the world (Belarusian Newspaper, 2005). Due to the fact there is no common effective system of statistical registration and analysis in the field of tourism industry in the country, the real contribution of this branch of economy in the generation of national GDP is often underscored, it is believed that up to 30% of all tourism deals is made in "shadow" and not accounted in the official statistics; however, in any case the input of tourism into the economy of Belarus is not so high as it could be (NPTD, 2005).

The number of arrivals in Belarus is relatively low and stable from year to year but the number of departures is gradually growing (Figure 5-4). It is noteworthy to mention that the number of arrivals made exceptionally with the tourism purposes constitutes only 21%; the prevailing types of arrivals according to their purpose are connected with business and private visits (up to 70%); most arrivals are registered from Russia, Lithuania, Poland, Latvia, and Ukraine (Ministry of Sport and Tourism of the Republic of Belarus, 2004).
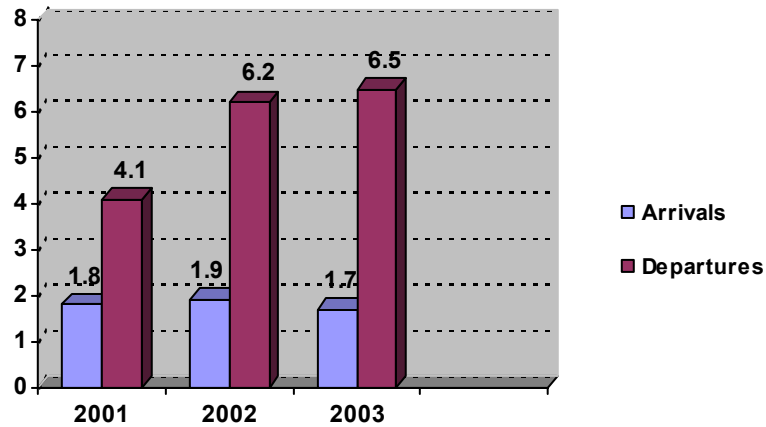
Figure 5-4. The number of arrivals and departures in Belarus (except those arriving and departing with the purpose of permanent residence) within the period 2001-2003 (million people)

Source: Adopted from Ministry of Sport and Tourism of the Republic of Belarus, 2004.

According to the Ministry of Statistics, the number of foreign tourists received in Belarus through tour operators is absolutely low compared to the number of Belarusian citizens sent abroad as tourists (Figure 5-5) (Ministry of Sport and Tourism of the Republic of Belarus, 2004).
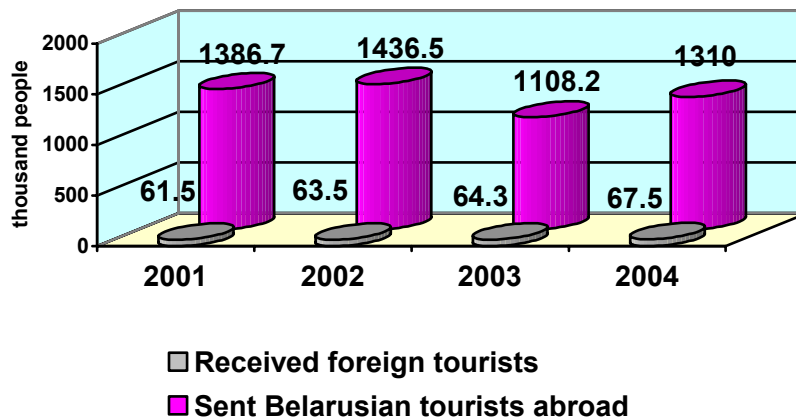
Figure 5-5. The number of received and sent abroad tourists in Belarus within the period 2001-2004

Source: Adopted from Belarusian Newspaper, 2005; Ministry of Sport and Tourism of the Republic of Belarus, 2004

Of the 16 000 objects of the cultural and natural heritage which can be used with tourism purposes in the country, less than 10% are currently in use. The foremost reasons for such a bad situation in the field of inbound and internal tourism and a great misbalance between a number of arrived and departed in Belarus lie in the poorly-developed infrastructure and slowly-renovated tourist facilities in the country, most of which have been inherited from the times of the former Soviet Union. According to some estimation, up to 70-80% of the material-technical resources of tourism call for immediate renovation. There is no reasonable

mechanism and strategy in Belarus on how to involve external and internal investments in order to solve this problem. Besides this, the process of accepting the international standards in the field of the quality of the tourism products and services provided is extremely slow. There is a strong need in the qualified specialists of different levels, particularly those who could effectively work in marketing tourism activities in Belarus and abroad (NPTD, 2005).

Like the foreign visitors, the Belarusian tourists are often not satisfied with the quality of the services provided in the country and prefer internal tourism in Belarus to other countries, particularly Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Russia and Germany; the number of departures from Belarus to these destinations made with tourism purposes constitutes almost 90% of the total amount (Ministry of Sport and Tourism of the Republic of Belarus, 2004). However, there is a strong intention expressed by the officials to drastically change this state-of-the-art and make the internal tourism market more attractive and competitive for the Belarusian tourists as well as for foreigners.

In order to develop the inbound and internal tourism services in the country, a number of measures have been recently undertaken. The most important is related to a new procedure of licensing of tourism providers in Belarus. By September, 1st, 2005 all tour operators will have to go through a new licensing process which can be passed only upon the condition if a particular tour provider offers a specific number of inbound tourism products and services. Today only 20% of the Belarusian tour operators work with the inbound and internal tourism in the country; in order to increase this rate the new mandatory type of a tourism license is introduced. The license is revoked if a tour operator fails to provide the National Agency for Tourism commissioned to perform this procedure with documentary evidences of its readiness to develop inbound tourism products and services in the country (e.g. a contract with a foreign partner about the organization of the reception of foreign tourists in Belarus). Moreover, the Ministry of Sport and Tourism has expressed their willingness to introduce certain quotas of the number of foreign tourists attracted to the country which will have to be reached by tour providers. These quotas are planned to be dependent on the size of tour operators but the particularities of how they will be calculated are still under discussion (Belarusian Newspaper, 2005).

In addition to that, a compulsory certification of tourism services provided by tour operators has been introduced. It started as a voluntary initiative directed to award those businesses which can prove the high quality and safety of the services provided. However, due to the changes in licensing, it has been decided to make this procedure compulsory. Now all tour operators have to pass the certification until April, 1st, 2006. The primary reason for such a decision lies in the willingness of the Ministry of Sport and Tourism to check if tour providers actually work with the inbound and internal tourism in the country or ignore this obligation by signing a contract with a foreign partner but doing nothing in practice. In other words, the certification aims to not only control if a particular tour operator has a contract with foreign partners about the reception of foreign guests, but also checks the presence of a specific product which is offered and developed by a tour provider on the internal tourism market. The authorities also promise to provide those tour operators who actively deal with the development of the inbound and internal tourism in Belarus with certain preferences and additional incentives (Chislova, 2005).

Apart from the new licensing and certification procedures, the new National Programme of Tourism Development for the period 2006-2010 has been worked out. Within the scope of this document, Belarus is planned to be divided into the 27 tourist zones of the national and regional rank located in the areas with the highest tourism potential. A special attention is going to be paid to the development of ecotourism, agrotourism, transit tourism, and other

types of tourism in Belarus within the scopes of these zones. In order to popularise and market above types of tourism and zones, a common network of tourist information centers will be created in the country. This programme will be financed from the state budget and its realization is going to be begun in the nearest future (Belarusian Newspaper, 2005).

According to the estimations of the officials, the measures mentioned above will enable Belarus by 2010 to reach a 30-fold increase in the profits generated by the inbound and internal tourism services, attract 3 times more foreign tourists in the country, bring additional investments and improve the image of Belarus and its tourism industry abroad as well as among Belarusian tourists (Belarusian Newspaper, 2005).

The last but not least step undertaken by the Belarusian authorities with the purpose of raising interest to the country is connected with its accession to WTO. In April, 2005 the parliament unanimously ratified this decision having thus made Belarus the 146th member of above authoritative organization. The officials believe that Belarus will benefit from the membership in WTO since the country will be advertised and popularised through its professional networks that may enhance the visibility of Belarus as an attractive tourist destination (WTO Press and Communications Department, 2005).

However, some independent specialists in the filed of tourism do not share the optimism of the authorities and believe that despite a number of measures undertaken they have approached the problem from the wrong end (Makouski, 2005). According to these experts, the division of Belarus into the 27 zones does not make big sense because in this case the money allocated will be dispersed through all these zones without any ponderable effect. It is believed to be much more efficient to work out a number of tourist routes instead of zones which would be well-furnished and equipped with necessary and modern tourist infrastructure. Some specialists also contend that due to the lack of the required infrastructure it is not feasible to make a stake on the development of ecotourism and agrotourism in Belarus today (Shulga, 2003). Their vision is based on the fact that Belarus is a totally new country for tourists and first time they will come here in order to get acquainted with the country in general and to see its major sights of interest. The agrotourism and ecotourism services are supposed to be in the programme of their second and further visits to Belarus, not the first one. According to these specialists, a particular attention should be paid to business tourists and those people who come to Belarus by transit. These categories of tourists (especially the former one) constitute a significant share from the total number of visitors; therefore it is prudent to count on them. They also contend that another big problem, which slows down the development of the inbound tourism in Belarus, is hidden in the high price of the Belarusian services which does not necessarily guarantee an adequate quality. Despite higher incomes, the foreigners are not prone to pay big money for the absence of comfort (Makouski, 2005).

5.4. Actors of the Belarusian tourism industry

5.4.1. Tourism businesses

Today, there are 689 officially registered and licensed <u>tour operators</u> in Belarus with the average number of employees equal to 5-6 persons. However, due to the upcoming changes in the legislation, namely, because of the obligation to provide inbound tourism services and develop internal tourism in order to get a license, the situation is likely to be changed in the nearest future. It is expected that some tour providers will loose the licence as a result of their inability to restructure their business for such a short period of time i.e. until September, 1st, 2005. Moreover, after licensing the Ministry of Sport and Tourism intends to check tour operators twice a year with the purpose of calculating the number of tourists attracted to

Belarus by each particular tour provider. If the latter fails to reach a specific quota imposed by the ministry, the license can be revoked (Tourism and Recreation, 2005). It may also force some tour providers especially smaller ones to leave the business.

Today there are 26 tour-operators which have passed the compulsory certification procedure (3.8% of the total). It is expected that their number will reach 30 by the end of the year (Chislova, 2005). However, neither a new procedure of licensing nor the certification is popular with the representatives of the Belarusian tourism business; particularly, the compulsory nature of the latter has given a rise to unfavourable criticism (Charter 97, 2005).

