

# The European Ecotourism Labelling Standard EETLS

e-evaluation and e-training tools

## HANDBOOK

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**ECOLNET**  
**European Ecotourism Knowledge Network**

Project Nr: 511766-LLP-1-2010-1-GR-KA3-KA3NW

November 2013

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This handbook offers guidance to the user of the e-evaluation and e-learning tools developed by the ECOLNET project to support the implementation of the European Ecotourism Labelling Standard (EETLS). It addresses ecotourism businesses as well as quality certification agencies, tour operators, students and experts in the field of ecotourism.

The EETLS tools are accessible through the ECOLNET website [www.ecotourism-network.eu](http://www.ecotourism-network.eu) and the ECOLNET online community's platform <http://ecolnet.ning.com>

They include:

- The self assessment tool for businesses
- The integrated evaluation tool for businesses
- The agencies' self assessment tool
- The learning package for businesses
- The learning package for evaluators

These tools were developed jointly by the ECOLNET partners:

1. PRISMA-Centre for Development Studies (project Coordinator), Greece
2. ECOTRANS e.V., Germany
3. European Centre for Eco and Agro Tourism (ECEAT) – Projects, The Netherlands
4. Association of Ecotourism in Romania, Romania
5. Estonian University of Life Sciences, Estonia
6. Edinburgh Napier University, Life Sciences Faculty, U.K.
7. PAN Parks Foundation – The Netherlands
8. Centro Turistico Studentesco Giovanile (CTS) - Sustainable Tourism Department, Italy
9. imaginary srl, Italy
10. ECOTONO, Consultancy on Environment, Tourism and Development, Spain
11. Silvicultura ltd, Finland
12. Estonian Ecotourism Association, Estonia

We wish to thank all the private businesses, NGOs and individuals who participated in the piloting of the e-evaluation and e-learning tools, enabling us to improve the performance of the tools and adapt them more closely to the needs of their users.

This publication has been prepared by PRISMA – Centre for Development Studies with contributions from all the ECOLNET partners. The texts were written by Fouli Papageorgiou and Isabelle Trinquelle.

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## A. Introduction

### A.1 The objectives of this handbook

This handbook relates to the European Ecotourism Knowledge Network (ECOLNET), a project supported under the Transversal Measures, Key Activity 3, ICT multilateral networks, of the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme. It focuses on the products developed by the Network, namely, the European Ecotourism Labelling Standard (EETLS) and the accompanying learning material and online evaluation tools.

The handbook targets ecotourism businesses wishing to obtain EETLS certification; agencies assessing the quality of sustainable tourism or ecotourism; and education/research organisations actively involved in ecotourism. It aims to:

- provide all ecotourism professionals – especially ecotourism businesses and quality certification agencies – with a simple and efficient methodology for using the EETLS and the evaluation and learning tools developed by ECOLNET;
- help the user understand the structure and content of the EETLS, obtain a working knowledge of the EETLS criteria and indicators, and provide the means for assessing the compliance of business practices with the EETLS.

### A.2 The ECOLNET products

#### A new standard for labelling sustainable ecotourism in Europe: the EETLS

ECOLNET has introduced and tested a new "standard" for labelling sustainable activities and businesses in the ecotourism sector: the European Ecotourism Labelling Standard – EETLS. The EETLS was initially developed by the Leonardo da Vinci-funded ECODESTINET project and revised by ECOLNET. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) has already fully recognised the EETLS as a European standard. Existing ecotourism or sustainable tourism labels in Europe are thus offered the opportunity to strengthen their market value by assuring their compliance with a European quality standard, the EETLS, while sustainable tourism labels may extend their coverage to ecotourism businesses and claim European applicability by complying with the GSTC-recognised EETLS.

#### Online evaluation tools

ECOLNET introduces a new system of online evaluation for businesses wishing to be certified. A number of online tools allow an external evaluator and a business manager to go through the different assessment stages together, with the former offering advice and the latter providing evidence using documents and visual material. This practice cuts down on certification costs and makes ecotourism quality labelling a more accessible option for small ecotourism businesses. The online evaluation tools developed by ECOLNET are available in 9 languages.

#### Learning material

The evaluation process is enhanced and supported by a training package for businesses that guides those wishing to seek EETLS certification using the e-tools. The learning material

is available online in 9 languages and can be accessed by registering in the e-learning platform "Ecotourism Training for Businesses" (<http://eetls.eu/>). The material is also available in pdf format and is attached to the e-evaluation tools.

A further training package provides the necessary knowledge and skills to prospective EETLS evaluators. This will ensure that they have a good understanding of the EETLS, the ecotourism industry and the basic rules of an objective and fair evaluation.

#### The European Ecotourism Network and community

ECOLNET has created a wide network of businesses, tourism professionals, certification agencies, education providers, teachers and researchers: the European Ecotourism Network (EEN). An online community of interest has also been created from the EEN members with the aim of promoting the EETLS quality standard in Europe. The online community's objectives include developing and promoting the sector's interests, enhancing networking opportunities, promoting best practices among ecotourism businesses and fostering dialogue among its members. The community members interact via a dedicated platform <http://ecolnet.ning.com/>, the ECOLNET group in LinkedIn and the ECOLNET Facebook page.

The ning platform of the online community provides its members with free access to the EETLS blueprint and the related assessment tools and training packages that are not evaluator-assisted. It also operates a helpdesk for assisting those members of the community who would like to try out the EETLS assessment process.

The online community also offers its members free access to the innovative online e-evaluation tools and e-learning packages, which were created by the ECOLNET project to assess a business' compliance with the EETLS.

Moreover, members of the online community have access to the DestiNet portal. The EEN Knowledge Base on DestiNet brings people and information together on both the European and national levels: who is who in Ecotourism; useful publications and tools; good practice examples; a full list of certificates, standards and awards; eco-certified businesses and award winners ("Atlas of Excellence"), as well as ecotourism news and events.

