

# The Application Sustainable Energy Programmes on Travel Enterprises in the Concept of Sustainability: The Case of Travelife

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## Abstract

The concept of sustainability which is put forward about the management and improvement of the environmental, social, cultural and economic impacts in tourism finds an field of application in different sectors of tourism industry. Management of sustainability in tourism aims not only to minimize or dispose the negative perception, but also enables tourism suppliers leading steps in terms of customer satisfaction, productivity, competitive advantages to the tourism establishments at the same time. In these context, after outlining general overview on the international certificate programs and the study deals with the effects of "Travelife" that opens application fields in different regions in recent years to Turkish tourism agencies. Summarizing the contents of Travelife Certificate and its applications, the perception of the international standards related to the travel agencies in Turkey, its place in application and the problems in carrying out and its management is given through the sample of Travelife".

**Keywords:** Sustainable Tourism, Certification, Travel Enterprises, Travelife

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism sector is one of the primary players in damaging the environment and nature (Güzel, 2012; Papatya et al., 2011; Demir and Çevirgen, 2006; Meydan, 1998). Papatya et al. (2011: 223) deems the presence of ecologic crisis as one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse, as the green/global capitalist system has become closer to the zero point, and they claim that, ecologic crisis has created the sustainable environment paradox and with the recognition that tourism activities have endangered its own future, the reality of 'transformation of the nature into a consumable object' has brought about the concept of sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism approach, which has become popular in 1980s with the Brundland report (Weaver et al. 1999), ensures the development and sustainability of the sector, while aiming to eliminate the negative environmental, economic and socio-cultural effects of destinations in the long-term (Butler and Wall, 1993). Sustainability concept, which has been frequently used in several fields, is defined as a participatory process which enables careful utilization of all social, cultural, scientific, natural and human resources and which creates a social perspective based on this sensitivity (Gladwin et al. 1995: 877). In the most simple and plain way, "Sustainable Development" can be defined as "fulfilment of today's needs

without compromising from the ability of future generations to fulfil their own needs". The approach of Sustainable Development is considered to be a holistic one which establishes a balance between the needs of humanity and the sustainability of natural resources to enable a program that would be suitable today and in the future on economic, environmental and social grounds, and it was first defined in this holistic way in the report of "Our Common Future", prepared by the United Nations Commission on Environment and Development in 1987. Sustainable Development is based on the idea that, economic, social and environmental development is an inseparable entirety and that, the lack of any of these would prevent the others to come to life (<http://www.skdturkiye.org>, 06.03.2015). According to Demir and Çevirgen (2006), environmental impacts shall be assessed in order to prevent the emergence of basic negativities/environmental impacts and to ensure that tourism activities do not have any negative impacts on the sustainable development of natural areas, and certain criteria shall be defined and implemented to achieve sustainable development in the system. Similarly, Papatya (2007) emphasizes the need for the testing of all steps in the implementation stage of tourism practices with regards to sustainability and resource-based tourism. In this sense, certification in tourism has become a management tool sought by the governments, industry and nongovernmental organization for the implementation of sustainable development principles in tourism industry (Demir and Çevirgen, 2006). In parallel with these, this paper will give general information about certification systems first. Then it will give some details about Travelife certification application, which is the broadest of these certification applications, and will discuss its applicability in Turkey.

## CERTIFICATION APPLICATIONS IN ACHIEVING SUSTAINABILITY

Certification is the whole procedure concerning the offering of a written warranty by third parties for a particular product, process, service or a management system in parallel with specific requirements (Demir and Çevirgen, 2006). At this point, comes out the significance of certification applications, criteria of which are determined by authorized institutions/organizations and which could offer enforcements for all stakeholders of tourism. Just as in many product groups, in tourism sector as well, there is an increasing demand from consumers/tourists for environmentally sensitive tourism activities. Both national and international legislations

have focused on the minimization of the environmental impact of tourism activities. Furthermore; companies in tourism sector has been seeking for the ways to use this demand as a marketing tool. As a result of this, several voluntary environmental certification programs have been created in order to raise consciousness about the environment and to enhance the available practices and these have become efficient tools complementing the laws and regulations about the environment ([www.unep.org/](http://www.unep.org/), 24.03.2015).