According to the Ministry of Statistics and Analysis, in 2003 there were 285 <u>accommodation businesses</u> in Belarus. This category includes hotels (260), motels (2), campings (1), hunting huts (9) and other types of accommodation except farms and pensions i.e. businesses specialising in the provision of housing in rural areas. Most of them work all year long except the 4 hunting huts which are available only in summer time. The overall capacity of these accommodations constituted 23 762 visitors per year; the number of tourists accommodated in 2003 was 1 217 037, among these, the visitors from Belarus did the biggest share – 81%. It is noteworthy to mention that, according to statistics, the number of guests accommodated in the facilities of this category of housing in Belarus who officially registered as tourists is insignificant – 19 051 i.e. 1.6% (Ministry of Sport and Tourism of the Republic of Belarus, 2004).

Nowadays, the certification of accommodation services exists in Belarus. It deals with the so-called "star" certification division; the number of stars awarded corresponds to the completeness and quality of the services provided. It has a voluntary nature but some experts believe that the destiny of the voluntary certification for tour operators which has become mandatory can overtake it. There are 12 certified hotels in the country representing 4% of the total number of accommodation businesses; 2 hotels have been awarded 4 stars whereas all the rest belong to the 3 stars category. It is expected that the certification of accommodation services will be over in 2006 (Bokut, 2005).

There are 48 officially registered businesses providing accommodation in rural areas i.e. <u>pensions and farms</u> (Association of Agro- and Ecotourism, 2005). This is a relatively new type of tourism activities in Belarus, however, according to some experts it has high chances to succeed due to the state support and its growing popularity with tourists (Klitsunova, 2005).

Apart from the categories of tourism businesses mentioned above, there are 325 different <u>sanatoriums and resorts</u>, 135 <u>museums</u>, 27 <u>theatres</u>, 2 <u>circuses</u>, 4 <u>zoos</u>, and 23 838 <u>sport facilities</u> in Belarus which are classified as tourism resources by the Ministry of Sport and Tourism. It is noteworthy to mention that restaurants, cafes and pubs in Belarus are not referred to the Ministry of Sport and Tourism. Instead, they belong to the competence of the Ministry of Economy and therefore are not accounted in the official tourism statistics (Ministry of Sport and Tourism of the Republic of Belarus, 2004).

5.4.2. Tourism business associations

There are 3 tourism business associations representing a particular category of the providers of tourism products and services in Belarus. The majority of tour operators are the members of the "<u>Belarusian Union of Tourist Organizations</u>" whereas accommodation business (including sanatoriums and resorts) is represented by the "<u>Association of Accommodation Industry</u>". These organizations are responsible for coordinating businesses' activities, providing them with adequate legal assistance and helping in their promotion on the Belarusian tourism market and abroad. It is noteworthy to mention that the tourism business

associations are not regarded as powerful entities in Belarusian tourism. For example, the most important decisions (i.e. a new procedure of licensing and mandatory certification of the services provided for tour operators) have been made without consultations with the representatives of above associations. In fact, the tourism business associations have been dictated the terms and conditions of licensing and certification by the officials and presented with a fait accompli (Klitsunova, 2005).

The representatives of rural tourism in Belarus seem to have a stronger professional entity called the "Association of Agro- and Ecotourism". By now, its members have prepared the draft amendments to the Law on Tourism which are devoted to the development of agrotourism in the country and have been negotiating with the members of the parliament to consider these amendments in one of the upcoming sessions of this body. Until recently agrotourism has been remaining poorly examined and stipulated in Belarus; due to the actions undertaken by the entity the situation is likely to be changed in the nearest future. However, it is not a typical business association; the organization combines the functions of the professional union and tourist NGO. The relative strength of this entity can be explained by the facts that rural tourism is still not totally regulated by the authorities and that it has a smaller number of businesses which prefer to keep together having learnt the negative experience of tour providers and accommodation industry (Klitsunova, 2005).

5.4.3. Customers associations

There are no customers associations in the field of tourism in Belarus; it is noteworthy to mention that tourists are not even regarded by the officials as an important actor of tourism industry in the country. As a matter of fact, tourists usually do not participate in the discussion of the directions and perspectives of its further development (NPTD, 2005). Instead of a specialized customer association for tourism, there is the "Organization of Customers Rights' Protection" which is to protect the rights of the consumers in any branch of the Belarusian industry. Although tourism is represented in this organization, it does not undertake any measures directed to lobby the interests of the customers among tourism businesses and government.

5.4.4. NGOs

According to the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus, 2214 NGOs (excluding political parties, trade unions and religious organizations) had been registered in the country by January, 1st, 2004 (Kuzmenkova, 2004, p.14). Among these, the fields related to tourism (including sport and recreation activities) had been represented by 19.35% of the total number of NGOs. This is one of the highest rates of the representation if compared to other areas; however, most NGOs in this category deal with sport rather then with tourism (NGO.by, 2005).

There are 5 big tourism NGOs in the country (Figure 5-3). They closely participate in the discussion on the different tourism issues and actively communicate with the Ministry of Sport and Tourism. All the rest NGOs usually do not have a direct access to the authorities and therefore contact them through the above 5 organizations.

The fields related to the environmental issues had accounted for 4.26% of NGOs in Belarus (NGO.by, 2005). Some of them have a long history and have been involved into a number of the different environmental projects of national and international rank; however, those dealing with tourism are rather poorly represented in Belarus (Belarusian Ecological Portal, 2005).

It has to be mentioned that the distinctive feature of NGOs in all post-soviet countries, including Belarus, is their fight and competition between one another rather than the intention

to cooperate and develop partner relationships. NGOs in Belarus usually compete not for people or territories of their influence but for ideas and sources of funding. As a matter of fact, some specialists contend that it is hardly possible to achieve a constructive dialogue and cooperation between certain NGOs representing the same fields of activity (Kuzmenkova, 2004, p.47).

5.4.5. Educational institutions

According to some experts, there are a few educational establishments in Belarus specialising in tourism. Although the study programmes related to tourism industry are present in most of the universities in the country, they are usually devoted to its general description and deal with the basic introduction into the trends and directions of its further development constituting a complementary part of bigger educational courses (Rodzkin, 2005). The higher educational establishments which specialise in tourism are the <u>Belarusian State Economic University</u> (the fields of specialisation are management in tourism, tourism business, preparation of guides and guides-interpreters), the <u>Academy of Physical Culture and Sport</u> (hotel management, accommodation business), and the <u>Higher School of Tourism</u> at the Geography Faculty of the Belarusian State University (preparation of guides, tourism management). It is noteworthy to mention that there are no institutions specialising in ecotourism or other types of sustainable tourism in the country. However, the <u>Minsk State Ecological University</u> is considering the possibility for introducing a new speciality with a particular focus on ecotourism (Rodzkin, 2005).

Apart from the higher educational establishments which deal with tourism as one of the important areas of their specialisation, there are a few more entities in Belarus which focus on preparing tourism professionals and researching the different issues within the scope of this branch of the economy. These are the <u>Association of Guides and Guides-Interpreters</u> and the <u>Center for Preparation of Tourism Specialists</u> at the National Agency for Tourism, which make an accent on teaching, preparing and raising skills of the tourism professionals, as well as the <u>National Academy of Sciences</u>, which work on a number of projects related to tourism industry and its impact on the environment in Belarus.

5.4.6. Media

The representatives of mass-media in Belarus are almost totally dependent on the government. There are only a few independent editions in the country, namely newspapers. As a matter of fact, in most cases media expresses the official will of the authorities and solidarity with them. When it comes to tourism, there is a special group of journalists dealing with tourism activities who are the members of the <u>Guild of Journalists Writing about Tourism</u>. They represent a number of newspapers and magazines either completely specialized in tourism or having particular sections devoted to this topic.

There are 2 major editions focusing on tourism issues in Belarus – "Туризм и Отдых" (<u>Tourism and Recreation</u>) and "Отдых и путешествия. Новости белорусского туризма" (<u>Recreation and Traveling. The News of the Belarusian Tourism</u>). These newspapers have been founded by a few tour operators in collaboration with the different structural bodies of the Ministry of Sport and Tourism. There are 2 state-owned publishing houses in the country – <u>"РИФТУР"</u> and <u>"Туринфо"</u> fulfilling exceptionally tourism tasks (e.g. print of above two newspapers, preparation of the different tourism information materials, brochures, guides, catalogues, booklets, etc.).

5.5. Ecolabel and the Belarusian tourism

The research has discovered the fact that there is an intention to set up a tourism ecolabel in Belarus which is going to be introduced in the field of rural tourism i.e. for pensions and farms. The idea of ecolabelling came to the country from Latvia and, partly, from Lithuania. The "Association of Agro- and Ecotourism" has close contacts with the promoters of certification programmes in those states. Inspired by the successfully developed scheme in Latvia (Green Certificate), the Belarusian practitioners in the field of rural tourism decided to realize a similar project in the republic (Klitsunova, 2005).

Another important driving force for the idea of an ecolabel became the membership of Belarus in ECEAT which supports certification initiatives in agrotourism. Having participated in a few workshops and seminars devoted to this issue, the "Association of Agro- and Ecotourism" received some useful knowledge about the possibilities of financing a scheme and its marketing abroad if it comes into being in the country (Klitsunova, 2005).

The meeting with the representatives of VISIT with a discussion of the benefits of ecolabelling during one of the workshops on sustainable tourism in Europe organized by the members of ECEAT has also added some confidence and strengthened the intentions of the Belarusian practitioners (Klitsunova, 2005).

Preliminary market surveys have indicated that there is an interest in an ecolabel expressed by the representatives of rural tourism in Belarus. They believe to be capable to comply with the criteria of a certification scheme due to a relatively high environmental performance of rural tourism facilities in the country and a successful fulfillment of the stringent standards accounting environmental issues which they had to have met in order to join an industry association. However, they do not see significant advantages in getting certified because of a poor environmental awareness of Belarusian tourists and a small number of foreigners who could potentially raise a demand for the labeled products and services in the country. Nevertheless, they are ready to participate in an ecolabelling initiative because it does not require any extraordinary resources and efforts to spend on and may concurrently serve as an additional bonus for their marketing and promotion (Klitsunova, 2005).

The representatives of other tourism businesses in Belarus have expressed a poor interest in a certification scheme. Although they appreciate a considerable impact of tourism activities on the environment and the necessity to address this problem in the country, an ecolabel is not seen as a market advantage and promotion tool due to a low demand for the certified products and services from tourists. According to them, the Belarusian consumers of tourism activities will hardly buy the labeled products and services due to the reason mentioned above and the number of foreigners coming to the country is insignificant to pay them attention to as a target consumer of the certified tourism activities (Makarevich, 2005).

Sociological surveys among Belarusian tourists have not shown an interest in an ecolabel due to their poor awareness about environmental impacts of tourism in the country. The absence of a permanent flow of foreign tourists and a low popularity of internal tourism products and services among Belarusians is another reason for an insignificant interest in a tourism ecolabel. As a result, according to the surveys, Belarusian tourists are not prone to buy certified products and services and thus support an initiative. However, with the intention of the government to facilitate the development of inbound and internal tourism in the country, the situation can be changed in the future (Ramanouski, 2005).

