

Environmental certification and labelling in tourism and hospitality

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Abstract. Environmental labelling has become an important instrument for improving environmental performance, service quality and organisational competitiveness in tourism and hospitality. The alignment of Ukraine's regulatory framework with European environmental requirements has increased the importance of developing an effective environmental certification system for accommodation establishments. The aim of this study was to evaluate environmental certification and labelling in tourism and hospitality through a comparative analysis of international certification schemes and the Ukrainian regulatory framework and to identify priorities for further alignment with European standards. The research employed comparative, regulatory and document analysis together with synthesis to examine international environmental certification schemes, European regulatory documents and the Ukrainian environmental certification framework. The findings demonstrated that the leading international certification schemes are based on common methodological principles, including independent assessment, environmental management and continuous improvement. The analysis confirmed that the Ukrainian environmental certification framework is largely harmonised with European approaches through the adoption of internationally recognised criteria covering energy and water efficiency, waste management, sustainable procurement, environmental communication and organisational management. A distinctive feature of the national system is the introduction of a performance-based environmental rating that encourages continuous improvement among accommodation establishments. The study also identified priorities for strengthening the national certification framework, including wider implementation of environmental management practices, greater stakeholder awareness and closer alignment with European certification approaches. The findings indicated that environmental labelling should be regarded as an effective quality management instrument supporting sustainable tourism development. The results may be applied to improve Ukraine's environmental certification system, enhance environmental management in accommodation establishments and strengthen the competitiveness of the national tourism and hospitality

Keywords: environmental criteria; environmental management; accommodation establishments; sustainable development; European standards

Introduction

The transition towards more sustainable patterns of economic development has reshaped priorities across the global tourism and hospitality industry, with greater emphasis on resource efficiency, environmental performance and responsible management. Environmental performance is increasingly regarded as a fundamental component of service quality, organisational governance and long-term competitiveness rather than an additional characteristic

of tourism products. As travellers become more attentive to the environmental impact of their purchasing decisions and regulatory frameworks place greater emphasis on sustainable business practices, tourism enterprises are expected to demonstrate measurable improvements in resource efficiency, environmental management and corporate responsibility. Within this changing landscape, environmental labelling has become one of the most widely recognised

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mechanisms for verifying environmental performance and communicating compliance with independently assessed sustainability criteria.

Environmental labelling has increasingly developed from a primarily promotional instrument into a broader mechanism for assessing environmental performance and supporting organisational sustainability. K. Bučar *et al.* (2022) analysed the development of environmental certification in tourism and hospitality and demonstrated that contemporary Type I environmental labelling schemes were based on comprehensive sets of environmental criteria and independent third-party verification. The authors emphasised that certification increasingly covered interconnected areas of organisational activity, including energy and water efficiency, waste management, sustainable procurement and environmental communication. Their findings indicated that the effectiveness of environmental labelling depended on the systematic assessment of enterprise performance rather than on the implementation of individual environmental measures. This perspective is particularly important for tourism and hospitality enterprises because it links environmental certification with the broader management of operational processes. The organisational implications of sustainability certification were further examined by S. Bianco *et al.* (2023). The researchers investigated the relationship between sustainability certification and hotel performance and found that certified enterprises demonstrated improvements in resource management and organisational sustainability practices. Their analysis showed that certification could contribute to stronger environmental performance when its requirements were incorporated into everyday management processes. At the same time, the authors identified certification as a mechanism that could support market positioning by providing external confirmation of an enterprise's environmental commitments. Thus, their findings extended the understanding of environmental labels beyond their informational function and demonstrated their connection with organisational performance and competitiveness.