Certification is important for achieving sustainability and preserving the environment, for improving the standards of tourism sector. For the stakeholders of tourism, certification is considered as a warranty that environmental values are prioritized. Voluntary participation, logo, law abidingness and development, assessment, control and membership-participation fees are deemed to be the basic components of the international, regional or national tourism certification programs (Maclaren, 2001: 3). In order to obtain the expected benefits of certification, it shall be internationally recognized and accepted, it shall be supported and in line with the environmental laws and there should be a regular control and assessment process (Buckley, 2002: 188). There are various examples of certificates around the world. These are developed for the stakeholders of tourism who would rather conform to the international standards defined in corporate social responsibility and sustainable tourism issues. In tourism industry, certification process is named as certification or labelling. It has been put into use in different names in different geographies. Certification process, which is introduced as a new market, has found itself a wide space in sustainability concept. Certification of tourism companies started voluntarily with the aim to determine certain standards for various concepts of tourism used throughout the European Union and the USA, from mass tourism stakeholders to alternative tourism, and has turned into a new market with the raised awareness on professional grounds. The history of labeling (certification) programs dates back to 1990s in tourism sector. The aims of these programs are to minimize the negative impacts of the sector and to improve the environmental quality at tourism destinations. Certification improves the environmental quality of products; is influential on destination preferences of tourists and brings a competitive advantage to the company (Kozak and Nield, 2004). It takes attention that, travel operators do not find an important place in the certification process, through which the countries try to form in parallel with their own expectations and world standards or travel operators are not sufficiently considered in the already available programs. Standards and labelling are mostly intended for accommodation facilities, eateries and tourism-related supply chains. Tourism certification studies has been the subject of different researches regarding education and quality aspects of sustainable tourism and certification practices are now being discussed more in different regions around the world. The goal of certification is to have a direct influence on sustainable tourism by improving service quality and achieving certain standards, conserving tourist attraction and the quality of destinations. The point to be discussed here is the question; which of the sustainability-related headings in literature refer to the practices of tourism companies. Another point discussed at this stage is the

question; how much the aspect of achieving distinctiveness in brand values of tourism companies and such distinctiveness correspond to the sustainability of tourism.

As well as the individual national certification programs, there are some international programs that are carried out with the participation of several countries. Examples of these are given below ([www.dkdtrkiye.org](http://www.dkdtrkiye.org), 06.03.2015):

- According to **Beluga**, every company shall be assessed independently from each other and it is not possible to talk about a whole of general principles called as “standards” and it claims that, companies focus on the assessment of their environmental policies, not environmental management.

Island-based **Beluga** serves internationally with its unique environment, security and quality certification system.

- **Bio Hotels** certification covers organic and regional products at hotels. Certified hotels only use organic certified products conforming to the standards of Bioland or other similar eco-labels.

- **Blue-Flag** is an eco-label granted to over 3200 beaches and marinas in total in 36 countries in Europe, South Africa, Morocco, New Zealand, Canada and the Caribbean.

- The purpose of **EHC** certification is to support ecology, sustainable development and local economy in commercial activities. This label, which is granted to tourism companies conforming to the principles of sustainability, takes the resource utilization amounts of companies into consideration.

- **Green Globe** Standard offers options to travel and tourism companies to support them in carrying out environmentally and socially responsible and sustainable activities. As well as companies, sustainability performances of the partners of supply chains are also subjected to an assessment.

- **GreenKey** is an international eco-label used for tourism products and it is like a diploma issued to the companies in tourism sector. Until now, **GreenKey** has been issued to over 2100 hotels and facilities in 45 countries.

- **GTBS** is the sustainable tourism certification program in England and Ireland and it has over 2400 members. It is the only national certification program supported by National Tourism agencies. Companies preferring Green Tourism are assessed based on strict rules involving 145 criteria in several areas such as energy and water efficiency, waste management, purchase, travelling and biologic diversity.

- Accommodation facilities are certified by **Steinbeck** with “Goat” symbols from 1 to 5, depending on their determinedness and performance about sustainable development. With this Swiss-based label, hotels are assessed regarding their success in management capabilities, economic, environmental and social responsibility, and their capabilities in creating value and culture for their region.