Today, the perspectives of an ecolabel in Belarus are as follows (Klitsunova, 2005): the preliminary plan of actions, describing the target category of tourism businesses, prescribing

measures to be undertaken and setting the approximate dates of the project implementation, has been prepared by the members of the "Association of Agro- and Ecotourism" consulted by the representatives of The Green Certificate (Latvia). There is an intention to build a tourism ecolabel in Belarus on the basis of the criteria and requirements borrowed from the Green Certificate and VISIT. It is also planned to join the VISIT initiative upon completion of a project in order to get a better recognition of a scheme and approach common European standards.

When it comes to financing a scheme, preliminary funding in the amount of 25 879 USD has been applied for and received from the Eurasia foundation (Eurasia Foundation, 2005). Now it is pending an approval from the state department for registration of funds received from abroad. There are further plans to get additional financing from other foreign sponsors, namely ECEAT, UNDP and EU programmes working with tourism projects (e.g. EU LIFE III), and from the Belarusian authorities. The basic negotiations with the officials have been conducted and resulted in the readiness of the government to support the initiative expressed by the National Agency for Tourism. It is planned to get the Ministry of the Environment involved; however, by now no steps have been made to realize this plan (Klitsunova, 2005).

By the moment of beginning the interviews with other stakeholders in the field of tourism industry in Belarus, there was no intention to start up an ecolabelling initiative in the country as soon as possible. According to the "Association of Agro- and Ecotourism", due to a long and complicated procedure of the approval of preliminary financing (which has been pending for already 4 months), the implicit situation with a level of the governmental involvement and roles which it would be ready to play, the absence of sufficient labor resources as well as a lack of comprehensive knowledge on how to develop a scheme, a project will hardly be launched earlier than in the beginning of the next year (Klitsunova, 2005).

According to the matrix (table 4-1) presented in chapter 4.1 that describes the major roles of the ecolabel's stakeholders in the process of developing a scheme, the lead of an initiative in Belarus is taken by an industry association. Although it combines the functions with tourism NGO, it will be regarded that a tourism ecolabel in Belarus is initiated by the industry association. The roles of other stakeholders should be then allocated as follows: government and public authorities – provision of funding, NGOs – building credibility, academia – knowledge support, tourists and tourist associations – participation in discussion on an ecolabel, media – assistance with marketing. Taking this framework into account, the capabilities of the Belarusian tourism stakeholders will be analyzed in the next chapter to assess their sufficiency/insufficiency to play the necessary roles in order to successfully develop a certification scheme in the country.

6. Capabilities of tourism stakeholders to address factors of success for a tourism ecolabel in Belarus

In order to achieve the best outcome upon completion of an ecolabelling project, it is necessary to understand the factors which determine its success. If this is done properly, it may help to anticipate and prevent the emergence of difficulties in running of a certification scheme in the future. Only upon the condition of the fulfillment of the factors of success, an ecolabel has high chances to prosper.

The effective fulfilment of the ecolabel's factors of success is closely related to the issue of its stakeholders' involvement into the development of a certification scheme. In order to ensure that the factors are fulfilled, the capabilities of stakeholders in their addressing should be identified. If the capabilities match the factors of success i.e. contribute into their fulfilment, an ecolabelling initiative has higher chances to get successfully realized; if not, it may create problems later on. Therefore it is important to study if the matching between available capabilities of stakeholders and factors of success exists. It may help to make an optimal allocation of the roles of stakeholders which they are capable to play in the fulfilment of the ecolabel's factors of success.

The literature review and interviews with the professionals in the field of tourism ecolabelling have discovered the fact that there are five factors determining success of tourism certification initiatives, namely:

- Stakeholders' involvement, cooperation and trust;

- Availability of comprehensive knowledge on how to develop a tourism ecolabel;

- Credibility and transparency of a scheme;

- Continual funding and diversification of its sources;

- Effective marketing and promotion of an ecolabelling initiative.

All these factors are closely related to one another: the ignorance of a proper fulfilment of one of them may lead to a failure in attending the others; moreover, there are two factors – credibility and funding – the improper fulfilment of which may endanger the entire destiny of a certification programme and lead to its collapse. However, there are always some capabilities existent which can be used in order to fulfil the factors and, thereby, contribute into a success of a certification scheme. These capabilities are in the possession of different ecolabel's stakeholders who should be ready to clearly identify and stipulate which of these capabilities they are able and willing to provide.

Since the research identified that there is an intention to set up a tourism ecolabel in Belarus, it is important to find out how high are the chances for such an initiative to come into being there. This can be done by identifying the stakeholders' capabilities and the ecolabel's factors of success which these capabilities can match as well as by defining the particular roles which stakeholders are able and willing to play in order to fulfil these factors for a Belarusian ecolabel. The latter task can be performed by using the "ideal" conditions described in chapter 4 (based on the analysis of the existent literature sources on this topic and experience of practitioners in the field of tourism certification) as a mandatory framework or a check-list for such a gap analysis.

In other words, for a successful implementation of a particular ecolabelling project it is essential to evaluate what capabilities stakeholders possess to adequately address a particular factor of success. A capability is understood within the scopes of this study as a the potential of a stakeholder to perform an activity or take a decision over the process of setting up and running an ecolabel based on the resources made available for this task. Therefore, looking at the resources that could be dedicated by stakeholders to develop a certification scheme, capabilities and potential for future actions are detected. The evaluation of capabilities is made on the basis of the framework presented in Table 6-1.

6.1. What capabilities do stakeholders of tourism industry in Belarus have in order to fulfil the ecolabel's factors of success?

- Government and public authorities (including the Ministries of the Environment, Tourism, Agriculture, tourism boards and municipalities of different levels, national standardization offices, etc.);

Table 6-1   Basic framework for evaluation of the stakeholders' capabilities to fulfil the factors of success

Factor	Evaluation is based on
Stakeholder's participation and cooperation	Number of tourism actors willing to join an initiative
Knowledge	Presence of study courses and materials on environmental labeling
Credibility, transparency, trust	Positive reputation of particular actors and projects; availability of information on the progress of a project; reporting on performance; willingness of stakeholders to believe each other
Funding	Amount of money or availability of funds allocated to finance tourism and environmental protection projects
Marketing	Existent marketing experience and availability of instruments to market

The government and public authorities in Belarus possess substantial volume of resources needed to set up and run a certification programme. Although their particular structural branches may be limited in specific types of capabilities, in general this stakeholder is able to provide an ecolabel with some necessities for its successful development.

In addition to the fact, that the Belarusian government is willing to get involved into a certification programme and lays down its involvement as a mandatory condition of the development of such a project in the country (Klitsunova, 2005), its basic and most evident capability lies in the **potential to raise the other stakeholders' interest and facilitate their participation** into an ecolabelling scheme. Due to the fact that the government in Belarus plays an extremely important role in almost all the sectors of its economy, including tourism, it has got a certain experience on how to efficiently impact the other stakeholders' behaviour in order to make them work in the desired way. Usually, this is done not only by means of direct contacts and negotiations but, mostly, with the help of indirect measures, namely though the additional economic and political preferences given to the particular stakeholders which comply with the officials' demands. For example, those tour operators which agreed to come through a mandatory certification procedure by the end of 2005 are exempted from the extensive reporting on their financial performance whereas all the rest undergo additional revisions and audits (Makarevich, 2005).

Another reason explaining the capability of the Belarusian government to contribute into the stakeholders' participation is hidden in the fact that there are a few actors in the field of tourism industry in the country (apart from the public authorities of different levels, national agency for tourism and the institute of standardization and certification) which are to a variable extent dependent on it. These are the sources of mass-media, some pro-governmental NGOs and most of the educational institutions. These parties, if needed, can be asked and even forced by the government to participate in a certification project as a result of their dependency and strict obedience. For instance, the state-owned sources of media are regularly used for reporting on the progress of a new licensing scheme and certification procedure; some educational institutions specialising in tourism are fulfilling special tasks appointed by the authorities e.g. the preparation of the qualified hotel staff or guides with knowledge of different foreign languages (Rodzkin, 2005).

Another area where the capability of the government is exclusive in Belarus when it comes to the stakeholders' involvement is related to verification. The state-owned Institute for Standardisation and Certification is the only entity in the country commissioned to conduct audits of tourism businesses i.e. hotels and tour-operators (Bokut, 2005). If an ecolabel is to be introduced, its verification procedures will be held by the specialists of this institute; it has to be mentioned, however, that the participation of this actor in a certification programme is possible only upon the condition of the governmental interest and approval (Klitsunova, 2005)

Despite all mentioned above, there are a few points which may considerably endanger a positive contribution of the Belarusian government into the process of the stakeholders' involvement into a certification programme. All of them come out of the unusual powerfulness of the state in Belarus and its excessive self-confidence. The most critical issue lies in the fact that since recently the Belarusian government has got used to simply dictate its will to different players in the field of tourism in the country often ignoring a constructive dialogue and possibility for discussion with them. The best example is the introduction of a new licensing scheme and certification procedures which have been greatly opposed by tourism businesses due to their mandatory nature and the unwillingness of the government to listen to their opinion. Taking into account the fact that certification was initially prepared as a voluntary but was gradually transformed into a mandatory project there is a danger that the same destiny may befall an ecolabelling initiative. Since the foremost reason for converting certification into a compulsory procedure was determined by a low participation rate of tourism businesses which were not willing to get certified due to a poor familiarity with its goals and advantages as well as because of the limited financial resources required to get certified, it can be assumed that in the case of a low application rate for an ecolabel the government may simply decide to make it mandatory. In other words, the authorities often do not consider the importance of other actors of a particular project in Belarus and ignore their attraction; they are self-confident and often claim that are able to run any initiative on their own (Rodzkin, 2005). This problem may not only endanger the effectiveness of the stakeholders' involvement into an ecolabelling programme in Belarus, but it may completely fail in fulfilling this factor of success at all. Since the government often neglects other parties and consider itself capable enough to develop any project independently, it may decide to ignore those stakeholders which, according to them, cannot contribute into an initiative (e.g. tourist associations, environmental NGOs, etc.).

The problem described above is closely linked to the specificity and complexity of the relationships between the Belarusian authorities and NGOs. It has to be mentioned that the government has certain hostility in respect of the latter stakeholder believing that NGOs may help the opposition to deliver foreign money allocated to fight against the current political

regime in the country. Although the authorities repeatedly declared their readiness to cooperate with the representatives of NGOs, this rarely happens. The situation is better on the regional and local levels where the process of making contacts is easier and the need for a close reciprocal cooperation between the officials and NGOs is stronger. It is noteworthy to say that there are a few NGOs in Belarus which have recommended themselves as loyal in relation to the authorities (including those five which are in the management structure of tourism in the country). These entities are in favor of the government and may count on its support, assistance and preferences whereas all the rest are in a much less advantageous position (Pahomenko, 2005).