The researchers R. Rodríguez-García *et al.* (2023) examined the conditions under which sustainability certification generated meaningful organisational outcomes. The researchers found that certification was more effective when sustainability principles were integrated across organisational processes rather than introduced exclusively for the purpose of obtaining an environmental label. Their analysis demonstrated that formal certification by itself did not guarantee substantial environmental improvements. Instead, its effectiveness depended on the extent to which environmental objectives were incorporated into decision-making, operational procedures and organisational practices. This conclusion is significant for the assessment of certification systems because it highlights the importance of the internal implementation of certification requirements in addition to formal compliance. The management dimension of environmental sustainability was explored by V. Guerra-Lombardi *et al.* (2024), who analysed

sustainability practices in hospitality enterprises. The authors demonstrated that environmental performance was associated with the coordinated implementation of energy management, water efficiency, waste reduction, sustainable purchasing, employee training and systematic environmental monitoring. Their research showed that enterprises achieved more consistent environmental improvements when these measures were integrated into operational management rather than implemented as separate environmental initiatives. Consequently, the study provided evidence that effective environmental certification should be considered within an integrated management framework that connects environmental criteria with the daily functioning of hospitality enterprises.

P. Beusch *et al.* (2022) investigated integrated sustainability management systems and examined the use of environmental indicators in organisational governance and performance evaluation. The researchers demonstrated that systematic environmental monitoring enabled enterprises to evaluate their progress identify areas requiring improvement and incorporate sustainability indicators into managerial decision-making. Their findings are relevant to environmental certification because certification systems require measurable criteria and mechanisms for verifying compliance. The study therefore supports the view that credible environmental labelling should be connected with systematic performance assessment rather than relying exclusively on declarations made by enterprises. The connection between environmental practices and competitiveness was examined by S. Bani-Melhem *et al.* (2023). The authors investigated green innovation in the hotel sector and demonstrated that environmental initiatives could strengthen organisational adaptability, technological development and competitive performance. Their findings showed that environmental management generated effects extending beyond compliance with environmental requirements because it could contribute to operational efficiency and long-term organisational development. From the perspective of environmental certification, this evidence suggests that certification criteria can create managerial value when they encourage enterprises to introduce technological and organisational improvements rather than simply satisfy formal requirements. S. Silva *et al.* (2025) focused on the human and organisational factors underlying the implementation of sustainability strategies in hospitality. The researchers demonstrated that the successful integration of environmental practices required appropriate managerial capabilities and employee competencies. Their analysis highlighted staff training, organisational learning and employee involvement as important conditions for the implementation of sustainability-oriented management practices. These findings are relevant to environmental certification schemes because compliance with environmental criteria frequently requires changes in employee behaviour and operational routines. Therefore, the effectiveness of certification depends partly on whether enterprises possess the

organisational and professional capacity necessary to implement the relevant requirements.

The Ukrainian context has been examined in recent tourism and hospitality research. V. Kalenska & V. Liubchenko (2023) analysed environmental responsibility in tourism enterprises and demonstrated its increasing relevance for service competitiveness. Their research indicated that environmental responsibility was becoming increasingly integrated into the assessment of tourism service quality and enterprise competitiveness. The authors' findings suggest that environmental criteria should be considered not as an isolated component of enterprise activity but as part of a broader system of quality and competitiveness management. O. Zelenko & H. Kozodub (2024) investigated environmentally responsible management in tourism and hospitality and emphasised the integration of environmental principles into enterprise management. Their analysis demonstrated that environmental responsibility required the systematic adoption of environmentally oriented management practices rather than individual measures with limited organisational integration. This approach corresponds with the international research discussed above and indicates the need to consider environmental certification within a comprehensive management framework in the Ukrainian tourism and hospitality sector.

H. Chmil & H. Tsiatska (2025) examined environmental responsibility and environmental image in tourism and hospitality and demonstrated that environmental characteristics could influence the market positioning and communication of tourism enterprises. Their research highlighted the connection between environmental practices and the perception of enterprises by consumers and other stakeholders. The findings are directly relevant to environmental labelling because a credible label can provide consumers with externally verified information about an enterprise's environmental performance. At the same time, the study reinforces the need for reliable certification mechanisms capable of distinguishing substantiated environmental performance from purely promotional environmental claims. N. Yakymenko-Tereshchenko *et al.* (2023) examined standardisation and certification within the quality management of tourism services. The researchers emphasised the function of formalised standards and certification mechanisms in ensuring consistency in service provision and strengthening organisational management. Their analysis demonstrated that standardisation could provide a structured framework for evaluating enterprise performance and supporting continuous improvement. In the context of environmental labelling, these findings demonstrate the need for clearly defined, measurable and consistently applied criteria for assessing tourism and hospitality enterprises.