## B. The European Ecotourism Labelling Standard (EETLS)

Certifying the quality of sustainable tourism providers through appropriate labelling brings some important benefits to ecotourism businesses: it makes ecotourism products more visible to clients and promotes higher quality services in the tourism market. Certification, when based on transparent and objective procedures, provides a reliable basis for identifying ecotourism businesses that meet the required range of sustainability criteria, and offers guidance to tourists as well as a sound basis for effective marketing.

The growth of nature-based tourism has highlighted the need to protect pristine and delicate natural environments as well as the integrity and culture of local communities. On the other hand, ecotourism tourists have become more demanding and seek a higher

quality of services and undisturbed contact with nature. The introduction of codes of conduct, quality assurance, labelling and service standards certification have all tried to meet these needs in one way or another. However, the multitude of such initiatives and their varying objectives, which are often not directly related to the concerns of ecotourism, highlight the need for a universal set of standards for ecotourism services and tourist conduct. This has become vital due to the lack of compatibility between the existing labels and the large variation in quality standards of ecotourism services on offer.

### B1. A European “umbrella” for existing ecotourism labels

The European Ecotourism Labelling Standard (EETLS) has been trying to do exactly this: i.e. to establish a universal set of standards that will serve as an “umbrella” for existing ecotourism labels or sustainable tourism labels, aiming to expand their applicability to the ecotourism market. It is true that labels addressing specific geographical territories and employing localised criteria are beneficial, as in most cases they reflect local challenges and needs. However, it is vital that such criteria also reflect some universal principles, the value of which has been proven through best practices on the global scale, allowing them to be easily recognised and accepted by both the casual nature tourist and the dedicated ecotourist. It should also be noted that, if managed by a national or regional agency, and if other ecotourism or sustainable tourism labels do not exist in a country, the EETLS can exist as a label in its own right.

#### The need the EETLS aims to cover:

- ▣ To harmonise existing European ecotourism labelling systems and strengthen the position of labelled businesses in the tourism market.

#### Development principles of the EETLS:

- ▣ The EETLS facilitates comparable standards of service in relation to a core group of baseline quality criteria.
- ▣ The EETLS makes the standards of ecotourism certification programmes comparable and can be used as guidance for the further development of such standards.
- ▣ The EETLS “does not reinvent the wheel” – it is built along the lines of the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria, adapted to ecotourism specificities in Europe.
- ▣ The EETLS is accompanied by a platform of communication for European ecotourism initiatives.

When developing the EETLS, it was a major challenge to successfully interpret and adapt the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) to the needs of European ecotourism. Following a lengthy consultation process, the first version of the EETLS was produced in 2009 via the ECO-DESTINET LdV project. Further development of the EETLS was carried out by the ECOLNET project.

#### Development process:

- ▣ Review more than 1200 individual criteria
- ▣ Filter them using the International Ecotourism Society’s (TIES) definition of ecotourism
- ▣ Categorise the criteria according to the GSTC
- ▣ Adapt the criteria to European conditions
- ▣ Consult with current European initiatives (EUROPARC, PAN Parks, Nature’s Best, Eco-Romania) on the first draft in February 2009
- ▣ Carry out a second consultation in 2011-2012 with 13 European initiatives, who offered detailed comments on the EETLS criteria and sub-criteria

### B2. EETLS criteria: designed for sustainable ecotourism businesses in Europe

Using the GSTC and the TIES definition to determine ecotourism standards has clear advantages because they have been developed as a result of extensive consultations and collective work. They are also expected to be adopted widely and used as a reference point for the tourism industry worldwide. As stated by the GSTC, the criteria are the minimum, not the maximum, which businesses and destinations should achieve with regard to social, environmental, cultural, and economic sustainability. It is also recognised that tourism destinations have their own culture, environment, customs and laws. Consequently, the EETLS criteria are designed to be adapted to local conditions and supplemented by additional criteria for the specific location and activity.

The EETLS contains most of the GSTC criteria because they are highly applicable to ecotourism. It should be stressed that the EETLS has been declared the first GSTC-recognised standard in Europe. The criteria included in the EETLS follow the “four pillars of sustainable tourism” defined by the GSTC. They fall into four groups, which have the following objectives:

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

#### The four groups of criteria

##### A. Demonstrate effective sustainable management

This group of criteria applies to various aspects of the management system of an ecotourism business. It requires the implementation of a long-term sustainability management plan that is suitable to its reality and scale and considers environmental, socio-cultural, quality, health, and safety issues.

It also necessitates compliance with all relevant national or local regulations and legislation (including, among other things, health, safety, labour, and environmental aspects) and gives special emphasis to employee training and the quality of services offered to visitors, which include interpretation and awareness-raising regarding the host destination's natural, cultural, social and political conditions.

#### **B. Maximise social and economic benefits to the local community and minimise negative impacts**

The B group of criteria relates to a core principle of ecotourism, namely, maximising the social and economic benefits for local communities and minimising the negative impacts. Local community benefits resulting from ecotourism operations and from the influx of eco-tourists in the destination include the employment of local people, especially young people; the support of initiatives for social and infrastructural development which improve quality of life; and the opportunity for local entrepreneurs to sell products that are based on the area's nature, history and culture.

#### **C. Maximise benefits to cultural heritage and minimise negative impacts**

The C group of criteria refers to the cultural heritage of a destination and how to maximise the positive impacts of ecotourism and minimise the negative impacts. It concerns material and non-material heritage: architecture, archaeological sites, but also traditional handicrafts, food, songs and music or customs. Criteria include respecting local cultural codes of conduct; protecting cultural sites; incorporating local traditional elements in the company's facilities and activities and preserving and promoting local culture.

#### **D. Maximise benefits to the environment and minimise negative impacts**

By definition, ecotourism operates in natural areas and thus the preservation of the natural heritage is essential. The D group of criteria focuses on maximising the benefits and minimising the negative impacts of tourism activities on the environment. It includes the responsible use of natural resources by implementing a purchasing policy which favours environmentally friendly products; increasing efficiency in the consumption of energy and water and in the management of waste; and controlling the interaction between tourists and wildlife.