Thus, the capability of the Belarusian government to address the factor of the stakeholders' involvement is rather essential; however, accounting the existent experience of the government in this field as known from the interviews and sources of mass-media, this capability is of a controversial nature. It should be mentioned that the negative sides of this issue outweigh the positive effect of the government's contribution. Therefore it is hardly possible to consider that this factor of success can be properly addressed by the Belarusian authorities.

Money is a capability which the Belarusian government seems to possess. Since recently tourism has been regarded by the officials as a priority direction of the state policy which should be paid a special attention to; as a matter of fact, 90 billions Belarusian roubles for 5 years (approximately 42 millions USD) have been allocated from the state budget to develop various tourism activities in Belarus. Although a part of these resources can be given to sport (i.e. for the construction and renovation of different sport facilities) which is considered as a complementary activity to tourism and often favoured by the particular members of the government even to a higher extent than tourism, this amount of financing is quite significant for Belarus and can be applied to fund those projects which aim to attract foreign tourists and promote Belarus abroad (Belarusian Newspaper, 2005).

Moreover, the environmental issues have always been a priority in the country. As a matter of fact, considerable funds are annually concentrated to carry out the projects connected with the environmental protection in Belarus. Although tourism is often not regarded by the authorities as an activity fraught with negative impact on the environment, the situation is gradually changing. In addition, the Ministry of the Environment commissioned to perform the environmental projects in the country is prone to support the initiatives dealing with tourism. As a result, it seems to be possible to get financing from the funds allocated to the environmental issues for an ecolabelling initiative (Klitsunova, 2005).

However, there is a big problem indirectly related to this capability of the Belarusian government. Although it can provide a scheme with funding, it is too suspicious in respect of the foreign financing as a result of its strong belief that money given from abroad can be used to finance Belarusian opposition. As a result of this suspicion, it can be quite difficult for initiators of a certification programme to get money from foreign donors to finance some of the initiatives within the scope of an ecolabelling project. Usually it takes the government up to half a year to check the character of financing and grant its approval. Such a situation may considerably endanger the capability of an administrative body to regularly obtain funding from abroad that is regarded as an important source of the ecolabel's financing (Klitsunova, 2005).

To sum up, the capability of the government to address the ecolabel's factor of success related to funding is quite significant. It can provide a certification scheme with continual financing from the state budget due to the availability of resources and compliance of an ecolabelling

initiative with the goals of the state tourism policy e.g. to develop rural tourism and facilitate the involvement of foreign tourists in the country. However, the problem of foreign funding may considerably diminish the value of this capability of the government. Only upon the condition if an ecolabel is totally subsidized by the authorities, this capability may be considered to be fully addressed by them in Belarus.

Another capability of the Belarusian government which can be provided by this stakeholder lies in the field of **marketing**. It has had a positive experience of organizing dissemination campaigns among particular target groups of the population and businesses. The authorities actively use television and street billboards which are provided for free or at lower rent rates to perform such projects; moreover, it often motivates tour operators to publish the reports and booklets about particular initiatives carried out by them and disseminate this information among customers (Pahomenko, 2005). Since there is a strong need to raise the tourists and business awareness of an ecolabel in Belarus, this experience can be rather useful. Besides this, the government owns most of the sources of Belarusian mass-media; among others it controls all those ones which specialise in tourism. As a matter of fact, it may easily influence them or provide with an incentive to get involved into the conduction of marketing and promotion campaigns for an ecolabel. The government can also be involved into publishing and distribution of the printed materials about a certification programme since most of the printing offices in Belarus belong to the state or may give its promoter some preferences when the need to publish occurs. Although some stakeholders argue about the effectiveness of the governmental promotion campaigns as a result of the absence of a good marketing strategy in their conduction and irregular nature of such initiatives (Klitsunova, 2005), the capability of the Belarusian authorities to make a contribution into addressing the factor of success connected with marketing and promotion is high.

The capability of the government to provide an ecolabelling initiative with adequate **knowledge** support is rather limited. There is no knowledge about an ecolabel in the country among the representatives of different groups of the authorities. However, the officials can help with the so-called initial information collection (country-specific knowledge) required to justify the need for a certification programme in Belarus and provide it with some relevant preliminary data on the targeted market and businesses. The knowledge on how to conduct marketing campaigns and what sources of media use can also be provided by the authorities as a result of their experience in these issues.

The issue of **credibility** can be addressed by the Belarusian government in the least effective way. Except its capability to stimulate (or force) the participation of the interested parties in a certification programme, it cannot guarantee their cooperation and is not capable to build trust between tourism stakeholders. Moreover, the government is often not trusted due to the recent initiatives aiming to change a licensing scheme and certification procedures without consultations with the industry representatives that had caused a negative feedback. Thus, after that the government and its participation in an ecolabel can be inadequately perceived by different players in the field of an ecolabelling initiative.

Another issue which diminishes the capability of the Belarusian authorities to contribute into credibility of a certification scheme is connected with the state-owned Institute for Standardisation and Certification which will likely be commissioned to conduct auditing of the applicants. Since it belongs to the government and is not obliged to report on its performance anybody except them, it can hardly increase credibility and transparency of an initiative.

In addition to that, most of the stakeholders do not believe that the Belarusian government is capable to guarantee transparency of a scheme. As a rule, it strives to totally control any

initiative and does not consider it necessary to justify its decisions and report on the activities made; the government seems to be self-confident in its capability to maintain the transparency of any project without anyone else's help. Nevertheless, there are some opinions claiming that authorities cannot provide credibility, transparency and trust of a certification programme without the involvement of other players into a project (Babiy, 2005; Pahomenko, 2005; Ramanouski, 2005).

To sum up, it has to be said that the situation with the capability of the Belarusian government to address the factors of the scheme's success is quite controversial. On the one hand, it seems to be capable to productively contribute into the fulfilment of those factors related to funding provision and marketing campaigns; however, these capabilities, especially the former one, are endangered by a number of obstacles which have been discovered from the history of the development of other projects with the governmental involvement in the country. The capability of the government to address the factors of the stakeholder's participation and cooperation and knowledge provision are rather limited and cannot be considered to have high chances to be properly fulfilled. Credibility as a key factor for success of an ecolabel cannot be addressed by the authorities at all as a result of distrust in the government existent among other Belarusian tourism stakeholders.

The matrix presented in chapter 4.2 prescribes the government a role of a funding provider if an initiative is promoted by the industry association. The research discovered that in Belarus this role can be played by the authorities; however, their capabilities to address this factor for success properly are limited and should be improved.

To finalise, the capabilities of the Belarusian government in addressing factors of the ecolabel's success can be considered to be sufficient only when it comes to marketing and, with some limitations, funding provision. All the rest success factors of a tourism certification scheme can not be properly fulfilled by the authorities in Belarus.

- Industry and industry associations, trade-unions;

The research discovered that tourism businesses in Belarus are characterized by a very limited number of capabilities which can be provided by them in relation to an ecolabelling scheme if compared to the "ideal" conditions as known from the already implemented certification projects.

One of the few factors of success which tourism businesses in Belarus seem to be capable to address is related to the **stakeholder's participation and cooperation** issues. The industry associations are willing to get involved into the development of an ecolabelling initiative, namely in discussion and consultation procedures (Makouski, 2005). They can also be helpful in facilitating the business participation, particularly when it comes to the members of these professional unions. However, it is quite difficult to say if the businesses participate in a certification project even if the industry associations ask them to do so. Most of the representatives of Belarusian tourism do not have sufficient financial and labour resources to guarantee even this type of involvement since these are mostly small enterprises with extremely limited resources. It is noteworthy to mention that there are a few big tour operators in Belarus which strive to follow modern trends in the world tourism industry and maintain their image as advanced tour providers. These businesses possess sufficient resources to participate in the development of an ecolabelling initiative (Makarevich, 2005).

Another issue which should be mentioned is related to the fact that tourism businesses and business associations in Belarus cannot fully guarantee a successful cooperation and trust

along the process of setting up and running an ecolabel because some of them have rather tough relations with one another as a result of their permanent competition. Nevertheless, there are a few examples of a positive cooperation between different industry representatives and other stakeholders, namely the government and NGOs, especially on the regional and local levels (Babiy, 2005), Pahomenko, 2005).

Thus, the capability of the industry in the fulfilment of the ecolabel's success factor of the stakeholders' participation and cooperation is quite high. Although most of the tourism businesses in Belarus claim to not have sufficient resources to get involved, the positive reputation of associations among their members may help to facilitate this process.

The tourism businesses are capable to provide an ecolabelling initiative with **marketing** support. This can be done by distributing information about a certification scheme and its benefits through the industry's professional networks and promotion events, namely fairs and exhibitions. The industry associations have a particular capability to contribute into the dissemination of information since they regularly publish newsletters and have an influence on the sources of mass-media specialising in tourism activities. Apart from this, they have an agreement with publishing offices that enables them to publish marketing materials at reduced costs (Makouski, 2005).

To sum up, the tourism industry in Belarus is capable to adequately address the factor of marketing of an ecolabel. Taking into account the fact that the previous marketing and promotion events organized by the industry associations for their members have been of success, there are good chances for this issue to be fulfilled in the case of a tourism certification scheme.

It is difficult to say if the representatives of the Belarusian tourism industry are capable to increase **credibility** of an ecolabel and contribute into its transparency. Although the "ideal" conditions claim that tourism businesses may fulfil this task, the Belarusian realities may diminish the value of this contribution. The foremost reason for this lies in the fact that some tourism businesses often do not trust each other and are sometimes not trusted by other stakeholders as a result of their fraudulent behavior in the past. However, the leading representatives of tourism industry in Belarus are held in respect with one another and other players of this branch of economy; accounting the fact that they are the most potential participants of the process of the development of an initiative, it is possible to state that they will be capable to contribute into building its credibility and trust (Makarevich, 2005).

Knowledge is the field where the industry's capability to contribute into an ecolabel is low. There is no knowledge about certification programmes in tourism; moreover, there is no knowledge about how to get this knowledge. However, the businesses may be capable to provide an ecolabelling project with marketing and managerial knowledge as a result of their extensive experience of working with these issues (Makarevich, 2005).

Money is another issue where the capability of the Belarusian tourism businesses is low. It is hardly possible that industry representatives will provide an ecolabel with adequate funding due to their limited resources. Nevertheless, the industry associations may potentially contribute into financing a certification scheme using their membership funds upon agreement with the majority of their members. However, this financing is extremely limited and can be applied only for funding of those tasks which do not require much money and can concurrently be of interest to the providers of this financing (e.g. sociological or market surveys among tourists); therefore it should not be relied upon along the process of setting up and running an ecolabel.

To conclude, the representatives of tourism industry in Belarus have limited capabilities to contribute into the issues related to financing of an ecolabelling initiative and its knowledge provision. The situation is better with those factors of success for a certification scheme which deal with credibility building, and, particularly, with marketing and facilitation of the stakeholders' participation; however, even these capabilities cannot be considered to be full if compared to the "ideal" conditions.

