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Comparative Analysis of Sustainability Certifications in Romanian Tourism

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Abstract: *This paper analyzes the sustainability certifications and standards displayed by 50 lodging establishments in Romania, selected from the Booking.com platform. The research aims to identify the existing systems, their prevalence, key characteristics, and the geographic distribution of the establishments analyzed. Six sustainability systems were identified, of which Green Key is the most common. The results highlight differences between tourism-specific certifications, management standards, and building assessment systems, as well as an uneven geographic distribution, with a higher concentration in Bucharest.*

• Introduction

Sustainable tourism aims to reduce the negative impact of tourism activities and maintain a balance between environmental, economic, and sociocultural aspects. It involves the responsible use of natural resources, the protection of biodiversity, respect for local heritage, and support for long-term economic development.

In this context, lodging facilities can contribute to the implementation of sustainability principles through the efficient use of energy and water and responsible waste management. Sustainability certifications serve as tools for evaluating these practices. Among the systems analyzed are Green Key, EU Ecolabel, Eco-Romania, ISO 14001, ISO 50001, and BREEAM In-Use.

• Material and method

The study analyzed 50 lodging facilities in Romania, based on information available on Booking.com. Six sustainability systems were identified: Green Key, Eco-Romania, EU Ecolabel, ISO 14001:2015, ISO 50001:2018, and BREEAM In-Use. The data was compiled into an Excel spreadsheet to analyze the frequency of certifications, compare them, and create a geographic map. The analysis is based exclusively on the information displayed on Booking.com, without independent verification of the validity of the certifications.

Table 1. Number of certifications and standards analyzed

Sustainability Certificates and Standards	Number of occurrences	%
Green Key (FEE)	27	43.55%
ISO 14001:2015	9	14.52%
ISO 50001:2018	9	14.52%
EU Ecolabel	6	9.68%
Eco-România	6	9.68%
BREEAM In-Use	5	8.06%
Total	**62**	

Key finding: Green Key ranks first, with 27 mentions (43.55%), followed by ISO 14001:2015 and ISO 50001:2018, each with 9 mentions (14.52%).

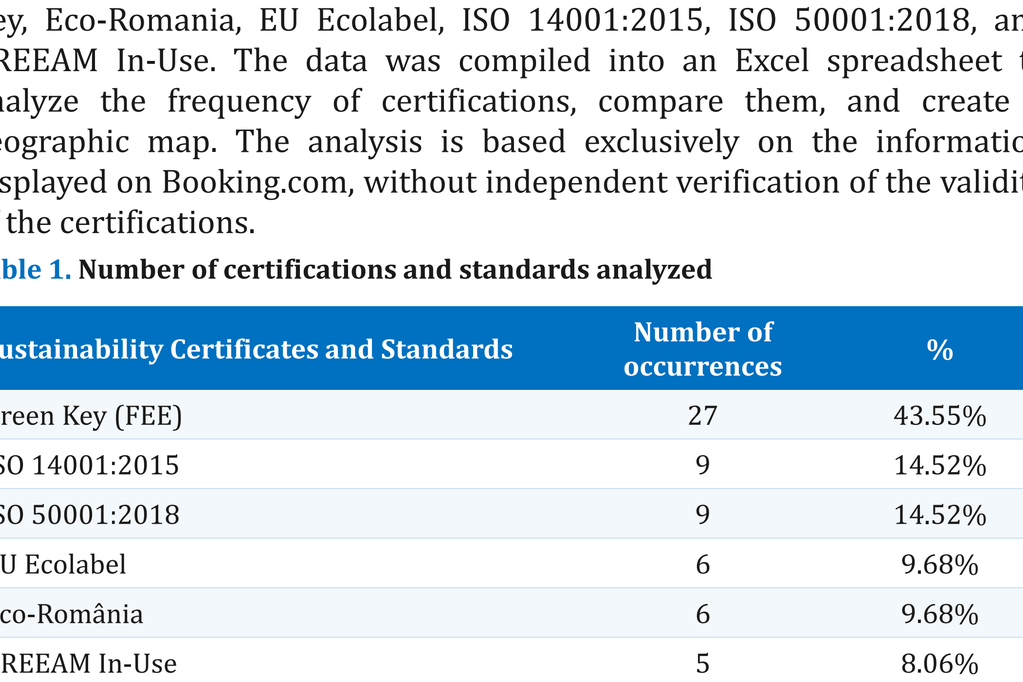


Figure 1. Map of the accommodations analyzed

• Results and discussions

3.1. Identification of Certifications and Standards

In the analysis of the 50 lodging facilities, six sustainability-related systems were identified: Green Key, EU Ecolabel, Eco-Romania, ISO 14001:2015, ISO 50001:2018, and BREEAM In-Use. These address sustainability from different perspectives, ranging from environmental practices in tourism and ecotourism to environmental management, energy efficiency, and building performance.

3.2. Frequency of Certifications and Standards

In the 50 establishments analyzed, there were 62 instances of certifications and standards, as some lodging establishments have multiple systems.

3.3. Geographic Distribution of the Units Analyzed

The geographic distribution shows a concentration of lodging facilities in Bucharest, where 18 of the 50 facilities analyzed were identified, representing 36% of the sample. The remaining facilities are spread across several cities, including Cluj-Napoca, Iași, Timișoara, Sibiu, and Brașov.

3.4. Comparison of Sustainability Systems

The systems analyzed differ in their scope and the criteria evaluated. Green Key and the EU Ecolabel are geared toward the tourism sector; Eco-Romania emphasizes ecotourism and local communities; and ISO 14001 and ISO 50001 focus on environmental management and energy efficiency, respectively. BREEAM In-Use focuses on the sustainability performance of existing buildings.

Table 2. Key characteristics of the systems analyzed

System	Main Domain	Evaluated Aspects
Green Key	Tourism and hospitality	Water, energy, waste, and sustainable management
Eco-România	Ecoturism	Nature conservation and local communities
ISO 14001:2015	Environmental management	Identifying and reducing environmental impact
ISO 50001:2018	Energy management	Monitoring and improving energy efficiency
EU Ecolabel	Tourist accommodation services	Resource consumption and environmental impact reduction
BREEAM In-Use	Existing buildings	Sustainability performance of buildings

The comparison highlights the fact that the six systems are not directly equivalent but have complementary objectives, contributing to the sustainability of lodging establishments from different perspectives.

• Conclusions

The analysis highlights the diversity of sustainability systems used in Romania's lodging sector. Green Key was the most frequently identified, and the geographic distribution of the analyzed establishments indicates a concentration in Bucharest. The six systems have different but complementary objectives, contributing to the promotion of sustainable practices in tourism.