I. Nestoryshen *et al.* (2026) analysed regulatory approaches to sustainable development in tourism and hospitality and emphasised the increasing relevance of regulatory and standardisation mechanisms for implementing sustainability principles. The authors demonstrated that

the effectiveness of sustainability-oriented measures was closely connected with the regulatory environment in which tourism enterprises operated. Their findings are directly relevant to environmental certification because the development of national certification and labelling mechanisms requires compatibility between international environmental criteria and national legislation. This regulatory dimension is particularly relevant for Ukraine in the context of its progressive alignment with European standards. Despite the growing body of international and Ukrainian research on environmental responsibility, sustainable management, certification and environmental performance in tourism and hospitality, the methodological and regulatory alignment of Ukraine's environmental labelling framework with contemporary European certification systems remains insufficiently examined. In particular, limited attention has been given to the systematic comparison of certification criteria, assessment procedures and management requirements and to their applicability within the Ukrainian regulatory context. This gap necessitates a comparative analysis of international environmental certification systems and the Ukrainian framework to identify areas of methodological convergence, system-specific differences and priority directions for further alignment with European standards. The aim of this study was to substantiate contemporary approaches to environmental labelling for tourist accommodation through a comparative analysis of international certification systems and the Ukrainian regulatory framework in order to identify priority directions for harmonisation with European requirements.

Materials and Methods

Design of the study

The study employed a qualitative comparative documentary analysis to examine the methodological characteristics of environmental certification and labelling systems in tourism and hospitality and their applicability to the Ukrainian context. The analysis was conducted from January to April 2026 and focused on international environmental certification systems, relevant academic literature, international standards and the Ukrainian environmental labelling framework.

Materials of the study

The documentary material included official standards, certification requirements, methodological documents and publicly available regulatory information relating to environmental certification in tourism and hospitality. The analysis focused on the International Organization for Standardization (2020) series, particularly International Organization for Standardization (2018) and its Ukrainian adaptation DSTU ISO 14024:2018 (2018), as well as the European and international certification systems selected for comparative analysis. The academic literature was selected to provide a conceptual basis for interpreting environmental management, sustainability practices and certification mechanisms in tourism and hospitality. The

first thematic group comprised studies addressing environmental responsibility and sustainable management in tourism and hospitality, including P. Beusch *et al.* (2022), S. Bani-Melhem *et al.* (2023) and S. Bianco *et al.* (2023). These publications were used to identify approaches to environmental management, sustainability performance and organisational practices relevant to certification.

The second group included studies examining environmental practices, sustainability integration and operational management in tourism and hospitality. This group comprised K. Bučar *et al.* (2022), V. Kalenska & V. Liubchenko (2023) and V. Guerra-Lombardi *et al.* (2024). These studies provided evidence for interpreting the relationship between environmental responsibility, management practices and tourism enterprise performance. The third group comprised studies addressing environmental certification, standardisation, environmental communication and environmentally responsible management. The analysis included R. Rodríguez-García *et al.* (2023), N. Yakymenko-Tereshchenko *et al.* (2023) and S. Silva *et al.* (2025). The study by O. Zelenko & H. Kozodub (2024) was additionally considered in relation to environmentally responsible management in the Ukrainian tourism and hospitality context.

Five international environmental certification systems were selected for comparative analysis: EU Ecolabel, Green Key, Green Globe, Nordic Swan and the sustainability criteria developed by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). The systems were selected according to four predefined criteria: relevance to tourism and accommodation services; availability of formal environmental or sustainability criteria; presence of defined assessment or verification requirements; and relevance to the European or international tourism context. The GSTC framework was considered as a criteria and accreditation framework rather than as an individual certification operator.

Analytical procedure

The analysis was conducted in several stages. First, the environmental labelling systems were classified according to the three environmental labelling types defined within the ISO 14020 family: Type I, Type II and Type III. Four comparison criteria were applied: type of environmental claim, verification approach, assessment procedure and relationship between the producer and the assessing party. Type I labelling was defined as third-party certification based on predefined environmental criteria. Type II referred to self-declared environmental claims made by producers or service providers without mandatory independent certification. Type III referred to quantified environmental information based on life-cycle assessment and verified environmental data.