In fact, the representatives of tourism industry in Belarus may effectively address only two factors of the ecolabel's success – marketing and stakeholders' involvement. Accounting the fact that industry plays a role of a promoter of a certification scheme in the country, the presence of these capabilities is of a particular importance for this stakeholder and an ecolabelling project.

- Tourism and environmental NGOs;

Belarusian tourism and environmental NGOs is a stakeholder which seems to be capable to address almost all the factors of success for an ecolabel in Belarus as attributed to it from the "ideal" conditions; from this point of view, NGOs is the only stakeholder in the Belarusian tourism which has claimed its capability to fulfil most of the tasks allocated to it.

Credibility building is one of the capabilities which Belarusian NGOs have claimed to possess. Like in most countries all over the world, Belarusian NGOs are believed by other stakeholders to play an important role in raising the trustworthiness and reliability of a particular initiative. According to many practitioners, they have an image of custodians whose involvement guarantees transparency of a project and may increase trust between its stakeholders (Makarevich, 2005), (Makouski, 2005), Pahomenko, 2005). The fact that the most effective professional entity in the field of tourism in Belarus whose members trust it and believe each other ("The Association of Agro- and Ecotourism") is based on NGO (combing functions with an industry association) may indirectly prove this statement.

However, this important capability of Belarusian NGOs may be considerably diminished by one factor. It is connected with a confronting nature of the relationships between different NGOs in the country, particularly with those working in the same areas of interest e.g. tourism or environmental protection. As it has been mentioned before, the Belarusian NGOs are prone to compete with one another rather than strive to cooperate in order to achieve reciprocally favourable outcome. It is determined by the willingness to occupy a leading position in a specific field and receive most of the preferences from other stakeholders (e.g. funding). The critical fact which may endanger the capability of NGOs to contribute into credibility and transparency building of an ecolabelling programme is hidden in unwillingness of promoters of a certification programme in Belarus (i.e. "Association of Agro- and Ecotourism") to attract other NGOs into a project. They believe to be able to develop an initiative on their own and claimed that would not need any other NGO's assistance (Klitsunova, 2005). Such a decision to avoid the involvement of other NGOs into a scheme may raise some questions from stakeholders (who in most cases believe that involvement of NGOs raises transparency of a project) and thereby endanger credibility of a scheme. It should also be mentioned that ignorance of other NGOs may substantially diminish the value of other types of capabilities which this stakeholder possesses. Taking into account the fact that these capabilities are rather significant, their diminishing may be painful to an ecolabelling initiative.

Knowledge is another issue which Belarusian tourism and environmental NGOs are capable to address. Although it is doubtful if they can provide a certification scheme with

comprehensive information on what an ecolabel is and how it should be developed, NGOs can be helpful in collecting some country-specific knowledge needed at the initial stages of an initiative (e.g. market studies, scoping the targeted sector of tourism, etc.). The significant contribution can also be made in the field of managerial knowledge provision as a result of the previous experience of NGOs which might have accomplished the projects required the administrative structure similar to the one used for an ecolabelling organization and, further, for an awarding body. Negotiation skills and knowledge on financial implications can also be provided by NGOs which must have succeeded in such practices before. The knowledge on the sources of funding that could be used to finance an ecolabelling initiative or its particular activities can be of a special importance in this category.

Belarusian NGOs have claimed to have a capability to help **marketing** a certification scheme. Most of them have obtained a positive experience in organising various promotion and educational campaigns aimed to raise the environmental awareness of people. Although there is no enough experience on how to market a particular product or service among the industry representatives, NGOs could be involved into the process of educating tourists and raising their awareness on the labelled products and services.

Belarusian NGOs are ready to participate in the process of developing a certification programme (namely in discussions and consultations on criteria, appointment of the members of the awarding body) and have claimed for their capability to facilitate the other **stakeholders' participation and cooperation** into a project. This can be done due to the already existent experience obtained through the fulfilment of various projects required the involvement of and contacts with authorities, industry representatives and academia. This contribution can be especially strong on the regional and local levels where the relationships between most of the tourism stakeholders are stronger. Some NGOs have agreements with different players in the field of tourism industry which stipulate what type of assistance can be expected from them (Babiy, 2005), (Pahomenko, 2005).

Nevertheless, the value of this capability can be questioned by the complexity of the relationships between the Belarusian authorities and NGOs. Since the government often does not trust NGOs and feel hostility in respect of them, it may be arguable if the latter actor can successfully involve the representatives of authorities into a project. According to the representatives of NGOs in Belarus, they cannot effectively influence the governmental support of an initiative (Pahomenko, 2005). Apart from those associations whose members have good contacts with the government, it is difficult to lobby their interests on the highest level. The officials are not considering NGOs as a strategic partner of any initiative; they are often suspicious to their activities and, particularly, to their sources of funding (Klitsunova, 2005).

Another questionable issue is related to the attitude of NGOs in Belarus to one another. Since in most cases they are not willing to cooperate, it may become a crucial issue diminishing the value of this capability.

Funding of an ecolabelling initiative seems to be the issue which Belarusian tourism and environmental NGOs are not capable to properly address. They possess a very limited budget which can not be allocated to finance such resources-consuming initiatives as a tourism ecolabel. Although NGOs could potentially be capable to provide a certification programme in Belarus with external financing obtained from the own sources (different from those financing promoters of a scheme) or contribute with the relevant knowledge where this financing can be received from, this capability is considerably endangered by the government's overall suspicion in respect of Belarusian NGOs especially those financed from abroad and by

the complexity of the bureaucratic procedures that received money should come through before giving to NGOs. Although there is a chance that such a situation will be changed in the future, this is not enough to name this capability as crucial to properly address the funding need of an ecolabelling initiative at the moment.

Thus, Belarusian tourism and environmental NGOs to a variable extent are capable to address almost all of the factors of success for a certification project. However, the effectiveness of their contribution is considerably endangered by the confronting nature of their relationships with the government and one another. The most critical situation is connected with the capability of NGOs to build credibility of an ecolabelling initiative – the foremost contribution allocated to NGOs in the "ideal" conditions and the role which it should be ready to play accounting the situation prescribed by the matrix presented in chapter 4.2. Despite the overall belief in their ability to address this problem existent among tourism stakeholders in Belarus, the conflicts between NGOs and the unwillingness of promoters of a certification scheme to attract them into a project may stultify this important capability of the Belarusian NGOs.

- Tourists and tourist associations;

This category of Belarusian stakeholders in the field of tourism ecolabelling can hardly fulfil any tasks allocated to them since their capabilities to do this are extremely low. Due to the fact that there are no specialized tourist associations in the country and, as a matter of fact, there is no coordination body between ordinary tourists which could enable their participation in lobbing particular interests, it is doubtful to expect any effective contribution of this stakeholder into the development of a certification programme.

Another problem which should be mentioned here is hidden in the fact that most Belarusian tourists do not regard tourism as an industry with significant impact on the environment; moreover, the overwhelming majority of them prefer outbound tourism services to inbound ones with a poor interest into the development of internal tourism activities in the country. As a result of all mentioned above, tourists are not capable to provide an ecolabel with any of the contribution needed. Ideally, the most active of them can be involved into the process of discussing the particularities of functioning of a scheme; however, this capability does not seem to be realistic if the modern state-of-the-art remains.

- Educational and research institutions, academia;

The representatives of Belarusian academia are most of all capable to contribute into the fulfilment of the ecolabel's factor of success related to **knowledge and information provision**. There are a few educational institutions in the country specialising in tourism whose members have claimed to possess considerable knowledge on its different aspects including the one associated with ecolabelling. It has to be mentioned that the representatives of this stakeholder appeared to be the only people familiar with the concept of tourism certification in Belarus apart from promoters of an ecolabelling project. The academia is particularly capable to provide an ecolabelling initiative with general (background) and country-specific knowledge; however, its capability to obtain other types of knowledge (administrative, marketing, etc.) is rather limited due to its incompliance with the specialisation of this stakeholder (Ramanouski, 2005), (Rodzkin, 2005).

Educational and research institutions can increase **credibility** of an ecolabelling project due to the fact they were regarded as reliable actors in the projects accomplished before (Babiy, 2005), (Pahomenko, 2005). Moreover, they may help to create a special image for an ecolabel

as a scientifically-justified programme the details of implementation of which has been properly discussed and whose costs and benefits have been thoroughly evaluated. It is noteworthy to mention that in many cases the representatives of academia are trusted to a higher extent than the government which they are officially dependent upon. Such a situation is explained by the fact that the members of academia often do not support the authorities although they cannot discover this fact to public. However, unofficially this fact is well-known and other stakeholders prefer to deal with the educational institutions rather than with the officials trusting its honesty and positive reputation (Makarevich, 2005).

Belarusian academia is ready and willing to get involved into the development of a tourism certification programme in Belarus (Ramanouski, 2005), (Rodzkin, 2005) particularly at the stages of criteria selection, manuals writing and appointment of the members of a verification team and an awarding body. Although their capability to attract attention to an ecolabelling initiative from other stakeholders is rather low, they can try to facilitate the **involvement of some other stakeholders**, namely NGOs and educational establishments, as a result of the professional and scientific contacts made.

Marketing is not an issue which the representatives of Belarusian academia are capable to properly address. However, they can indirectly participate in the dissemination campaigns on a tourism certification scheme through the organization of conferences, seminars and forums open to public and other stakeholders devoted to the problems of sustainable tourism and its interrelationships with the environmental issues. Such events may not only increase the recognition of an ecolabel in the country and build higher awareness of such a project among public but also maintain some useful contacts with interested parties from abroad.

Funding seems to be the only factor for success into the fulfilment of which academia has no capability to contribute. The budgets of the educational and research institutions in Belarus are extremely limited; however, what this stakeholder can do is to apply for external funding which can be allocated to perform certain tasks within the scope of an ecolabel, thus reducing the costs for the initiators of this project. The monetary funds saved can further be relocated to finance other actions along the process of setting up and running a certification programme.

To sum up, the capabilities of the academia representatives in Belarus are rather high if compared to the "ideal" conditions of an ecolabel development. It seems to be a key stakeholder when it comes to the comprehensive knowledge support of a certification initiative i.e. it may play the role allocated to it if the industry association becomes a promoter of an ecolabelling initiative. Apart from this, together with tourism and environmental NGOs academia is capable to raise credibility of a scheme and create its scientifically-based image and positive reputation.

- Sources of mass-media, journalists;

Belarusian media are capable to fulfil their major task – participate in **marketing** and dissemination campaigns. However, their readiness and willingness to contribute into a certification programme is totally dependent on the government which is an exclusive owner of almost all the sources of mass-media in the country. If the government is willing to get involved into an ecolabelling scheme, it may simultaneously facilitate more effective participation of this stakeholder. All the rest needs associated with an ecolabel in Belarus cannot be addressed by media because of the specificity of their profession.