- **Viabono** is a label issued to accommodation facilities, destination and other tourism companies in Germany. Its prerequisite for “eco-benefit” is that, the nature shall remain pristine and tourism products shall be of high quality.

- **Nature’s Best**, which certifies nature trip companies that

conform to ethics and high quality standards, was established with the combination of travel agency associations, land owners, nature preservation foundations, non-profit organizations, public organizations, tourism companies and other organizations.

- **Estonia Ecotourism Quality Label** indicates that, organizations prefer the options supporting the local economic development and the preservation of Estonia's natural and cultural heritage.

- **The Blue Angel** certificate has been started by the German government and it has a wide coverage. It has four basic preservation focuses regarding a product or a service.

- **Earthcheck**, which is another certification organization for sustainable travel and tourism operators, has over 1300 clients in 70 countries.

### THE CASE OF TRAVELIFE

Development of tourism industry can obviously be achieved through sustainability-focused objectives. Therefore, in sustainability concept, which has been discussed on academic grounds in the last two decade, principles, labels, accreditation programs and certification process developed by tourism companies are considered as the prerequisites for the sound development of tourism. Certification, which was discussed within the framework of hotel management until today, has now started to establish its own rules, principles and processes for the other stakeholders of tourism. Thus, considering that, travel agencies and tour operators are the first address to apply to for the transportation of tourists to the destinations, it is commonly agreed that they shall obey these principles.

While hotel/accommodation companies' certification system is managed by ABTA (Association of British Travel Agents), travel operations are managed by ECEAT (European Center for Ecological and Agricultural Tourism). ECEAT is a non-profit, management-based organization founded in 1993 to serve for the development of sustainable tourism, which is supported by the European Union and consultancy companies. This organization offers its services in the areas of rural tourism, public-based tourism, tourism in conserved sites, sustainability training in developing countries and marketing activities and with the areas of tour operators. The basic reason for ECEAT to address to travel operators is the desire to determine and prevent the emergence of the problems (utilization of over 100 different certification programs, non-recognition of the certificate in the market, emergence of high management expenses) in the certification process of accommodation facilities.

Since the late 1990s, international tour operators have started to utilize sustainable management approaches in their companies. In 2000, the most active 25 tour operators came together under the body of Tourism Operators' Initiative for Sustainable Tourism Development (TOI) with the leadership of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and identified, for the first time, the methodology and concepts regarding how sustainability could be applied for tour operators. In 2003, the Dutch Association of Travel Agents

and Tour Operators (ANVR) developed a Product Based Environmental Management System. The system includes "appointment and training of an environment coordinator and conformance to certain minimum standards" and it is compulsory for all off the 200 tour operator members of the Association. Forum Anders Reisen is, which is another travel operator in Germany, has also defined various sustainability standards to which its members are required to conform. In 2004, key players were brought together under a project funded by the EU, for the development of a joint tour operator sustainability system. As well as the tour operator associations in the Netherlands and UK, UNEP, Leeds Metropolitan University, Lund University and the European Centre for Ecological and Agricultural Tourism (ECEAT) have also joined this project. Past experiences, standards and methodologies were combined together and developed for 3 years and were integrated with general sustainability systems and principles such as EU EMAS (Eco Management and Audit Scheme) , ISO 14001 (Environmental Management) and GRI (Global Reporting Initiative) supported by the UN. In 2007 ITB Tourism exhibition organized in Germany, common standards and tools were introduced to the market under "Travelife" (Travelife, [www.travelife.eu](http://www.travelife.eu), 10.03.2015).