Second, the five selected international systems were examined using their official documentation. The systems were compared according to their scope, institutional basis, environmental assessment approach and principal certification characteristics. This stage established the common methodological features and system-specific differences

relevant to tourism and hospitality. Third, a comparative analysis was conducted using nine predefined assessment criteria: (1) conformity with the principles of International Organization for Standardization (2018); (2) independent third-party certification; (3) involvement of accredited certification bodies; (4) resource management, including energy, water and waste; (5) sustainable procurement; (6) environmental management and awareness among staff and guests; (7) continuous environmental improvement; (8) use of a rating or performance-level system; and (9) alignment with European standards. Each criterion was assessed using three coding categories: Present, Partial and Not identified. Present was assigned when the official documentation contained an explicit requirement, formal procedure or clearly defined mechanism corresponding to the criterion. Partial was assigned when the relevant aspect was addressed only partly, indirectly or without a complete requirement, assessment procedure or verification mechanism equivalent to the criterion under consideration. Not identified was assigned when no corresponding provision could be identified in the analysed official documentation.

The coding was based on the substantive content of the official documents rather than on the general reputation or stated objectives of the certification systems. Where a criterion was addressed through several provisions within the documentation, these provisions were considered collectively when determining the coding category. The same coding definitions and assessment criteria were applied to all selected systems to maintain consistency of comparison. The resulting comparative analysis was used to construct Table 3 as a comparative matrix. The matrix applies the same nine assessment criteria to the five international systems and the Ukrainian environmental labelling framework, allowing their methodological characteristics to be compared using a consistent analytical structure.

Analysis of the Ukrainian environmental labelling framework

The Ukrainian framework was analysed using the same criteria and analytical procedure applied to the international systems. Particular attention was given to SEM UA.10156.55.059:2025, Environmental Certification and Labelling System in accordance with DSTU ISO 14024:2018 (2018): Tourist Accommodation Establishments. Environmental Criteria and Assessment Method. The framework was examined in relation to its environmental criteria, conformity assessment procedure, certification requirements and performance-level structure. The Ukrainian system establishes 22 mandatory criteria and requires a minimum of 20 points from additional criteria. Certification is differentiated into four levels: Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum. This structure was analysed as a progressive performance-rating mechanism and compared with the certification and rating approaches used by the selected international systems.

The analysis also considered the relationship between the Ukrainian framework and International Organization for Standardization (2018) principles. Particular attention

was given to predefined environmental criteria, third-party conformity assessment, formal certification procedures and mechanisms for differentiating levels of environmental performance. The hierarchy of environmental certification systems presented in the study represents an author-generated conceptual synthesis based on the comparative documentary analysis. It is used to systematise the analysed approaches according to their methodological characteristics rather than to establish an official international classification.

Methodological limitations

The study was based exclusively on documentary analysis and does not include surveys, interviews or statistical measurements of the environmental or economic effects of certification. Consequently, the findings assess the methodological structure, assessment mechanisms and management requirements of the analysed systems rather than their causal effects on the performance of tourism and hospitality enterprises. The identified similarities and differences provide a basis for further empirical research into the implementation and outcomes of environmental certification in Ukraine.

Results

Types of environmental labelling and their application in tourism and hospitality

The comparative analysis of environmental certification systems in tourism and hospitality identified several common methodological dimensions, including environmental criteria, assessment procedures, verification mechanisms, resource management and continuous improvement. These dimensions reflect the integration of environmental requirements into organisational management and provide a basis for comparing the approaches applied by different certification systems. In Type I ecolabelling, such assessment is supported by independent third-party verification, which distinguishes certified environmental performance from general environmental claims. The analysed approaches also correspond to the environmental objectives of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those concerning responsible consumption and production, climate action and ecosystem protection (European Commission, 2019). At the European level, these approaches have developed within the policy context of the European Green Deal, which promotes resource efficiency, climate neutrality and the transition towards more sustainable economic models (Sun & Nasrullah, 2024). The analysed certification systems differ in the scope of environmental criteria, assessment procedures, management requirements and levels of conformity with European standards. Their comparison therefore makes it possible to identify common methodological principles and system-specific characteristics relevant to the development and further harmonisation of environmental certification in tourism and hospitality (Bi *et al.*, 2025).