The big problem which arises here is linked to a high dependence of Belarusian media on the authorities. If the latter stakeholder refuses to support a certification programme, it will hardly be possible to attract attention of media to a project.

To sum up, the situation with tourism stakeholders and their capabilities to address the ecolabel's factors of success is quite controversial. There are two players – tourist and environmental NGOs and the representatives of academia, which have claimed their capability to fulfil most of the tasks allocated to them as known from the "ideal" conditions (Table 6-1, marked in bold those capabilities which can be most realistically utilised for an ecolabel by a particular stakeholder in order to play roles for matching its factors of success; all the rest capabilities are presented in the order of decreasing a probability of their success).

Table 6-2   Stakeholders of a tourism ecolabel in Belarus and their capabilities to fulfil its factors of success

Stakeholders	Contribution
Government and public authorities	1. **Funding or subsidizing (through tourism and environmental funds);** 2. **Marketing (use state-owned media, printing brochures, postcards, etc.);** 3. Stakeholders' participation and cooperation (encourage other stakeholders to get involved); 4. Knowledge (country-specific); 5. Credibility, transparency, trust;
Industry and industry associations	1. **Marketing (through professional networks);** 2. **Stakeholders' participation and cooperation (mainly businesses);** 3. Credibility, transparency, trust; 4. Knowledge (managerial, marketing); 5. Funding (for specific tasks);
Tourist and environmental NGOs	1. **Knowledge (country-specific, managerial);** 2. **Credibility, transparency, trust;** 3. Marketing (managerial, negotiation skills); 4. Stakeholders' participation and cooperation; 5. Funding;
Academia	1. **Knowledge (background, country-specific);** 2. **Credibility, transparency, trust;** 3. Stakeholders' participation and cooperation; 4. Marketing; 5. Funding;
Media	1. **Marketing;**

The former of these stakeholders used to play a key role into the development of many certification programmes worldwide and it is good to know that in Belarus it is also ready to fulfil some of the ecolabel's factors of success.

The educational institutions have also expressed their capability to perform those tasks allocated to them and seem to have sufficient resources to make their claims true. However, the problems related to the Belarusian NGOs may arise over the process of developing a certification scheme due to the existent conflicts between them. This can considerably diminish the value of the contribution which this stakeholder may make into an ecolabel, especially when it comes to the issues of the stakeholders' cooperation and credibility building.

The worse situation is in the case of the industry and industry associations whose role in the process of setting up and running a tourism ecolabelling scheme in Belarus is far away from the "ideal'. Although it is a significant disadvantage that may negatively affect the outcome of the project, the situation can be changed if other stakeholders undertake urgent measures to attract attention and facilitate productive involvement of the industry into a scheme.

The Belarusian government is a stakeholder whose capabilities deserve particular words to be said about. Although it possesses almost all the resources needed for an ecolabel, it is quite difficult to say if it is an advantage or a drawback. The powerfulness of the state and its unpredictability may considerably endanger the value of these resources and contribution made. The specificity of the Belarusian realities lies in the strategic significance of this player for a certification programme. Without its approval and support an ecolabel is doomed to failure or may never evolve from the mere intentions to a real existence. Although many experts believe that a deep governmental involvement into ecolabelling schemes should be avoided, it will hardly be made in Belarus. Moreover, the government will hardly give up the control over a project especially accounting the fact that it is willing to check the foreign aid and financial assistance which will definitely be needed and is counted on for running an ecolabel. The potential threat of the refusal of foreign grantees to provide funding to the government-controlled initiative in addition to the specificity of the Belarusian political situation may endanger the cloudless future of a certification programme and, particularly, the issues related to its financial implications. Another problem associated with the Belarusian government is hidden in credibility of an ecolabelling initiative. This stakeholder has got a negative image among other actors of tourism in Belarus and will hardly be capable to contribute into the process of trust building and credibility rising. Due to the fact that the government is willing to take a control over a certification project, this will be an issue of a particular importance which may endanger the further destiny of an ecolabel.

Participation of media in an ecolabelling initiative is also stuck in the government's interest. It owns most of the sources of mass-media in the country and may get them involved into the marketing of a certification programme or may not.

Tourists are, probably, the only stakeholder in Belarus which seems to be incapable to fulfil any tasks allocated to them within the current state-of-the-art in Belarusian tourism. However, the intensive educational campaigns aiming to raise the awareness of tourists may help to make them participate in the process of the development of an ecolabel. This seems to be a direct responsibility of other stakeholders, especially the government and academia to organize such campaigns and make tourist get interested.

6.2. Strengths and weaknesses of the capabilities of the Belarusian stakeholders to fulfil the factors of the ecolabels' success

The previous chapter has discovered the fact that the Belarusian stakeholders possess a number of capabilities which can be used to fulfil the ecolabel's factors of success thus representing the strong sides of a certification initiative in the country if it comes into being; however, the effectiveness of these capabilities is limited by a few factors which form the weaknesses or barriers that may endanger a successful implementation of an ecolabelling project. In the following table, a brief analysis of the strong and weak sides of the capabilities of the Belarusian stakeholders linked to the factors of success for an ecolabel is presented:

Table 6-3   Strengths and weaknesses of the capabilities of the Belarusian tourism stakeholders in securing the ecolabel's success

Conditions of success of an ecolabel	Capabilities	
	Strengths	**Weaknesses**
Stakeholders' participation and cooperation	• Readiness of stakeholders to participate (as has been discovered from the interviews);	• No "official" guarantee if this state-of the-art remains in the future;
		• The readiness expressed does not have a tangible ground and is not supported by real facts;
		• Confronting nature of the relationships between NGOs in the country;
		• Unwillingness of promoters of an ecolabel to attract other NGOs into a project;
	• Government has a power and sufficient resources to impact the participation of other stakeholders;	• Danger to a voluntary nature of an ecolabel as a result of the authorities' willingness to control a project;
		• Opposition to an ecolabel from stakeholders if participation is forced by the government;
		• Negative attitude of the officials to NGOs;
		• Government's disposal to dictate its will to stakeholders rather than to cooperate;
Knowledge	• NGOs and academia may provide an ecolabel with country-specific knowledge;	• There is a lack of the background knowledge about how to run and manage an ecolabel which is a crucial starting point for such an initiative;
	• Some stakeholders (e.g. government and NGOs) have got an experience on marketing campaigns;	• Knowledge on financial implications is missing;
		• The effectiveness of negotiation skills is doubtful;
	• Good contacts with the promoters of other certification schemes and intention to overtake their experience;	• No guarantee that the criteria borrowed from the already existent ecolabelling initiatives will match the demands of the major players involved and the Belarusian legislation;
	• Good relationships between some stakeholders maintained as a result of the previously accomplished projects;	• No intention to attract into a scheme as many stakeholders as possible;
		• Conflicts between NGOs and their problematic relationships with the government;
		• Distrust of tourism businesses to the authorities as a result of the mandatory certification project recently carried out in the country;

Conditions of success of an ecolabel	Capabilities	
	Strengths	**Weaknesses**
Credibility, transparency, trust	• Intention to regular report on the progress made and activities performed;	• The only entity commissioned to conduct auditing procedures in Belarus is totally dependent on the government – no possibility to appoint the members of the verification team and no intention to change this state-of-the-art from the government;
	• International organizations (ECEAT, VISIT) are going to be asked by promoters to be an external guarantor of the ecolabel's transparency;	• Government is suspicious to foreign participants;
Funding	• There are considerable funds allocated to develop internal tourism in Belarus (including rural tourism);	• No feasible financial strategy on how to get funding for an ecolabel;
	• The Ministry of the Environment possesses money which can be used to mitigate negative impacts of tourism activities in the country (i.e. to develop an ecolabel);	• No confidence on the amount and regularity of funding received from the ecolabel's stakeholders;
	• The government may provide additional funding in the form of regular grants;	• No long-term strategy on how to generate internal revenues – the promoters currently rely exceptionally on foreign aid or governmental assistance;
	• Foreign sponsors (ECEAT, Eurasia Foundation) are willing to support an ecolabel in Belarus;	• Government's suspicion to foreign funding; a long and tiresome procedure of its approval;
	• There is an intention to set up a tourist agency within the association-promoter of an ecolabel and generate internal revenues;	• Limited capability to generate own money due to the Belarusian legislation (NGO is not allowed to have a tourist company or agency otherwise the license is revoked);
Marketing	• Media can be influenced by the government;	• According to some stakeholders (e.g. tour-operators), marketing strategy of the government in the field of tourism is imperfect and should be improved;
	• Experience on how to conduct successful marketing campaigns exists among NGOs and authorities;	
	• Environmental issues can be promoted at lower costs in the media owned by the state;	

The analysis of the Belarusian stakeholders' capabilities allows for assuming that the critical points of an ecolabelling initiative in Belarus are related to the issues of the stakeholders' participation and cooperation, funding and credibility. The remaining two factors of success for a certification programme (i.e. knowledge and marketing) have rather high chances to get satisfied due to the existent experience of the stakeholders in this field and a variety of capabilities available which can be utilized to address these issues.

6.3. Will a tourism ecolabel come into being in Belarus?

This question is difficult to answer unambiguously. On the one hand side, yes, it will appear in the country one day since the money to set it up has already been allocated and the preliminary action plan has been prepared. However, on the other hand, it is not possible to say exactly if it is going to be a long-lived initiative or just a temporary toy for its promoters.

The Belarusian tourism stakeholders possess a number of capabilities to address the ecolabel's factors of success and thus contribute into a successful implementation of an ecolabelling initiative in Belarus. According to the matrix prescribing the roles of stakeholders in the process of developing an ecolabel, the capabilities of the Belarusian stakeholders to play the roles allocated to them are rather high. However, the detailed analysis of the situation formed in the field of tourism in the country has indicated that these capabilities cannot be considered to be sufficient and should be refined in order to ensure that factors of success for an ecolabel are properly fulfilled. The Table 6-2 has indicated that the most insufficient capabilities of the Belarusian tourism stakeholders are in the field of such conditions of success as the stakeholder's participation and cooperation, credibility and funding; the issues of knowledge provision and marketing can potentially be effectively addressed by the joint efforts of the interested parties.

Although all the stakeholders of the Belarusian tourism industry have expressed their readiness and willingness to support a certification programme as well as claimed about their capabilities to make a tangible contribution into its development, there is no guarantee what will happen when the business comes to the practical actions. Moreover, the most important stakeholders of a project have either discredited themselves among the majority of the actors of tourism industry (e.g. government) or are not prone to facilitate their cooperation (the NGO-promoter). In other words, the stakeholders' participation and cooperation as an important factor of success for a certification scheme is poorly addressed in Belarus.

Funding is another issue which may endanger the destiny of an ecolabel in Belarus. The absence of a long-term financial strategy which should be developed by promoters of a scheme in advance seems to be the most critical gap of a certification programme in the country. The complicatedness of receiving funding from abroad, numerous bureaucratic barriers and a long period of its registering in Belarus does not enable a quick solution to this issue. In addition, the research has discovered that there is no appreciation of the importance to make an ecolabel as much financially independent as possible among promoters of a scheme; authorities and foreign donors are regarded as exclusive providers of funding, at the same moment there is a vague idea on how to generate internal revenues and make a project at least partly financially self-sufficient.