In order for the EETLS to closely reflect the nature of the ecotourism industry, each criterion has been specified according to the specialised needs of the sector. The specification of each criterion is elaborated through a set of sub-criteria which correspond directly, on an individual basis, to a set of indicators. A significant feature of the EETLS is that its sub-criteria and indicators reflect good practices by current European and global ecotourism businesses that operate under existing eco-labelling initiatives. A further unique feature of EETLS is that each "indicator" is further elaborated by a number of "implementation indicators". The latter outline the terms and conditions which ecotourism businesses must

fulfil in order to satisfy the EETLS criteria, and the evidence they are expected to provide in this regard.

A full copy of the EETLS can be accessed here:

<http://www.ecotourism-network.eu/en-ecotourism-standard/en-the-euro-eco-label-stand>.

#### **The EETLS profile**

In order to comply with the EETLS, an Ecotourism business must fulfil the criteria and implement the recommended measures. Currently the EETLS is made up of:

- 4 groups of criteria
- 38 criteria
- 94 sub-criteria
- 94 indicators for certifying agencies
- 94 indicators for businesses
- 130 implementation indicators

### **B3. The application of the EETLS: a learning process**

The application of the EETLS should be considered mainly as a learning process for an ecotourism business. The criteria and indicators of the EETLS provide clear guidance for both startups and established businesses looking to build their sustainability profile.

Through the process, ecotourism SMEs can:

- learn how to become green and sustainable;
- become guardians of the environment – which is especially important in protected areas;
- become aware of the importance of integrating their business with the local community;
- learn how to promote sustainable development in their local area.

To enhance this learning process, a training package has been developed to improve the skills of business' owners and the evaluators who assess them (see D.). Furthermore, a "Best Practice Library" has been developed by the ECOLNET team and is available online under the following link:

<http://www.ecotourism-network.eu/en-knowledge-center/en-library-best-pract>

The Library offers over 100 examples of business practices that have applied the EETLS criteria in different circumstances and locations, and can be used to illustrate in practical and tangible terms how a business can achieve compliance with the EETLS criteria.

The application of the EETLS is facilitated by a number of "tools" that make its implementation easier and clearer. They offer step-by-step guidance to verify whether a business complies with the EETLS criteria and sub-criteria. These tools are presented and explained in the following chapters and include the compliance assessment protocols and the learning material that accompanies them.

## C. Using the e-tools for assessing compliance with the EETLS

### C1. The e-evaluation tools

Three online evaluation tools have been developed by the ECOLNET team for use by certification agencies, ecotourism businesses and evaluators. According to past experience, including the results of the ECODESTINET project, ecotourism certification agencies consider the cost of evaluation in situ as one of the biggest obstacles to attracting businesses to apply for a quality label. The evaluation cost, paid either separately or integrated in the membership fee imposed by the labelling agency, represents a significant burden for ecotourism providers – many of which are small, family-owned enterprises. To make ecotourism labelling more attractive to small businesses, the ECOLNET team has developed online evaluation tools that significantly cut the evaluation costs and allow more frequent evaluation follow-up tests to take place.

Three tools have been developed for two specific target groups:

#### 1) E-evaluation tools for ecotourism businesses

- **A self-evaluation tool** targeting ecotourism businesses. This tool is intended to serve as an initial check through which a business evaluates its compliance with the EETLS and assesses the changes that are necessary to respond to the required quality standards. To increase the learning value of this tool, it is linked with the e-learning package and the library of best practice in order to illustrate, in practical terms, the implementation of the EETLS criteria and the benefits gained.
- **An “integrated” assessment tool** which brings the ecotourism business to the next stage of assessment using an “integrated methodology”. Here, the objective is not only to assess the ecotourism business’s compliance with the EETLS, but also to define the improvements that are necessary in order to ensure the quality of service and infrastructure set by the EETLS. This assessment involves a pair of an EETLS evaluator and a business manager who has applied for his/her business to be assessed for compliance with the EETLS. The evaluator should be certified and appointed by an existing ecotourism certification agency that has adopted and implements the EETLS. This tool combines a 5-point scoring system with specific requests for evidence using various multimedia (photographs, videos, internet information, publicity materials etc) to support/illustrate the score.

#### 2) E-evaluation tool for certification agencies

- The third e-evaluation tool targets certification agencies. This tool assesses the degree of compliance of the agency’s own criteria with the EETLS and points out the gaps that need to be addressed by the agency being assessed. The tool has the form of an online questionnaire which assesses compliance with each sub-criterion/indicator of the EETLS by means of a rating scale. For certification agencies, such an evaluation may lead to new ideas regarding the development of new criteria and indicators within their own labelling framework. Such agencies can also improve their

marketing profile by becoming members of a large European initiative recognised by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council. Moreover, they can become a member of a wider network of labelling agencies which implement the EETLS and take advantage of various training, networking and promotional activities.

### C2. How to carry out the Assessment

#### 1. Are you an ecotourism business who would like to take part in an initial test of your compliance with the EETLS? Then try the self-assessment tool.