For Ukraine, the European integration process has increased the relevance of aligning national environmental certification mechanisms with European approaches. The

development and application of environmental labelling for tourist accommodation therefore require consideration of both international certification practices and the specific Ukrainian regulatory framework. A comparison of these frameworks makes it possible to identify methodological similarities and differences, assess the degree of regulatory convergence and determine priority directions for the further harmonisation of environmental labelling in Ukrainian tourism and hospitality. International practice employs several approaches to verifying the environmental performance of products and services. These approaches differ in terms of assessment procedures, methods of verification and the level of credibility they provide to consumers. The fundamental principles governing environmental labels and environmental declarations are established by the ISO 14020 series of international standards, which provide a comprehensive framework for the development, implementation and communication of environmental information (Regulation (EC) of the European Parliament and of the Council No. 66/2010, 2009).

According to the ISO classification, three principal types of environmental labelling are distinguished. Type I environmental labelling is regulated by DSTU ISO 14024:2018 (2018) and is based on an independent multi-criteria assessment conducted by a third-party certification body. The environmental criteria are developed with consideration of the environmental impacts of products or services throughout their life cycle. The right to display an ecolabel is granted only after compliance with all established requirements has been independently verified. Consequently Type I environmental labelling is widely recognised as the most reliable and credible form of environmental certification, providing assurance to consumers and other stakeholders that environmental claims have undergone rigorous external assessment. Type II environmental labelling is defined by International Organization for Standardization (2016) and is characterised by self-declared environmental claims made directly by manufacturers or service providers without independent certification. Typical examples include statements indicating that a product is recyclable, reusable or biodegradable. Responsibility for the accuracy of these claims rests entirely with the organisation making them, which inevitably limits their credibility compared with independently verified certification schemes. Although self-declared claims may encourage organisations to communicate environmental initiatives, their effectiveness depends largely on corporate integrity and consumer confidence in the information provided.

Type III environmental labelling is regulated by International Organization for Standardization (2006) and is based on the quantitative assessment of environmental performance using Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) methodology. The results are presented in the form of a standardised Environmental Product Declaration (EPD), which contains independently verified quantitative indicators describing the environmental impacts of a product throughout its life cycle. Type III declarations are primarily applied

within manufacturing industries and professional procurement environments where objective comparison of measurable environmental performance indicators is required. Their technical nature makes them particularly valuable for business-to-business communication although they are less accessible to the general consumer. A comparative assessment of the three categories of environmental labelling indicates that Type I certification is the most appropriate model for the tourism and hospitality. Tourism enterprises operate through a wide range of interconnected activities

including energy and water management, waste reduction, sustainable procurement, food service operations, building maintenance and environmental communication with guests. The environmental performance of these organisations therefore cannot be adequately represented by a single indicator or isolated environmental claim. Instead, a comprehensive multi-criteria assessment provides a more accurate and balanced evaluation of organisational sustainability performance while encouraging continuous environmental improvement across all operational areas (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparison of environmental labelling types according to ISO standards

Criterion	Type I (ISO 14024)	Type II (ISO 14021)	Type III (ISO 14025)
Principle	Independent environmental certification	Self-declared environmental claims	Quantitative environmental declaration
Assessment	Independent third-party certification	Manufacturer or service provider	Independent verification
Basis	Multi-criteria assessment based on life-cycle considerations	Individual environmental claims	LCA
Outcome	Ecolabel	Environmental claim	EPD
Examples	EU Ecolabel, Green Key, Nordic Swan	Recyclable, Biodegradable	Environmental Product Declaration
Application in tourism and hospitality	Widely applied	Limited	Rarely applied

Note: ISO – International Organization for Standardization, LCA – Life Cycle Assessment, EPD – Environmental Product Declaration

Source: compiled by the author

The leading international environmental certification systems applied in tourism and hospitality are based on the principles of International Organization for Standardization (2018), although their assessment structures and implementation mechanisms differ. Systems such as the EU Ecolabel, Green Key and Nordic Swan apply predefined environmental criteria and independent verification, while differing in the scope of assessed indicators, certification requirements and approaches to monitoring and continuous improvement. These differences provide a basis for comparing the methodological characteristics of the systems and identifying elements relevant to the Ukrainian context. The European development of environmental certification in tourism has been closely associated with the integration of sustainability principles into tourism and environmental policy. A further stage involved the development and harmonisation of environmental criteria for tourism accommodation. The EU Ecolabel established a common assessment framework covering a broad range of operational areas, including energy and water use, waste management, procurement and accommodation-related services. In contrast, other international systems apply different combinations of criteria and assessment mechanisms, reflecting their respective institutional and methodological approaches.

