Development and implementation of a sustainability labelling scheme including varying certification levels

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Abstract

Eco-label schemes seek to encourage a transition towards sustainable and more environmentally friendly consumption patterns. Those schemes, could serve as the basis to urge organizations and management bodies to increase the environmental performance of the facilities, products and services. The economic and environmental opportunities that an eco-label could potentially offer are well acknowledged by industry and governmental and non-governmental organizations. Eco-labeling schemes can provide a tool for industries/organizations to fulfill their commitments imposed by legislative frameworks or international agreements on important environmental issues. This paper presents the stages of development and implemantation of a sustainability labelling scheme for protected areas that include anthropogenic activities within their boundaries.

KEYWORDS

Sustainability; Eco-labelling schemes; Protected Areas

1. INTRODUCTION

To guide society towards sustainability, pertinent and adequate ecological data about both products/services and organizational performance, nowadays is a required necessity for consumers, experts and producers in order to advise their choices. (Bratt et al., 2011). Recently, one of the methodologies that have gained expanding significance is that of “environmental labelling” or 'eco-labelling'. Eco-labels aim to inform consumers about the impacts on the environment of the production, consumption and waste disposal practices of the products/services consumed. Therefore, eco-labelling revolves around three objectives: (i) to provide consumers with more information about the environmental effects of their consumption, generating a change towards more environmentally friendly consumption patterns, (ii) to encourage producers, governments and other agents to increase the environmental standards of products/services (Gallastegui, 2002), and (iii) to protect domestic production (Stein, 2009).

There are three types of eco-labels that can be identified (OECD, 1997):

(i) Type I labels refer to the environmental quality of a product compared with the rest of the products and are meant to encourage a switch towards more environmentally friendly consumption habits.

(ii) Type II labels consist of one-sided informative environmental claims made by manufacturers, importers or distributors and refer to specific attributes of products, such as ‘CFC free’ products.

(iii) Type III labels use pre-set indices and give quantified information about products based on independent verification. Given that there is not enough experience with such labels, they are rarely found in environmental fields.

For the successful implementation of an environmental label, the responsible government agency (or other responsible establishing bodies) has to consider several steps: i) Preparation and Launching Phase when the responsibilities are assigned, as well as the selection and determination of product/services and categories. ii) Negotiation phase, when the criteria, standards and guidelines are developed, and iii) Implementation Phase, when the certification and licensing is taking place (Porrini, 2005).

2. BIO2CARE SUSTAINABILITY LABELLING SCHEME

As part of the the project "Reinforcing protected areas capacity through an innovative methodology for sustainability (BIO2CARE)", co-funded by the European Union under the INTERREG V – A "Greece-Bulgaria 2014-2020" Territorial Cooperation Program, the development of a sustainability scheme targetting protected areas was developed. The significance of this label is the fact that it takes into account protected areas that include anthropogenic activities within their boundaries. The overall objective of BIO2CARE is to improve the carrying capacity of protected areas, promote sustainable development and reduce carbon emissions. Consequently, as part of the project, BIO2CARE Sustainability labelling scheme and its varying certification levels revolve around these objective. The varying certification levels (not in their final form) are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: BIO2CARE Label and levels of certification

Certification Level	Description
Protected Areas	
	Labelling Scheme given to protected areas that implement the 2CARE decision making platform
	Labelling Scheme given to protected areas that implement the 2CARE decision making platform and communicate the results for at least 2 consecutive years.
Activities within Protected Areas	
	Given to products that are produced within the borders of protected areas.
	Given to companies and organizations within the protected areas that contribute to the development of symbiotic activities
	Given to companies/organizations, initiatives and activities that reduced the CO2 emissions.

3. CONCLUSIONS

For eco-labeling to work, it's essential that labels appear only on products/services that meet the standards they advertise. In practice, that means that the interesting party, have to apply to some certification authority for a license to display a label, which is granted only if their product/service meets specific criteria. Based on the overall methodology of BIO2CARE those criteria are objectively developed and transparent, while based solely on scientific data. Furhermore, BIO2CARE labelling scheme sets as priority the need to address and supervise the anhropogenic activities within protected areas. Through the next step of implementing the scheme on the National Park of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, and Rila National Park in Bulgaria, there will be more tangible results and a clear picture regarding the reception of the eco-label from the interested parties.

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