#### Completion of the self-assessment tool for businesses - steps to follow

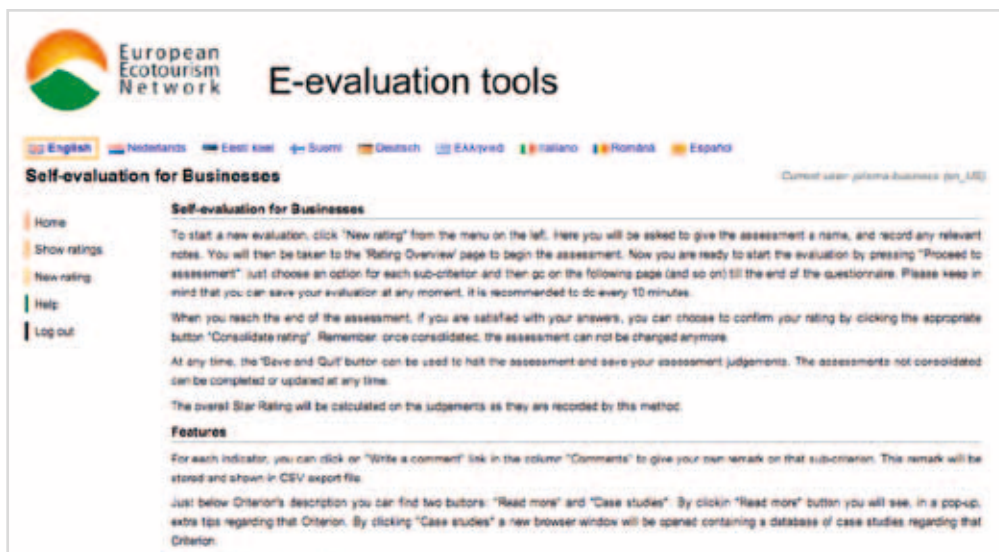
##### Step 1. Become a member of the European Ecotourism Network

By registering in the online community <http://ecolnet.ning.com/>, you become a member of the EEN online community. Click on the EETLS page to request access to the self-assessment tool.



## Step 2. You gain access to the online tool!

Following your request, you will receive an email containing a username and password to gain access to the online tool, which is available in 9 languages. Follow the instructions on the first page of the tool.



## Step 3. Familiarise yourself with the EETLS

You are encouraged to read carefully the document attached to the online tool labelled "learning material for businesses", which explains the background of the EETLS criteria and offers useful tips and examples of their application. Alternatively, you may log into the e-learning platform <http://eetls.eu> and take the training course for businesses.

You are also encouraged to consult the database of case studies available on the ECOLNET website (see the "Best practice library").

## Step 4. Carry out your self-evaluation

Click "new rating" from the menu and proceed with the evaluation. You must read carefully the indicators listed under each of the 38 EETLS criteria. Taking into account what you have already read in the learning package, you rate your business under each of the indicators using a 3-point scale or choosing the option "non-relevant" if this is the case.

## Step 5. Learn about your score and act!

After you have completed all indicators, click "consolidate" and a final rating of either one, two or three stars will appear at the top of your screen.

If your rating is one star, you need to follow the guidelines offered in the learning package in order to make your business more sustainable. If your rating is two or three stars, you may proceed with the full evaluation of your business's compliance with the EETLS together with a certified evaluator.

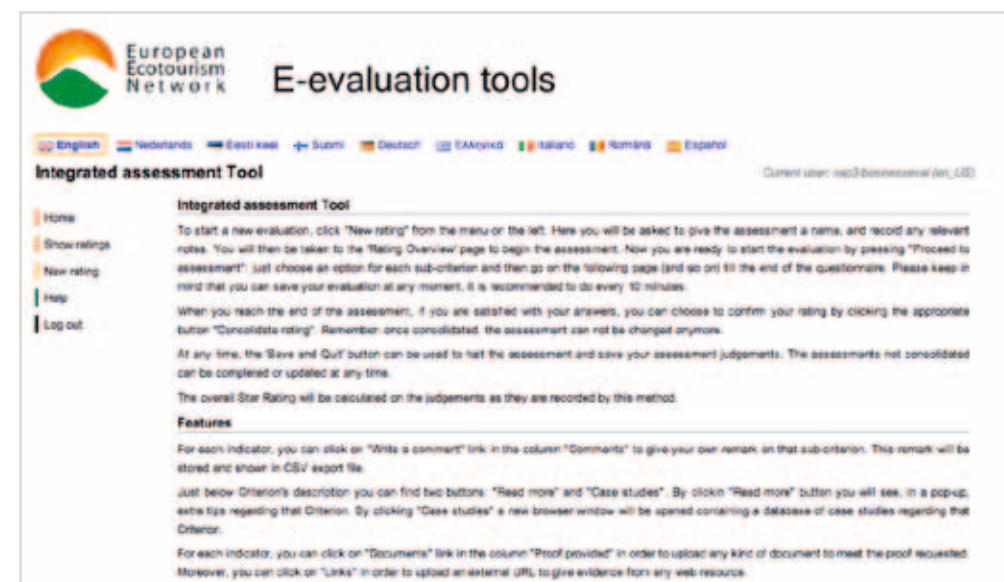
You now have an initial picture and understanding of your potential compliance with the EETLS!

## 2. Do you wish to go further and complete the integrated evaluation tool for businesses?

### Completion of the integrated assessment tool for businesses - steps to follow

#### Step 1. Get ready to go further!

Contact a national or regional ecotourism certification agency which uses the EETLS as its labelling standard and apply for a full evaluation of your business's compliance with the EETLS. You will receive an email from a certified EETLS evaluator, who will introduce himself/herself, and provide you with a new username and password to access the integrated evaluation e-tool.



#### Step 2. Complete the Integrated Evaluation Tool

By selecting "New rating" from the menu, you can start analysing your compliance with the EETLS criteria and the indicators you familiarised yourself with during the self-evaluation. This time you will have to estimate, using a 5-point rating scale



starting from 0% and ending in 100%, the level of compliance of your business and then prove it by uploading the required documents, videos or photographs, links and comments. If some of the indicators do not apply to your specific business, tick 'Not relevant' (for example, if your company does not hire employees, you will select 'Not relevant' to answer the question: Does the business train periodically all personnel?)

At this stage of the process, proof is requested for each sub-criterion in order to support or illustrate your analysis. Such proof may include documents such as your sustainability management plan, information/leaflets provided to clients concerning your ecotourism activities and services, publicity material promoting the destination, as well as photographs or links to the business website. This information will be used by the evaluator when carrying out his/her own assessment. If you have difficulty selecting or collecting the requested evidence, click on the 'read more' section, where you will find suggestions on the information you should provide.

If you cannot provide the requested proof or if you want to communicate some information directly to the evaluator, click on 'Comments' and explain your situation or specific issue.

The evaluator will remain in contact with you in order to provide the necessary guidance for completing the tool and clarifications about the required evidence. At this time of the evaluation process, the evaluator will play the role of mentor and support you when using the tool.