The comparative analysis indicates that the systems converge primarily in their attention to resource efficiency, waste prevention, sustainable procurement and environmental management. At the same time, they differ in the structure and number of criteria, the weighting of environmental indicators, verification procedures, certification

levels and approaches to performance monitoring. The EU Ecolabel demonstrates a highly structured regulatory approach, Green Key places greater emphasis on operational environmental management, while broader systems such as Green Globe incorporate environmental requirements within a wider sustainability framework. For Ukraine, these differences indicate that European experience should be considered through selective methodological adaptation rather than direct replication of an individual certification system. The most relevant elements include clearly defined environmental criteria, transparent assessment procedures, independent verification and mechanisms for regular improvement, which can be incorporated into the further development of the national environmental labelling framework.

Development of environmental labelling in EU tourism and its relevance to Ukraine

The comparative analysis identified five major international environmental certification systems relevant to tourism and hospitality: EU Ecolabel, Green Key, Green Globe, Nordic Swan and the sustainability criteria developed by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). Although these systems differ in their organisational structures, governance models and assessment procedures, they are generally founded upon common principles, namely voluntary participation, independent third-party verification and continuous improvement of environmental performance. Collectively, these systems provide frameworks for assessing environmental performance across accommodation establishments, food service businesses and other components of tourism infrastructure (Table 2).

Table 2. International environmental labelling schemes in the tourism and hospitality

Scheme	Organisation	Scope of certification	Key characteristics
EU Ecolabel	European Commission	Hotels, campsites and other tourist accommodation	Official European Union ecolabelling programme based on the principles of ISO 14024
Green Key	FEE	Hotels, campsites, restaurants and tourism attractions	One of the most widely implemented voluntary environmental certification programmes in the hospitality sector
Green Globe	Green Globe Certification	Hotels, resorts, tourism companies and convention centres	Comprehensive assessment of environmental, social and governance performance
Nordic Swan	Nordic Ecolabelling	Hotels and other accommodation establishments	Official Nordic ecolabelling system harmonised with ISO 14024 principles
GSTC	Global Sustainable Tourism Council	Destinations, hotels and tour operators through accredited certification bodies	Establishes international sustainable tourism criteria and accredits certification programmes

Note: EU – European Union, GSTC – Global Sustainable Tourism Council, FEE – Foundation for Environmental Education, ISO – International Organization for Standardization

Source: compiled by the author based on European Commission (n.d.), Foundation for Environmental Education (n.d.), Global Sustainable Tourism Council (n.d.), International Organization for Standardization (2018), Nordic Ecolabelling (2026)

A comparative review of international environmental certification schemes demonstrates that, despite differences in governance structures, scope and assessment procedures; they share a common focus on reducing the environmental impacts of tourism and hospitality. Energy and water efficiency, waste management, sustainable procurement, environmental awareness and continuous improvement constitute the principal areas addressed across the schemes. However, the comparison reveals differences in the depth and orientation of these requirements. The EU Ecolabel represents the most strongly standardised regulatory approach, as its criteria for tourist accommodation are established within the European Union regulatory framework and periodically revised in accordance with environmental policy and technological developments (European Commission, n.d.). Green Key places greater emphasis on the practical implementation of environmental management in accommodation establishments, including staff involvement, guest awareness, resource efficiency and continuous improvement (Foundation for Environmental Education, n.d.). Green Globe applies a broader sustainability framework that combines environmental requirements with social, cultural and governance dimensions, while GSTC establishes internationally recognised sustainability criteria and provides a framework for the accreditation and recognition of certification bodies rather than operating as a certification scheme itself (Green Globe, n.d.; Global Sustainable Tourism Council, n.d.).