The internal funding is potentially available in the country through the government; however, it is impossible to say exactly if the authorities agree to provide a continual financing and on what conditions it will be done. Despite the fact that considerable funds have been allocated for the development of sustainable tourism practices in the country, there is no guarantee that

the government will be willing to give some of this financing for an ecolabelling initiative developed by a non-governmental organization. The monetary funds allocated to finance environmental projects are significant in Belarus; however, there are no measures directed to study the possibilities of applying for this money from promoters of an ecolabel in the country.

Credibility is a key problem of an ecolabelling initiative in Belarus. Neither government, nor NGOs and industry associations may guarantee a proper fulfilment of this critical factor of success. The government has discredited itself, NGOs are not prone to cooperate, businesses compete – all this does not facilitate the process of building credibility, raising transparency and creating trust in an ecolabel. Perhaps the first steps over the process of developing a certification scheme should be taken in this direction with the purpose of the radical improvement of the current situation.

It is noteworthy to mention that writing of this thesis started with the guess that the Belarusian government would create most of the barriers for the implementation of an ecolabelling initiative in the country. This assumption has been partly proved and supplemented by a number of additional facts. The authorities in Belarus have concentrated a big power in their hands and are prone to use it in all the sectors of political, economic and social life of the country to achieve the goals which are stipulated without consultations with other stakeholders. The government possesses a variety of political and economic instruments to make other parties get obedient and comply with the requirements or demands imposed. This situation has resulted in distrust and hostility of other stakeholders in relation to the authorities and their actions.

Apart from this, one of the most unexpected findings was related to the Belarusian NGOs and their capabilities to contribute into the development of a certification scheme. The confronting nature of the relationships between them may become one of the crucial factors of failure for an ecolabel if it is to be set up and run in the country. The hostility of NGOs to one another will never bring a positive outcome for an ecolabelling initiative.

One of the biggest problems for an ecolabel in Belarus is also seen in the country's isolation. The foreign tourists coming to Belarus may bring a new demand for the certified products and services and thus facilitate an interest to an ecolabelling initiative. The openness of Belarus will also enable to market an award abroad and discover new funding possibilities for its promoters.

Finally, tourism should be realistically put on the list of the state priorities in Belarus. Although such an announcement has been made, it remains to be on paper rather than to work in practice. Despite tourism has been declared as one of the key elements of the Belarusian state policy, it is still often preferred to sport and its importance is ignored.

6.4.   What suggestions can be made to enhance the stakeholders' capabilities in Belarus?

The previous chapters have shown that the stakeholders of tourism ecolabelling in Belarus are capable to make a specific contribution into the implementation of such a project in the country. However, it is quite difficult to contend if their capabilities are full; most of them should be refined in order to guarantee the success of the development of a certification programme if this happens. Since the most critical situation is in the case of the capabilities related to the fulfilment of such factors of success for an ecolabel as the stakeholders' participation and cooperation, funding and credibility, the particular efforts should be taken in

these fields. The Table 6-3 presents the suggestions which can be taken into account in order to enhance the existent capabilities of the Belarusian stakeholders or fill in the identified gaps.

Table 6-4   Suggestions to enhance the existent capabilities of the Belarusian stakeholders in securing the ecolabel's success

Stakeholders' participation and cooperation		
NGOs	Government	Other stakeholders
• Improve relationships with other NGOs, move from competition to partnership; • Attract other NGOs in a scheme and encourage them to contribute with other capabilities to address the ecolabel's factors of success; • Facilitate cooperation with regional and local NGOs which may be particularly helpful due to their contacts and experience of wworking with other stakeholders; • Organize seminars and workshops for businesses showing the advantages of an ecolabel; • Conduct educational campaigns for tourists to focus on the negative impacts of tourism activities and the ways for their mitigation; • Tourist information dissemination;	• Change behaviour and move from cooperation with NGOs on paper to practical actions; • Guarantee at the beginning a voluntary character of an initiative; • Provide incentives and preferences to the parties involved, avoid force; • Closer cooperation with industry associations and facilitation of their involvement into tourism decision-making process; • Create favourable conditions for the involvement of tourist representatives in the discussion of an ecolabel; • Deeper involvement of the Ministry of the Environment (particularly accounting their capability to provide funding and contribute into marketing); • Encourage academic research on the benefits of certification; • Tourist information dissemination;	• Discuss and delegate their official representatives commissioned to participate in the discussion and consultations on an ecolabel; • Be ready to participate in debates on tourism certification in the country; • Tourist information dissemination;
Funding		
• Work out or borrow a long-term strategy of generating internal and external revenues (including foreign aid); • Make a database of the potential donors and maintain contacts with them; • Discuss with the government what	• Ease the order of receiving foreign aid for an ecolabel; • Simplify the procedure of its registering in the governmental institutions; • Allocate a specific amount of money given to develop a national programme on internal tourism in	• Identify alternative sources of funding and report on them to promoters of an ecolabel;

Stakeholders' participation and cooperation		
NGOs	Government	Other stakeholders
financial assistance (amount, regularity, needs to cover) it is capable to provide an ecolabel with; • Provide promoters of an ecolabel with additional possibilities and sources of funding;	the country for financing ecolabelling initiatives;	
Credibility		
• Do not limit the number of participating parties due to private offences or fear of competition; • Discuss with the government a possibility to appoint independent verifiers rather than the employers of the institute for standardisation and certification; • Insist on the invitation of an external auditor representing the authoritative international organization;	• Stipulate in advance the conditions of its participation and present them to other parties involved; • Do not create barriers to a foreign auditor to revise an ecolabel; • Make an exception in the order of the conduction of auditing procedures in the country and appoint external verifiers for an ecolabel independent from the institute for standardisation and certification; • Put the candidatures of potential verifiers for open discussion;	• Insist on independent auditors and discuss their candidatures;

To conclude, the remedies for the improvement of the existent capabilities are quite simple; however, in order to achieve the best outcome from a certification project, they should be compulsorily followed. Since the Belarusian realities are much different from the "ideal" conditions, it should become the foremost task for promoters of an ecolabel in the country. If some of the suggestions stated above are accounted, there are higher chances for an ecolabelling initiative to get successfully realized in Belarus.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1. Conclusions

The process of development of a tourism ecolabel is a complex phenomenon. It consists of a number of steps each of those is characterized by a set of particular actions and activities which should be performed in order to achieve the best outcome of such an initiative upon its completion. It is a responsibility of managers of a certification scheme to work out a comprehensive plan prescribing a type and order of these actions and activities at the initial stages of an ecolabelling project; nevertheless, its all stakeholders should be ready to create favourable conditions for them to come into being.

The actions and activities performed within the scopes of an ecolabel aim to achieve positive results of the implementation of such a project and avoid its failure. In order to gain the best effect, success factors should be thoroughly identified, understood and examined. It should help to prevent the occurrence of difficulties which may arise along the process of development of an ecolabel and facilitate its successful realization.

Therefore the question "**What are the factors of success for a tourism ecolabel?"** is of a special importance to promoters of a tourism ecolabelling initiative.

There are five factors of success which determine a destiny of an ecolabel, namely:

- stakeholders' willingness and readiness to participate and cooperate;

- availability of knowledge required for the development of an ecolabel;

- a high level of credibility and transparency of a project, trust between its participants;

- funding possibilities and its regular provision;

- effective marketing and dissemination campaigns.

All these five factors are important and may impact not only a level of recognition and awareness of a tourism certification scheme, but also its life-span.

It has to be mentioned that among others credibility and funding constitute key issues ignorance in addressing of which is the foremost factor that may cause a failure or most of the problems for an ecolabelling initiative.

The process of building credibility and finding a continual financing should be put into the basis of an ecolabel at the initial stages of its development as an issue which influences others and may contribute into their success.

Commitment of stakeholders to participate as well as the availability of basic knowledge should be achieved before starting a certification project. Stakeholders' cooperation and provision of other types of knowledge should be secured during the process of running an ecolabel.

Marketing is an issue which should be paid a special attention to after a certification scheme has been set up.

This factor determines recognition and success of an ecolabel among the targeted category of businesses and tourists.

As a multi-stakeholder initiative, setting up an ecolabel is based on each actor involved; therefore each stakeholder should contribute into the fulfillment of the factors of success for a certification scheme through different roles which they can play in such a project.

Therefore the question "**What roles can be allocated to different stakeholders to facilitate the success?"** should be answered.

The roles of stakeholders in facilitating the ecolabel's success can have a different nature depending on a particular situation. Some stakeholders who possess sufficient resources and capabilities may even play several roles thereby addressing a few factors of success for a certification scheme. However, the major roles of the parties interested in a project can be attributed to them according to who becomes an initiator or promoter of an ecolabel. The primary role of the government is seen in the improvement of the initiative's financial stability and provision of long-term resources, industry and industry associations most of all also contribute into funding of a scheme, tourism and environmental NGOs are expected to raise transparency and build credibility of an ecolabel, academia - seek the knowledge required for its setting up and running, etc.

In order to ensure an effective implementation of a certification project, the capabilities of its stakeholders to attend the factors of success should be identified in order to ensure an optimal allocation of roles which they would be able to play. The more capabilities stakeholders possess in order to address the ecolabel's factors of success, the more chances for such an initiative to get effectively developed exist. Also, not knowing these capabilities leads to the occurrence of difficulties in running an ecolabel later on. So, knowing them in advance may solve problems in the future.

Belarusian case has been selected to verify the statements made above with the purpose to identify "**What capabilities exist in Belarus to develop a successful ecolabel"?**

The conclusion is that contrary to the initial hopes of this research, the results showed that in this particular case, the conditions for setting up an ecolabel are not mature enough to secure the viability of such an initiative in Belarus.

Stakeholders of Belarusian tourism are capable to play a number of roles allocated to them. However, their capabilities to fulfill the factors of success for a certification scheme are insufficient. The specificity and complexity of Belarusian situation is in the fact that its tourism stakeholders seem to have high capabilities to address most of the determinant factors of an ecolabel but the nature of their capabilities is more theoretical rather than practical.

In theory, the Belarusian tourism actors are capable to fulfill many needs associated with an ecolabelling initiative. However, the analysis of their practical feasibility and applicability has discovered a number of weak points in these capabilities which call for urgent improvement if promoters of a certification scheme in Belarus are willing to develop a successful project. The most critical situation is in the field of the stakeholders' involvement, credibility building and funding provision. There are a number of serious problems which may endanger an ecolabel, namely conflicts in relationships between the major players, problems with foreign financial assistance, and an intention to ignore a multi-stakeholder participation. Some drastic changes should be made on the highest state level in order to address these issues properly. If this is not done, it is hardly possible that a certification programme in Belarus will succeed.