This certificate program is accepted by 18 European Organization (Belgium (ABTO, BTOV, VVR, BFNO & FBAA), Germany (ASR), Greece (HATTA, SETE), Bulgaria, Italy (FIAVET), Czech Republic (ACCKA), the Netherlands (ANVR), Croatia (UHPA), Cyprus (ACTA), Latvia (ALTA), Denmark (DRF), Spain, Ireland (ITOA), Poland (PIT), Finland (SMAL/AFTA), Sweden (SRF), the UK (ABTA) and France (CETO). Apart from these associations, Travelife certificate is also accepted by travel associations in Thailand (ATTA, TEATA), Tajikistan (TATO), Kirghizstan (KATO), Nepal (TAAN), Brazil (BRAZTOA) and Kenya and is used by travel companies such as TUI Deutschland, Arke, Apollo, Thomas Cook, HotelplanSuisse, LookVoyages, TUI Holland, Thomson, Neckermann Reizen, TUI Travel PLC, Kuoni, Sovereign Luxury Travel, TUI Nederland, VING, First Choice, Cosmos, Airtours. Travelife certificate is applied in 3 consecutive steps as Participation (online training and examination, guidance for sustainable performance, action plan developing, self-evaluation, reporting tools), Partnership (reporting tools and self-evaluation, application of national partnership standards, recognition of partnership and logo issuing) and Certification (field audit performed for the confirmation of certification level, use of logo on the company's web-site and promotional materials, international promotion of the company's successful sustainability practices) ([www.travelife.eu](http://www.travelife.eu), 10.03.2015).

Tour agencies Travelife Certification system has a multi-dimensional body as can be seen on Table 1. The **first dimension** involves the internal management of travel organizations. *Sustainability management module*, as the sustainability manager, describes how a travel agency can efficiently progress within the framework of sustainability and introduces the tools and documents that could be used for the improvement of the objectives. *Internal management module* is about measures such as sustainable energy consumption, waste management and social policies of the organization,

which could be used for the improvement of the sustainability of the operational office. The **second dimension** involves the suppliers. *Supply-chain management module* shows how you could facilitate sustainability in all your units by carrying out a close relationship with your available business partners and by selecting new suppliers. Different types of transportation vehicles used in business-chain are discussed in the *transportation module*. Environmental load of each type of transportation and the ways to minimize such load are explained in this module. In *accommodation facility module*, the socio-cultural, economic and environmental impacts of accommodation facilities are evaluated. The ways to introduce sustainable hotels in cooperation with the suppliers are explained. Food and child abuse issues are also discussed in this module. *Tours module* deals with the impacts of various types of activities tourists perform at destination. In *local guides, tour leaders and local representatives* module;

qualifications, work conditions and employees' interest in the issue are evaluated. The **third dimension** involves the destination. *Destinations module* evaluates the impact of tourism on destinations and the ways for tour operators to cause a positive impact. Evaluation is made with respect to mountains, urban areas, coasts and cruise tours. The **fourth dimension** involves the clients. Client communication module describes how the decisions and behaviours of the clients could be stimulated throughout the vacation cycle in terms of sustainability. While evaluating the most significant impacts of tourism, each module offers actions and solutions within the scope of travel companies. Furthermore; while reflecting practical practices, modules give idea about campaigns and tools. Travel companies that fulfil the basic conditions of Travelife within the framework of these modules deserve the right to become a Travelife partner.

**Table 1. Travelife Sustainable Tourism Themes and Sub-Themes**

<b>1. Sustainable Management and Law-Abidingness</b>		
11.1	Company Loyalty	Appointing sustainability coordinator and subjecting to Travelife training with his/her team/key employees, making sustainability an integral part of management, allocating resources for sustainability policy, defining sustainability mission.
1.2	Social Cooperation	Cooperating with forums/ study groups supporting sustainable tourism, sharing sustainable practices with the employees, company's support of sustainable initiatives through its employees and clients.
1.3	Basic Assessment	Reviewing sustainability performance of key suppliers, making self-assessment about conformance to good practices.
1.4	Sustainability Policy	Sustainability policy set-up by senior management, announcing this policy to the employees and to the community.
1.5	Action Plan	Preparing an action plan based on Travelife, integrating the employees into this plan, allocating relevant resources to product development/contract managers.
1.6	Monitoring, Evaluation	Developing procedure on Travelife for the evaluation of the sustainability policy, discovering the conflicts between the objectives and activities and taking measures, informing the employees regularly, keeping relevant records, monitoring the performance of sub branches.
1.7	External Reporting, Communication	Sustainability coordinator's reporting to the senior management about the policies and activities, reporting the progress every other year through Travelife, announcing to the public.
1.8	Law-Abidingness, Fair Trade Practices	Reviewing the legal obligations that must be considered (corruption, security, work conditions etc.), abiding to laws in work and action areas and taking corrective measures, establishing the rules of ethics, enabling fair competition, supporting lobby groups.
<b>2. Internal Management: Social Policies and Human Rights</b>		
2.1	Actions/ Solutions	Providing the employees with the right of organization, collective labour agreements, free labour, a written HR policy, written rules for work and job definitions, a reasonable salary, overtime payments or leaves, health insurance, applying pregnancy and birth-giving programs, vacation right, sick leave, additional benefits (profit sharing etc.), health and security policy, providing equal opportunities to the employees and preventing discrimination, child labour, complaint submission procedure, the right to appeal to the management, introducing disciplinary procedure, flexible work hours, assessing employee satisfaction, providing the employees with the right for education, providing the students with the right to serve their internship.
<b>3. Internal Management: Environmental and Social Relationships</b>		
3.1	Actions/ Solutions	Minimizing the use of single-use/consumable materials, providing sustainable purchase (food, drink, consumables), using sustainable office materials/recyclable paper, saver printer mode,