These differences indicate that the European and international experience provides several complementary approaches that could be considered in the development of Ukraine's environmental labelling system. The EU Ecolabel approach is particularly relevant for establishing clearly defined, measurable and periodically updated environmental criteria and ensuring consistency with European regulatory requirements (European Commission, n.d.). The operational model of Green Key could be adapted to strengthen requirements concerning the practical implementation

of environmental management, staff participation, guest awareness and continuous improvement within accommodation establishments (Foundation for Environmental Education, n.d.). Selected elements of the Green Globe (n.d.) framework could be considered for extending environmental certification towards broader sustainability management, particularly where environmental performance is interconnected with social responsibility, cultural heritage and organisational governance. The GSTC framework demonstrates the value of internationally comparable criteria and structured certification and accreditation mechanisms, which could contribute to greater transparency and credibility of the Ukrainian system (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, n.d.).

For Ukraine, these approaches are relevant within the broader process of European integration and the approximation of national environmental regulation to European standards I. Neuweg *et al.* (2023) emphasised the importance of strengthening environmental governance and applying European approaches to environmental policy and sustainable economic development in Ukraine. In this context, the development of environmental labelling for tourist accommodation should be based not on the direct replication of any single international system but on the selective adaptation of compatible methodological principles, particularly in relation to environmental criteria, verification, resource efficiency and continuous improvement. Such an approach would combine the regulatory consistency of the EU Ecolabel, the operational orientation of Green Key, the broader sustainability perspective of Green Globe and the international comparability promoted by the GSTC framework. The comparative analysis showed that the systems have a common environmental foundation but differ in their assessment approaches, scope and level of standardisation. These differences confirm the relevance of selective adaptation of international practices to strengthen the consistency and European compatibility of the Ukrainian environmental labelling framework.

Environmental labelling of tourist accommodation in Ukraine: Harmonisation with European standards

In line with international sustainability approaches, Ukraine has developed its own environmental labelling framework for tourist accommodation based on recognised environmental assessment principles. Ukraine introduced the SEM UA.1O156.55.059:2025 Environmental Certification and Labelling System in accordance with DSTU ISO 14024:2018, “Tourist Accommodation Establishments. Environmental Criteria and Assessment Method”, which entered into force on 1 September 2025 (All-Ukrainian Non-Governmental Organization “Living Planet”, 2025a). To obtain certification and the Green Crane ecolabel, tourism accommodation providers are required to demonstrate compliance with all 22 mandatory criteria and achieve a minimum of 20 points across the additional voluntary criteria. The rating-based assessment system assigns an environmental certification level ranging from Bronze to Platinum, reflecting the overall degree of compliance with the established environmental performance criteria. The adoption of this standard represents the first comprehensive national framework specifically designed to assess the environmental performance of accommodation establishments through a structured ecolabelling system consistent with internationally recognised certification principles. A defining characteristic of the standard is its harmonisation with Commission Decision (EU) No. 2017/175 (2017),

which established the EU Ecolabel criteria for tourist accommodation services.

Consequently, the environmental assessment of Ukrainian accommodation providers is conducted according to the same methodological principles applied throughout the Member States of the European Union. Such regulatory alignment promotes consistency in environmental assessment, facilitates mutual recognition of sustainability approaches and represents an important step towards integrating Ukraine’s certification framework with established European environmental governance. The standard applies to a broad range of accommodation establishments defined in DSTU ISO 18513:2024 (2024), including hotels, campsites, tourist lodges, holiday centres and other facilities providing temporary accommodation services. Its scope extends considerably beyond the core accommodation function by evaluating the environmental performance of the enterprise as a whole. Assessment criteria encompass energy efficiency, water resource management, waste prevention and recycling, sustainable procurement, the use of environmentally preferable cleaning products, staff training and environmental communication with guests and a wider range of environmental management practices. Such a comprehensive assessment reflects the understanding that sustainability within hospitality depends upon the integration of environmental considerations across all organisational activities rather than within isolated operational processes (Table 3).