### Step 3. Consolidate your evaluation

The overall rating is automatically calculated.

When you reach the end of the assessment, if you are satisfied with your answers, you can choose to confirm your ratings by clicking the button "Consolidate rating".

### Step 4. The evaluator comes into play!

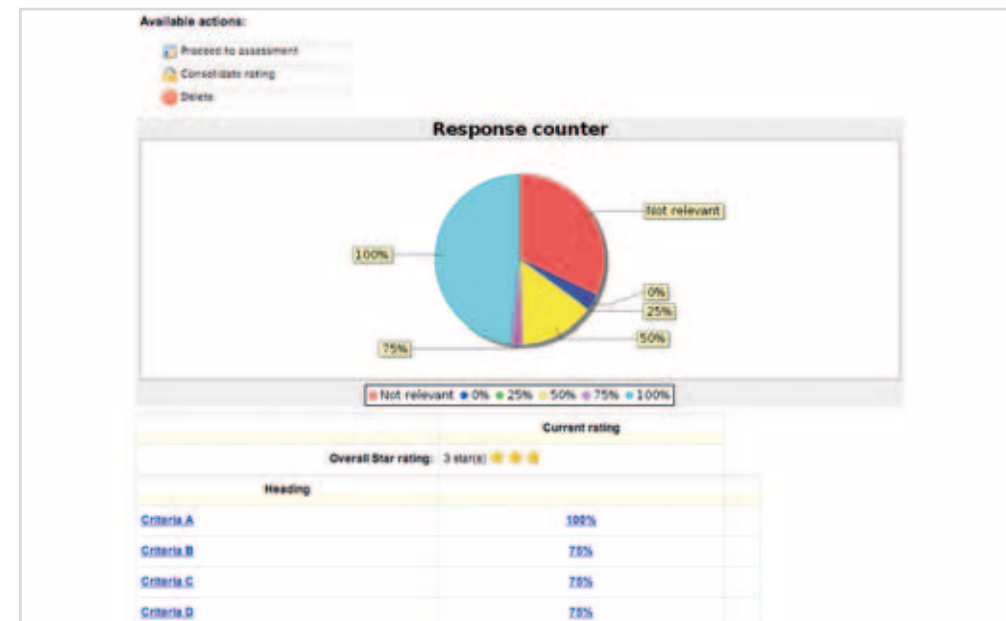
Following the calculation of your score and the uploading of the required evidence, the evaluator examines the proof provided by the business without having seen the final score resulting from the self-assessment. He/she then evaluates the evidence and awards a score for each indicator. Following an interview with the business manager, the evaluator finalises his/her score, which is automatically converted to a zero, one, two or three star award.

### Step 5. Get the benefit!

You are sent the evaluator's report, which gives a breakdown of the evaluator's scoring based on the evidence provided by the business, compares the results of the business with those of the evaluator, explains these differences and offers suggestions. If necessary, the report will also outline the necessary action and measures that need to be taken by the business in order to increase its compliance with the EETLS.

If you have a high level of compliance with the EETLS, the star rating system gives a result of two or three stars. You will subsequently be awarded the label of EETLS compliance to use on your website and other publicity material.

Indicators	100%	75%	50%	25%	0%	Not relevant	Proof requested	Proof provided	Comments
<b>A.1. Management System</b> The company has implemented a long-term sustainability management scheme that is suitable to its needs and scale, and that considers environmental, socio-cultural, quality, health, and safety issues. <b>Rationale</b> A realistic business plan and a long-term sustainability management scheme, which is communicated to both staff and clients, gives to the enterprise greater chances in implementing high quality ecotourism measures.									
<b>A.1.1. Does the business have a sustainability management plan, which includes specific actions related to Ecotourism?</b>							<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A.1.1. Present the sustainability management plan including an ecotourism development action plan</li> <li>A.1.1. Explain how the sustainability management plan considers environmental, socio-cultural, quality, health and safety issues</li> </ul>	Documents Links	View my comments
<b>A.1.2. Does the business communicate the sustainability management plan to staff, local stakeholders and clients?</b>							<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A.1.2. Provide evidence regarding the communication of the sustainability management plan to staff, local stakeholders and clients</li> </ul>	Documents Links	
<b>A.1.3. Does the business include sustainability monitoring in its daily activities and a staff member is appointed to monitor performance?</b>							<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A.1.3. Provide evidence that sustainability monitoring is part of the daily activities of the business and a sustainability manager is included in the staff</li> </ul>	Documents Links	



### 3. Are you a Certification Agency?

#### Completion of the self-assessment tool for certification agencies – steps to follow

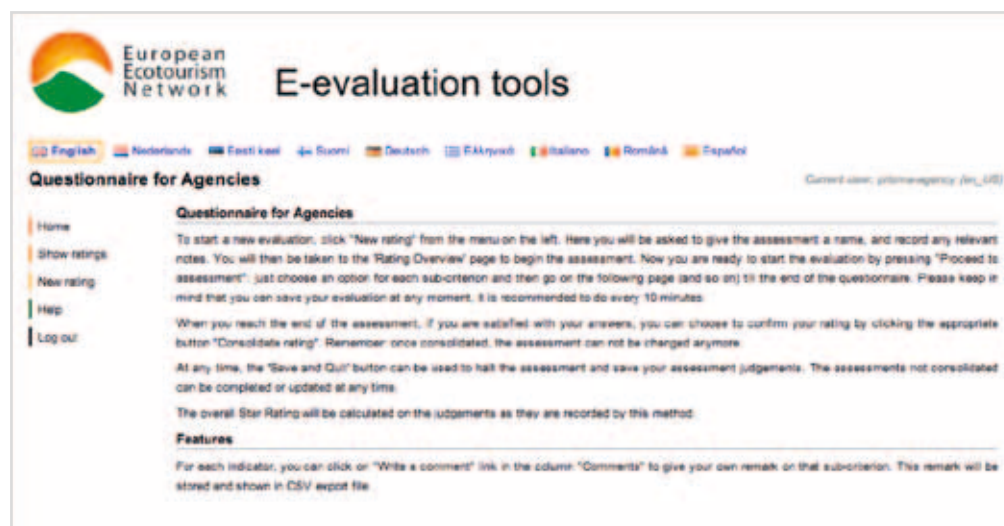
Certification agencies can also assess their criteria and indicators for compliance with the EETLS.