		local production/sustainable food/catering supplies/complimentary materials, energy-reduction policy, greenhouse gas/carbon gas release, energy saving and control, energy-efficient lighting, automatic on/off, equipment switch-off policy, lights switch-off policy, energy-efficient equipment, energy-efficient mode, water saving policy, using flow limiter, using water saver technology, rain water/waste water recycling, water-saving toilets, waste regulations, waste reduction, waste measurement/benchmarking, sustainable packaging, minimizing the use of plastic water bottles, using sustainable toner, recyclable batteries, employing waste water purification, pollution reduction policies, using water-based dyes in the interiors and exteriors of the building.
3.2	Mobility	Employee travel policy, business trip assessments, encouraging the use of mass transportation vehicles, minimizing transportation (home-working, video-conferencing etc.), encouraging the use of vehicles conforming to legal release standards, fuel-saving company vehicles, renting cars for the company, giving environmental training to the employees.
3.3	Land Use and Mass Relationships	Conformance of the building/land use to the laws/regulations on preservation sites, respecting the natural/cultural heritage areas in building locations, making natural/cultural impact assessments for new constructions, renovation and destruction operations, conformance of the property ownership right to the law, sustainable design and construction, using local types in landscaping, referring to the local community regarding land and water use, taking care that activities do not pose a threat for the environment, food, water, health, energy or the cleaning areas, supporting the preservation of historical, archaeological, cultural and moral areas, including local art, architecture and cultural heritage elements in activities and designs.
<b>4. Sustainable Supply Chain Management</b>		
4.1	Partner Agencies (outbound /inbound)	Establishing partners' sustainability policies, continuously informing the partners, integrating basic sustainability items into the contract, receiving trainings, reporting activities, sustainability awards and promotions.
4.2	Special Conditions	Written contracts, sustainability briefing of contract managers, corruption prevention policies, including child abuse prevention issues in the contracts made with the partners, conformance to laws and regulations, informing the clients about the sustainability of destinations, work conditions, reasonable amount of salary.
<b>5. Transportation</b>		
5.1	Transportation to the Destination	Preferring the most sustainable transportation option, using sustainable transportation to go to the departure airport, including greenhouse gas/carbon filter compensation fee in the package price in international transportation, measuring total greenhouse/carbon release when arriving at the destination, taking quality and reliability into consideration when preferring among bus transportation companies.
5.2	Transportation in the Destination	Using sustainable alternatives in transfers and local trips, sustainable code of conducts for drivers, encouraging the sustainability of the activities of boat trip suppliers
<b>6. Accommodation Facilities</b>		
6.1	Accommodation Facilities	Introducing sustainability objectives and demands to contracted accommodation facilities clearly, establishing sustainability strategy, preferring recognized <b>certified accommodation facilities</b> , integrating basic sustainability items (child labour, fighting against corruption/bribery, waste management, preservation of biological diversity etc.) into all contracts, distributing materials about sustainable management standards, making sure that contracted accommodation facilities regularly perform self-assessments, encouraging participation to local/national/international courses and trainings on sustainability, <b>collective activities</b> for the sustainability of destinations, offering initiatives (green logos, marks etc.) to accommodation facilities that are actively involved in sustainability.
6.2	Special Policies	<b>Attaching importance to child labour and compulsory work conditions, encouraging offering of souvenirs which are locally produced, respecting the local architecture, environment and cultural heritage and preferring accommodation facilities that care for these</b> , breaking up cooperative relationship with facilities that endanger the public offering or wholeness of basic services such as food, water, energy health, soil etc., encouraging the purchase and use of local foods that are produced in parallel with sustainability principles, encouraging the minimization of the negative impacts on local/global biologic diversity.