Regarding knowledge provision and marketing, the capabilities of Belarusian stakeholders seem to be sufficient to contribute into the fulfillment of above factors. This has been

achieved due to the experience gained in the previously conducted promotion campaigns and several possibilities to get the information needed from different sources.

Thus, the capabilities of Belarusian stakeholders to address the ecolabel's success factors cannot be regarded as sufficient. Although there are two factors which can be fulfilled, the remaining three require to be solved. Taking into account the fact that these three factors constitute the most important issues determining success and failure of a certification programme, particularly when it comes to its credibility and financing, there are low chances for an ecolabel to get successfully developed in Belarus if the modern state-of-the-arts remains. In order to change the situation and facilitate the success, stakeholders of Belarusian tourism should undertake urgent actions directed to improve relationships and build trust between government and NGOs, ensure a long-term financial safety of an ecolabelling initiative and encourage stakeholders' participation and effective cooperation; some of them are suggested and presented in this research.

7.2. Final thoughts

Ecolabelling initiatives in tourism are prolific and their number is growing from year to year. Nevertheless, they are not all the time successful; most of them have difficulties and therefore it is important to understand why and when these difficulties occur and what determines them in order to prevent their occurrence. This research strove to do this and its results should help promoters of an ecolabel to anticipate what may happen in the future with a certification scheme if the factors of success are not properly addressed.

Belarusian situation seems to be a good example where the results of the study of the factors of the ecolabel's success are applicable to. Difficulties identified as a result of the absence of addressing such success factors as credibility, funding and multi-stakeholders involvement become even obvious in the Belarusian case, where political and social contexts are a direct determinant of the success of such an initiative. The analysis of the factors of success and the gap analysis of the existing capabilities of stakeholders provided by the research should help to facilitate the success of an ecolabel in Belarus.

7.3. Recommendations for future research

The research for this thesis made apparent the fact that there are a few other points which can be studied within the scope of this topic. Below are some proposals in respect of the potential focus areas research of which would be beneficial for the establishment of a deeper insight into the topic addressed by this thesis:

- Further analysis of the relationships between the factors of success and failure of an ecolabel with the preparation of a comprehensive manual for promoters of an ecolabel describing the actions needed to be undertaken to secure success and avoid failure;

- One of tourism ecolabels in the world – the Costa-Rican Certificate for Sustainable Tourism is totally administered by the government and believed to be successful. Since the authorities in Belarus are willing to control an ecolabelling initiative in the country, it would be of interest to compare the state-of-the-art and capabilities of the stakeholders in Costa-Rica with the situation in Belarus in order to study the possibilities, prerequisites and advantages for setting up a Costa-Rican model of a certification scheme in the country.

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Abbreviations

CIS   Commonwealth of Independent States

ECEAT   European Center of Eco- and Agrotourism

ELIN   Electronic Library Information Navigator

EU   European Union

EU LIFE   European Union, Financial Instrument for the Environment Programme

EMAS   Eco-Management and Audit Scheme

GDP   Gross Domestic Product

ISO   International Organization for Standardization

ISO 14000 series Environmental management system from the International Organization for Standardization (ISO)

ISO 14024   a set of principles and procedures which a certifier should follow when developing environmental criteria for a product or service

NGO   Non-Governmental Organization

OECD   Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

SME   Small and Medium Enterprises

STSC   Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council

UNDP   United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO   United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

USD   United States Dollars

USSR   Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

VISIT   Voluntary Initiative for Sustainability in Tourism

WTO   World Tourism Organization

WTTC   World Travel and Tourism Council

Appendix

WTO survey on tourism certification schemes

Number	Title	Geographical area	Targeted group	Time of establishment
1	Blue Flag campaign	Europe	Sports facilities (Beaches, marinas)	1987
2	Qualität Plus Kleinwalsertal (Quality Plus Kleinwalsertal)	Austria	Accommodation (all types)	1988
3	Blaue Schwalbe (Blue Swallow)	Europe	Accommodation (several types)	1990
4	Grüne Hand . Wir tun etwas für die Umwelt (Green Hand . We do something for the Environment)	Austria	Accommodation (hotels, private)	1991
5	Gite Panda	Belgium	Accommodation (Gites)	1992
6	Umweltsiegel Lungau (Environmental Seal Lungau)	Austria	Accommodation (several types)	1992
7	Wir führen einen umweltorientierten Betrieb (Greener Management for Hotels and Restaurants)	Germany	Accommodation (all types)	1993
8	Alcúdia - Municipi Ecoturistic (Alcúdia - Ecotouristic Municipality)	Spain	Accommodation (several types)	1994
9	Den Grønne Nøgle (The Green Key)	Denmark, Sweden, Greenland, Estonia	Accommodation (all types)	1994
10	ECOTEL Certification	Worldwide	Accommodation (Hotels)	1994
11	Nachhaltigkeits-Zertifizierung für Hotelbetriebe („Label oeplus") (Certification of Sustainability for Hotels)	Switzerland	Accommodation (Hotels)	1994
12	Naturprodukt Nationalpark Hohe Tauern (Natural products Hohe Tauern National Park)	Austria	Accommodation (all types) Other businesses	1994

13	Standardy pro ubytovaci zarizeni venkovské turistiky (Standards for Countryside Accommodation)	Czech Republic	Accommodation (bio-ecological holiday farms)	1994
14	Umweltsiegel Tirol-Südtirol (Environmental Seal Tyrol - South Tyrol)	Austria, Italy	Accommodation (all types)	1994
15	Gite Panda	France	Accommodation (Gites)	1995
16	PATA Green Leaf Program/ APEC/PATA Code for Sustainable Tourism	Asia-Pacific	Accommodation (all types) Tourism companies (all fields)	1995
17	Sistema de Turismo Responsible (Biosphere Hotels . Quality for Life)	Spain	Accommodation (several types)	1995
18	David Bellamy Conservation Award	United Kingdom	Accommodation (holiday parks, camping, caravanning)	1996
19	Hiiumaa Roheline Märk - Loodussõbralik Teenindus (Hiiumaa Green Label - environmentally sound service)	Estonia	Accommodation (all types)	1996
20	Umweltgütesiegel auf Alpenvereinshütten (Eco-label of the Alpine Associations for Huts)	Germany, Austria, Italy	Accommodation (alpine huts)	1996
21	Alberghi Consigliati per l´impegno in Difesa dell´Ambiente (Recommended Environmentally Friendly Hotels)	Italy	Accommodation (Hotels)	1997
22	Certificación para la Sostenibilidad Turística (Certification for Sustainable Tourism)	Costa Rica	Accommodation (all types) Tourism businesses (all fields)	1997
23	Das Österreichische Umweltzeichen für Tourismusbetriebe (The Austrian Ecolabel for Tourism)	Austria	Accommodation (all types)	1997
24	Green Key for Holiday Houses	Denmark	Accommodation (holiday houses)	1997
25	National Ecotourism Accreditation Program	Australia	Accommodation (several types) Tourism products (Tour offers)	1997

26	Umweltbewußter Hotel- und Gaststättenbetrieb (Environmental orientated Hotel and Gastronomy business)	Germany	Accommodation (all types)	1997
27	Clean Marine Green Leaf Eco-rating Programme	Canada	Sports facilities (marinas, yacht clubs, other boating facilities)	1998
28	El Distintivo de Garantia de Calidad Ambiental ('El Distintivo') (The Emblem of Guarantee of Environmental Quality)	Spain	Accommodation (all types)	1998
29	Green Tourism Business Scheme	United Kingdom	Accommodation (all types)	1998
30	GreenLeaf Eco-Rating Programme	Canada	Accommodation (several types)	1998
31	Greenlinks Eco-Rating Program	Canada	Sports facilities (Golf courses)	1998
32	Hôtel au Naturel (Hotel of Nature)	France	Accommodation (Hotels)	1998
33	Milieubarometer (Environmental Barometer)	The Netherlands	Accommodation (camping)	1998
34	Öko-Pikto (Eco-Picto)	Europe	Accommodation (camping)	1998
35	Regionalmarke Biosphärenreservat Schorfheide-Chorin (Regional Brand Biosphere Reserve Schorfheide-Chorin)	Germany	Accommodation (all types) Trade companies	1998
36	Umweltsiegel Uckermark (Environmental Seal Uckermark)	Germany	Accommodation (several types)	1998
37	Urlaub auf Biohöfen in Deutschland (Holiday in Organic farms in Germany)	Germany	Accommodation (bio-ecological holiday farms)	1998
38	EcoLabel Luxembourg	Luxembourg	Accommodation (all types)	1999
39	Green Globe Certification	Worldwide	Accommodation Tour operators Destinations	1999
40	Guida Agli Agriturismi Bioecologici (Holiday in Organic farms)	Italy	Accommodation (bio-ecological holiday farms)	1999
41	Les Clefs Vertes (The Green Keys)	France	Accommodation (camping, caravanning)	1999

42	Nordic Ecolabeling: Miljömärkning av hotel (Nordic Swan)	Scandinavia, Iceland	Accommodation (Hotels)	1999
43	Öko-Proof-Betrieb (Eco-Proof-Company)	Germany	Accommodation (Hotels)	1999
44	Entreprise éco-dynamique (eco-dynamic company)	Belgium	Accommodation (Hotels) Other tourism businesses	2000
45	Horizons : the Saskatchewan Ecotourism Accreditation System	Canada	Tour operators	2000
46	Label Vert (Green Label)	Belgium	Accommodation (several types)	2000
47	Power Smart Green Hotel Programme	Canada	Accommodation (all types)	2000
48	SmartVoyager	Ecuador	Tourism products (tourist boat operations)	2000
49	Der UMWELT verpflichtet (Committed to Green)	Germany	Sports facilities (Golf clubs)	2001
50	Estonia - the Natural Way	Estonia	Tourism products (Tour offers)	2001
51	Groene Duim (Green Thumb)	The Netherlands	Accommodation (several types) Destinations	2001
52	Umweltzertifizierung für die Tourismusbranche nach der Norm von ISO für kleine Betriebe (Environmental Certification for Tourism - Introduction of Environmental Management Systems in conformance to ISO for small businesses)	Italy	Accommodation (several types)	2001
53	PAN Parks Initiative	Europe	Nature areas (Protected areas)	2002
54	VIABONO	Germany	Tourism businesses (accommodation, destinations, further services)	End of 2001
55	Destination 21	Denmark	Destinations	2001
56	European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas	Europe	Nature areas (Protected areas) Tourism businesses Tour operators	2001

57	Eco Diving Standards	The Netherlands	Sports facilities (dive shops, land tour operators, etc.) Accommodation (hotels)	2002
58	Kiskeya Alternative Certification Programme	Haiti / Dominican Republic	Tour operators	2002
59	Lee Valley Eco-label Project	France	Accommodation (all types) Other tourism businesses	2002

Source: WTO - World Tourism Organization, 2002.