##### Step 1. Become a member of the European Ecotourism Network

You register in the online community <http://ecolnet.ning.com/> and complete a short profile about your organisation on the EETLS page to confirm your interest in the e-evaluation tool.

##### Step 2. You gain access to the online tool!

Following your request, you will receive an email containing a username and password to gain access to the online tool, which is available in 9 languages. Follow the instructions on the first page of the tool! This can be a self-evaluation procedure or you may be assisted by an independent evaluator.



##### Step 3. Proceed with the evaluation of your agency's compliance with EETLS

You start your evaluation by selecting "New rating" from the menu on the left and then answering the questionnaire for agencies using the three-point scale provided. For each indicator, you can click on "Write a comment" in the column "Comments" to give your clarifications/remarks/thoughts on that indicator.

##### Step 4. Time for the conclusion!

After completing the questionnaire, you can confirm your ratings by clicking on the button "Consolidate rating". Your file can now be accessed by the EETLS evaluator, if you choose so, who may contact you to confirm the ratings and ask for clarifications. With the support of the evaluator, you can analyse your results and decide on the necessary changes that need to be introduced to your agency's evaluation system in order to score at least two out of three stars and thereby comply with the EETLS.

A certification agency may choose to obtain compliance with the EETLS and then use its own label alongside the EETLS logo. Alternatively, a certification agency, which may not be specialised in ecotourism but has a history in sustainable tourism labelling, may choose to implement the EETLS as it is and certify ecotourism businesses according to the EETLS criteria and using the EETLS evaluation tools.

## D. Learning Package

The training packages are aimed at both startups and established businesses. They provide background material relating to the EETLS and introduce various aspects of ecotourism theory and practice.

#### The Training Package is divided into three main topics/sections:

- 1) Establishing and managing your business (12 units)**  
This is the main section. It helps you to define or redefine your business towards ecotourism with guidelines on strategy, management, marketing and integration in the local social, cultural and environmental context.
- 2) Service and your clients (7 units)**  
As an ecotourism business, how should you provide services and respond to customer demands? This section is about understanding customer expectations and providing the best service possible, but it also concerns the way you will introduce visitors to the local environment, the local culture and traditional production.
- 3) Sustainable business practice (6 units)**  
You will learn what makes a business sustainable and how it can minimise its impact on the environment. Among the various guidelines and tools for responsible operations, this section deals with the respect of regulations regarding your activities in protected areas; sustainable building and construction practices; promoting the wellbeing of the local community and of the rural economy; and the development of environmental policy.

### D1. The Training Units in just a few clicks

■ **One Click to open the learning package**

There are two different ways to access the learning platform

<p><b>Ecotourism Training Platform</b> <a href="http://eetls.eu/">http://eetls.eu/</a></p> <p>Log into the Moodle platform and select the appropriate section. A password is required. It can be obtained from the project website: <a href="http://www.ecotourism-network.eu">http://www.ecotourism-network.eu</a></p>	<p><b>E-evaluation tool</b></p> <p>All businesses that carry out the self-evaluation have direct access to the "learning material". The training units are available in pdf format within the e-evaluation tool.</p>
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#### Ecotourism Training Platform

The business e-learning package provides knowledge on the principles and practice of sustainable tourism and ecotourism and shows how this can increase the competitiveness of a tourism business. It also includes a direct reference to the EETLS criteria and the requirements for complying with them.

The following table of contents will appear (see also Annex 2):



■ **Click to open the units that are of interest to you**

You can now choose the unit you are interested in and obtain direct access to it.

**Each Unit is structured as follows:**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Overview</li> <li>■ Table of contents</li> <li>■ Introduction</li> <li>■ Case studies – based on businesses involved in ecotourism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Links to other training units</li> <li>■ Further reading</li> <li>■ Exercises</li> <li>■ Indicators</li> <li>■ Individual Learning Portfolio</li> </ul>
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3.1 SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS PRACTICE - MANAGING A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS		
<p>In this unit we will go beyond the obvious environmental parameters associated with sustainability and explain sustainable management within a tourism business concept, presenting guidelines and tools for responsible operations.</p>		
<p><b>Introduction</b></p> <p>All businesses should operate based on the principles of sustainability nowadays, but what exactly does this imply? What makes a business sustainable? In this unit we will go beyond the obvious environmental parameters associated with sustainability and explain sustainable management within a tourism business concept, presenting guidelines and tools for responsible operations.</p>	<p><b>Contents</b></p> <p>1. Introduction 2. Sustainable Management 3. The Sustainability Management System Components 3.1 Components of the Sustainability Management System 3.2 Measures and Tools for the Sustainability Management System</p>	<p><b>Links</b></p> <p><b>Further reading</b></p> <p><b>Exercises:</b></p> <p>EXERCISE 1: Create a list of potential impacts of your business, and from this list document your mitigation measures and your monitoring strategy.</p> <p>EXERCISE 2: Create a flowchart (draft outline) for your system of communication showing how your sustainability management plan will be communicated to staff, local stakeholders and clients for implementation and monitoring.</p>
<p><b>Case Studies</b></p> <p>CASE STUDY 1: Madkapitj DG, quality oriented nature/adventure tourism operator CASE STUDY 2: Wilderness Scotland</p>	<p><b>Individual Learning Portfolio</b></p>	<p><b>Criteria and Sub-Criteria</b></p>

The units include the basic concepts relating to the topic. Some theory is included, although practice is emphasised at all times. There are links to best practice case studies and further reading linked to websites offering examples as well as practical tools which you can use to develop your business. The units are also linked back to the EETLS and the best practice examples on the EEN website <http://ecolnet.ning.com>

A table provides you with guidance about how the training units link to the EETLS criteria. It also suggests which units are relevant to specific types of businesses.