7. Tours and Activities		
7.1	Tours and Activities	Designing environmentally/culturally sensitive tours, ensuring sustainability of tours, integrating tour suppliers in the sustainability policy of the company, introducing the code of conducts for sensitive tours and activities, enabling regular self-assessments for sensitive tour operators, preferring tours that conform to sustainability standards, distributing education materials to enable tour suppliers perform sustainable actions, integrating sustainability items (child labour, preservation of biologic diversity etc.) into the contracts.
7.2	Special Criteria	Not cooperating with tour suppliers who give harm to living beings and natural resources (water/energy etc.), taking care for the wild life, not offering tours that give harm to the wild life, minimizing and reducing any damage to the natural ecosystem, enabling travelling to ecologically or culturally sensitive destinations under the leadership of expert guides only, integrating activities supported by the local people into tours, supporting the preservation of the environment and biologic diversity in tours.
8. Tour Leaders, Local FRepresentatives and Guides		
8.1	Actions/ Solutions	Preferring local tour leaders, representatives, tour guides and ensuring their conformance to legal obligations while working, providing suitable conditions for work, providing a reasonable salary, ensuring that the leaders, representatives and guides have necessary qualifications and knowledge about the destination and training them regularly, informing and training them about sustainable company policy, having the guides train the clients about sustainability issues (preservation of flora, fauna and cultural heritage; resource utilization etc.), social norms (dressing code, photograph taking etc.) and human rights (child sexual abuse etc.), introducing a responsibility insurance for the guides (work accidents etc.).
9. Destinations		
9.1	Destination Selection	Keeping records of critical sustainability information (waste, biologic diversity etc.), taking sustainability issues (non-traffic zones, sustainable urban planning, proper waste management etc.) into consideration when selecting new destinations, <b>eliminating non-sustainable destinations</b> that could be influenced by tourism, access with sustainable transportation vehicles, obeying international enforcements (UN, EU) concerning the destinations
9.2	Local Projects and Initiatives	Making legal planning for activities, conformance to legislation on preserved zone/heritage and destination management strategies, developing relationships between accommodation facilities and local producers, supporting initiatives such as the distribution of local foods and souvenirs, destination planning and management, using natural resources, supporting the local administration in cultural issues, discussing any non-sustainable management or event with local administrations, supporting the flora/fauna systems under threat and souvenirs including historical and archaeological pieces.
10. Client Communication and Protection		
10.1	Before Reservation	Introducing client consultant and client relationships management system, conforming to standards/ethics in client privacy, marketing and advertising messages, offering complete information about products/services, quality of the destination information, informing about the minimum number of groups/participants, greenhouse gas/carbon release and reduction of such release, ensuring sustainable transportation, offering sustainable alternatives in every stage of package tour.
10.2	During Vacation	Giving information about the natural environments, local culture and cultural heritage in destinations, giving advice about how they could contribute to sustainability issues (restriction of resource utilization, wastes, illegal souvenirs, cultural habits, dressing code etc.), giving information about health/security issues in destinations, destination contact person, sexual abuse or illegal souvenirs, encouraging the use of local goods and services, sustainable transportation options, preserving the nature in destination, making donations for cultural and social projects, warrant funding.
10.3	After Vacation	Assessing client satisfaction, managing complaints, detecting problems, discovering the ways for recovery

Source: Edited from Travelife Training Modules and Criteria Assessment Reports

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

As is also seen from Travelife modules, travel companies play active role in every step included in tourism cycle, from accommodation companies to destination management. At this point, it has become an important life mission for travel companies to adopt sustainable management processes and implementing those inside/outside the company for the assessment and prevention of the negative impacts of tourism and it has turned into a competitive approach with respect to provision of the sustainability of tourism and gaining a competitive edge over the other companies. As can be understood from modules and sub-criteria, Travelife certificate offers the opportunity to enter into sustainability issues in tourism and aims to raise consciousness of the travel agency employees about the positive and negative impacts of tourism and to make them feel environmentally and socially responsible for the development of the corporate performance of travel agencies. Thus; travel companies can establish and manage their own sustainability management systems through certification applications such as Travelife. Certification applications provide the tour operators/travel agencies and hotels/accommodation facilities with training, management, certification and marketing support under the body of a single brand.