Some training units are relevant to specific types of businesses and present different interests/options depending on whether a business is a startup or already established. Established businesses may want to ignore the sections on starting a business, but it is always good to review your business practices. Therefore, if you have the time and interest to scan through some of the other units, you may get some new ideas and find a more efficient or cost-effective way of carrying out your work.

If you have any questions, the helpdesk is there to offer advice. You can also contact your local partner in your native language and the message will be passed on to the appropriate person.

#### ■ Click to go further: links to best practices and further reading

There is a wealth of information within the training units and it is up to you to decide how to use them. However, we suggest you skim through the table of contents relating to the units which interest you and/or you feel will directly benefit your business. After that, you may want to browse through some of the other topics for possible new business ideas and to learn more about ecotourism and sustainable tourism in general.

Finally, the units include links to best practice case studies and further reading linked to websites which offer examples as well as practical tools to develop your business.

Other links to best practices include:

- the knowledge centre on the ECOLNET website <http://www.ecotourism-network.eu>
- the Library on the EEN website: <http://ecolnet.ning.com>

Don't forget that there is an enormous amount of information about ecotourism businesses on the internet. You can learn valuable information by studying other businesses (both well and poorly run), so spend some time on the various search engines looking for your chosen business type. Analyse what they are doing, how they are doing it and whether you could do it better.

## D2. Learning material for Evaluators

Evaluators can also have access to a special ecotourism training package. A professional and well-trained evaluator has an integral role in the evaluation process, thereby adding credibility to the procedure. Evaluators working for ecotourism certification agencies which use the EETLS as their labelling standard will certainly gain from this learning material.

The competencies required for the EETLS can be divided into two categories: general

and specific. General competencies include those relating to personal attributes (e.g. ethical, fair, observant, diplomatic, self-reliant, etc.), skills (e.g. organisation, record-keeping, communication, prioritising, presentation), to a limited respect knowledge (e.g. general awareness of cultural norms and customs, the ability to judge what is relevant and correct based on experience or learning) and in some cases conflict management. Specific competencies relate to the aims of the EETLS and include being able to thoroughly understand what the criteria mean, how to source supporting information to enhance their understanding and how to use it to evaluate the outcome.

Although the general competencies should come from their own inherent abilities and skills and/or previous training, the specific knowledge and skills required may need further education and training. The ecotourism training package provided by ECOLNET contributes to this need.

If you are an evaluator, this ecotourism training can broaden your skill base and help you gain experience and/or additional knowledge. In turn, you will become more confident in fulfilling your role as an EETLS evaluator.

#### How to proceed:

After registering in the EEN platform, click on the EETLS page, which will ask you for a login name and password. You can choose from the 9 languages available on the ecotourism training tool.



The evaluators' learning package includes all the training material for ecotourism businesses to ensure that the evaluator has the same knowledge as the business he or she evaluates.

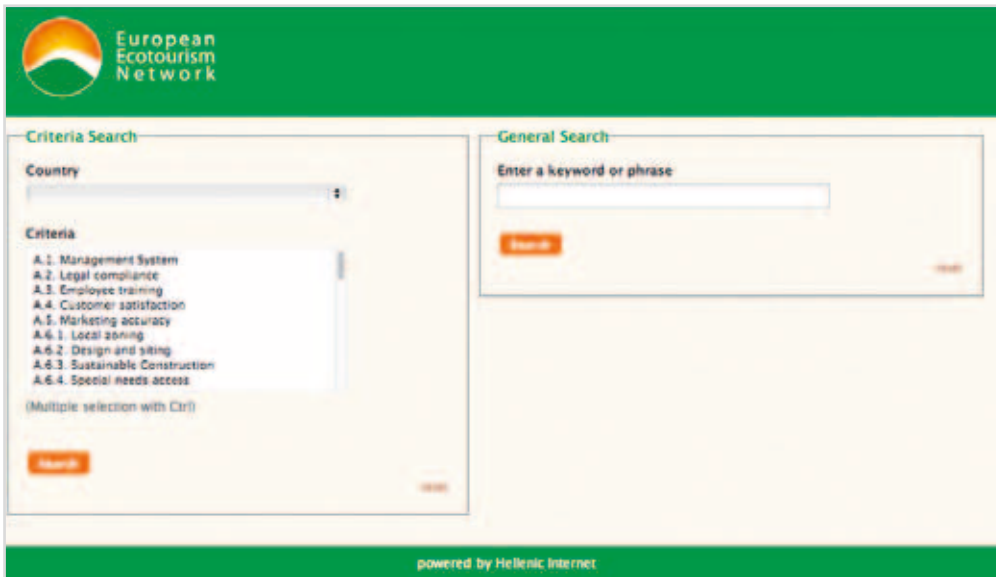
The ecotourism training for evaluators also contains a separate section that refers to the personal skills of the evaluators and includes an analysis of the EETLS criteria and their application via the e-evaluation tools.

**Specific Training Units which cover several topics**

- ▣ Evaluator skills (personal skills)
- ▣ The EETLS
- ▣ The EETLS evaluation process and the online tool

### D3. Best Practice Library

The Library of Best Practice aims, through a number of case studies for each of the criteria and indicator sub-groups, to link best practice examples of ecotourism with the practical implementation of the EETLS criteria. Every case study is described and the content of the best practice is analysed and linked to the EETLS criteria. The Library offers a search facility which is linked to the evaluation tools developed by ECOLNET.



You may consult the best practices via:

- ▣ the knowledge centre on the ECOLNET website: <http://www.ecotourism-network.eu>
- ▣ the library on the EEN online community's platform: <http://ecolnet.ning.com>
- ▣ the EEN Knowledge Base on DestiNet: <http://destinet.eu/who-who/civil-society-ngos/european-ecotourism-network/good-practice>



## Annex 1 - The 4 Groups of Criteria of the EETLS

### A - Group of Criteria

- A.1** Management System
- A.2** Legal Compliance
- A.3** Employee Training
- A.4** Customer Satisfaction
- A.5** Marketing Accuracy
- A.6** Design and Construction of Buildings and Infrastructure
  - A.6.1** Local Zoning
  - A.6.2** Design and Siting
  - A.6.3** Sustainable Construction
  - A.6.4** Disabled Access
- A.7** Interpretation
- A.8** Compliance of activities with special regulations in protected areas
- A.9** Raise visitors' sensitivity of the host destination

### B - Group of Criteria

- B.1** Community Development
- B.2** Local Employment
- B.3** Fair-Trade
- B.4** Local Entrepreneurs
- B.5** Indigenous Communities
- B.6** Exploitation
- B.7** Equitable Hiring
- B.8** Employee Protection
- B.9** Basic Services

### C - Group of Criteria

- C.1** Cultural Code of Conduct
- C.2** Historical Artefacts
- C.3** Protection of Sites
- C.4** Incorporation of Culture

### D - Group of Criteria

- D.1** Goods and resources consumption
  - D.1.1** Purchasing Policy
  - D.1.2** Consumable Goods
  - D.1.3** Energy Consumption
  - D.1.4** Water Consumption
- D.2** Waste disposal
  - D.2.1** Wastewater
  - D.2.2** Solid Waste Disposal
  - D.2.3** Harmful Substances
  - D.2.4** Other Pollutants
- D.3** Wildlife and biodiversity
  - D.3.1** Wildlife Species
  - D.3.2** Wildlife in Captivity
  - D.3.3** Landscaping
  - D.3.4** Biodiversity Conservation
  - D.3.5** Interactions with Wildlife

## Annex 2 - Ecotourism Training Package for businesses

### Introduction to Training Packages (for business)

The following training packages include a series of topics linked to three main areas

#### 1. Establishing and Managing Your Business

- 1.1 Is Ecotourism the way forward
- 1.2 How to write a business plan
- 1.3 The Law and your Business
- 1.4 Documenting your business
- 1.5 Ethics and your business
- 1.6 Managing Staff
- 1.7 Health and Safety at Work - (no further information other than stating a Certificate is required)
- 1.8 Marketing your Business
- 1.9 The role of Certificate and awards to your business
- 1.10 Involving Local Communities and People
- 1.11 Community Payback - getting involved with your local community
- 1.12 Supporting Biodiversity

#### 2. Service and Your Clients

- 2.1 Meeting Customer demands
- 2.2 Guiding and Interpreting
- 2.3 The role of customer feedback
- 2.4 Visitor payback schemes
- 2.5 Health and Safety and Risk Assessments
- 2.6 Providing Food and Drink
- 2.7 Activity tourism

#### 3. Sustainable Business practice

- 3.1 Managing sustainable business
- 3.2 Environmental Legislation and Codes of Practice
- 3.3 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Socio Economic Impact Assessment (SIA)
- 3.4 Sustainable building design and construction
- 3.5 Servicing your business
- 3.6 Environmentally Sensitive Business Operation (and Accommodation)

## Annex 3 - Contacts and Links

### The partners of ECOLNET

#### PRISMA Centre for Development Studies Greece

Contact: Fouli Papageorgiou  
foulipapageorgiou@prismanet.gr  
<http://www.prismanet.gr>

#### ECOTRANS e.V Germany

Contact: Herbert Hamele  
herbert.hamele@ecotrans.de  
<http://www.ecotrans.org>

#### ECEAT The Netherlands

Contact: Naut Kusters  
n.kusters@eceat-projects.org  
<http://www.eceat-projects.org>

#### Association of Ecotourism in Romania Romania

Contact: Andrei Blumer  
andrei.blumer@eco-romania.ro  
<http://www.eco-romania.ro>

#### Estonian University of Life Sciences Estonia

Contact: Lea Sudakova  
lea.sudakova@emu.ee  
<http://www.emu.ee>

#### Edinburgh Napier University United Kingdom

Contact: Kathy Velandar  
K.Velandar@napier.ac.uk  
<http://www.napier.ac.uk>

#### PAN Parks Foundation The Netherlands

Contact: Louis Frankenhuis  
louisfrankenhuis@yahoo.com  
<http://www.panparks.org/>

#### CTS - Sustainable Tourism Department Italy

Contact: Micaela Solinas  
msolinas@cts.it  
<http://www.ctsassociazione.it>

<p><b>imaginary srl</b>                  Contact: Luca Rioli                  luca.rioli@i-maginary.it  <a href="http://www.i-maginary.it/">http://www.i-maginary.it/</a></p>	<p><b>Italy</b></p>
<p><b>ECOTONO</b>                  Contact: Amanda Guzman                  aguzman@ecotono.es  <a href="http://www.ecotono.es">http://www.ecotono.es</a></p>	<p><b>Spain</b></p>
<p><b>Silvacultura ltd</b>                  Contact: Pekka Alhojärvi                  pekka.alhojarvi@silvacultura.com  <a href="http://www.silvacultura.com">http://www.silvacultura.com</a></p>	<p><b>Finland</b></p>
<p><b>Estonian Ecotourism Association</b>                  Contact: Aivar Ruukel                  aivar.ruukel@gmail.com  <a href="http://www.ecotourism.ee">http://www.ecotourism.ee</a></p>	<p><b>Estonia</b></p>

- Ecolnet main links**
- ▣ <http://www.ecotourism-network.eu> - The website of the ECOLNET project
  - ▣ <http://ecolnet.ning.com> - The European Ecotourism Network
  - ▣ <http://destinet.eu/who-who/civil-society-ngos/european-ecotourism-network> - The European Ecotourism Network Knowledge Base on DestiNet
  - ▣ [http://data.prismanet.gr/ecolnet-case-studies/search\\_form.php](http://data.prismanet.gr/ecolnet-case-studies/search_form.php) - The Best Practice Library
  - ▣ <http://eetls.eu> - The Ecotourism Training Platform

User Notes

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