Travelife certificate provides travel companies with several advantages. For example, they encourage contracted accommodation facilities about sustainability and offer a chance for the assessment of sustainability performance. Furthermore; with the use of certificate logos, a competitive advantage can be created for the promotional materials through a marketing perspective. For the clients who care for green consumption, it creates consciousness about the company. As company and stakeholder-based measures will be taken for the minimization of the negative impacts of tourism activities on destinations, sustainability of destinations will be achieved. With the members in the certificate centre system, companies will find the chance to find themselves international suppliers and to establish partnerships. Managers will be able to make assessments and regulations in all application areas through regular self-assessments. Sustainability management and activities can contribute to the minimization of operational costs, maximization of efficiency, more efficient use of available opportunities and prevention of punishments. Moreover; when tour operators obey the laws and encourage/oblige their tourism partners to work in parallel with sustainability principles, they can reduce their own responsibilities. As mentioned in Travelife training modules, tour operators have a significant role in encouraging their clients about more sustainable decisions and behaviours. In this sense, travel companies can inform and encourage their clients about sustainable tours and transportation vehicle reservations. Furthermore; they can introduce certain code of conducts specific to the destination or activity in order to raise consciousness of their clients. On the other hand, compared with the obligation of the acquisition of sustainability certificates or accommodation facilities due to the enforcements of tour operators, travel companies draw back from the enforcements the hotels are exposed to. At this point,

TURSAB (Association of Turkish Travel Agencies) and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism could take tourism practices under control and apply valid modules particularly for the preservation of destinations.

Differences of Travelife certification programs from other programs are discussed in two dimensions. Besides the certificate feature, coaching and guidance services given by consultants and country offices are prioritized. Training opportunities are created for tourism companies with this difference. With several comprehensive practices that are exemplary for the sector, sound steps can be taken for the improvement of online systems and sustainability reports and plans. As for the strength of Travelife program, it can be said that, not only tourism companies but also concerned institutions and organizations from different countries, which give tourism training, contribute to the certificate program. In this regard, it was aimed to involve all stakeholders of the sector in the right issues discussed in travel industry. The heading introduced for the reason why travel agencies has to be certified is the improvement of employee and client satisfaction. For international recognition, particularly for the development of an innovative perspective in travel market and for raising awareness, travel agencies tend for certification.

Compared to other companies, some headings discussed in the certification process seem to bring about some official difficulties in Turkey. For example, official difficulties in green energy practice mean a rather difficult process for the application of certain criteria. Some sustainability-related laws are not clearly defined and there are some difficulties in the control process. These are deemed to be the official deficiencies. On the other hand, despite the official deficiencies, bureaucratic obstacles that come out in certification process are not so detailed to discourage the travel agencies withdraw from the certification process. With the use of written materials belonging to the certification program and with the stage named as the guidance stage where details of each criterion are discussed, the amount of processes which are considered to be potentially difficult for the travel agents to meet, will be minimized. Standards introduced through documents can be easily applied by the companies.

The most significant and different part of the criteria is considered to be the "Basic Assessment" stage. Though being considered as an intense work load for agencies, this stage is significant both for the detection of deficiencies in the basic stage of the process through guidance and supports and for the understanding of the further stages. Furthermore; there should be the dimensions of communication and the outcomes under "Reporting on Web sites" heading only within the information transfer and sustainability concept and only for the relevant clients of the perceived dimension. As for competition, it should be deemed not as a gain but as a deficiency for the competitors that this information is not desired to be shared. One of the details that come to the forefront in practice with regards to transparency is this heading. For encouraging the travel agencies' participation to certification programs, official initiatives and guidance shall be included in current tourism policies. The steps needed to be taken for the realization of sustainability and the code of ethics in tourism

are also considered to be a significant process in certification. Considering the role and significance of travel agencies in the introduction of different trends and diversifications in the world tourism development, it can be said that, certification process shall be supported particularly in our country and the amount of exemplary practices shall be increased.

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