Table 3. Comparative matrix of international environmental labelling schemes and the Ukrainian standard for tourist accommodation

Assessment criterion	EU ecolabel	Green key	Green globe	GSTC	Ukraine (SEM)
ISO 14024 compliance	✓	✓	Partial	Reference framework	✓
Independent certification	✓	✓	✓	Accredited bodies	✓
Environmental resource management (energy, water and waste)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sustainable procurement	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Environmental management and awareness (staff and guests)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Continuous improvement	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rating system	No	No	No	No	Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum
Alignment with EU standards	✓	Partial	Partial	Indirect	✓

Note: data exclude the temporarily occupied territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea

Source: calculated by the author based on I. Werner (2024), Goal 12: Responsible consumption and production (n.d.)

The comparative assessment presented in Table 3 demonstrates substantial methodological convergence between the Ukrainian SEM framework and international environmental labelling schemes in the areas of energy and water efficiency, waste management, sustainable procurement, environmental awareness and continuous improvement. However, unlike most international schemes, the Ukrainian framework introduces an explicit four-level rating structure, which gives accommodation establishments a clearer basis for assessing their current environmental performance and planning further improvements.

The Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum levels can be interpreted as successive stages of environmental management maturity. They enable accommodation establishments to identify priority areas, plan investments according to their current level of development and progressively integrate environmental requirements into operational management. Thus, certification becomes not only an assessment mechanism but also a practical management instrument supporting continuous improvement of environmental and operational efficiency (All-Ukrainian Non-Governmental Organization “Living Planet”, 2025b).

The Ukrainian rating approach therefore complements the common environmental criteria applied by international schemes with a progressive development pathway adapted to the national context. Its implementation can support more systematic environmental management, improve resource efficiency and strengthen the transparency and competitiveness of Ukrainian accommodation establishments while providing a basis for further harmonisation with European environmental certification practices. The assignment of an environmental labelling level is based on a comprehensive assessment of an accommodation establishment's compliance with established environmental

criteria (Table 4). The certification procedure combines the verification of mandatory requirements with the evaluation of additional performance indicators that reflect the overall level of environmental sustainability achieved by the enterprise. The final rating is determined by the total number of points awarded across all assessment categories, on the basis of which the accommodation establishment is assigned one of the recognised environmental labelling levels. This assessment methodology encourages organisations not only to achieve compliance with minimum environmental requirements but also to pursue continuous improvements in operational sustainability and environmental management.

Table 4. Main assessment criteria for awarding environmental labelling to accommodation establishments

Criteria group	Examples of assessment requirements
Environmental management	Existence of an environmental policy, appointment of responsible personnel and regular monitoring of environmental performance indicators
Energy efficiency	Use of energy-efficient lighting and equipment, monitoring of energy consumption and the utilisation of renewable energy sources where applicable
Water resource management	Installation of water-saving fixtures, monitoring of water consumption and implementation of measures to prevent water leakage
Waste management	Waste separation, reduction of single-use products and appropriate recycling or recovery of waste materials
Use of environmentally preferable products	Application of environmentally friendly cleaning agents, paper products and other consumable materials with reduced environmental impacts
Information and training	Provision of environmental information to guests and regular staff training in environmental management principles and sustainable operational practices
Additional environmental practices	Landscaping and greening initiatives, support for local products, biodiversity conservation measures and participation in broader environmental initiatives

Source: compiled by the author

The environmental criteria of the Ukrainian standard can be translated into specific management procedures within accommodation establishments. Requirements concerning energy, water and waste management imply the assignment of responsibility for environmental performance, regular measurement and monitoring of resource consumption and the identification of areas with excessive use or avoidable losses. Sustainable procurement criteria require the integration of environmental considerations into supplier selection and purchasing decisions, including preferences for environmentally preferable products and services. Criteria related to staff and guest environmental awareness can be implemented through regular staff training, internal environmental instructions and clear communication with guests regarding resource-saving practices, waste separation and responsible consumption. These measures should be supported by documented monitoring procedures and periodic review of environmental performance, allowing management to assess the effectiveness of implemented actions and determine further priorities. Consequently, environmental certification can stimulate the revision of internal business processes rather than remain a formal compliance procedure. The Ukrainian framework links environmental criteria with responsibility allocation, resource monitoring, sustainable procurement, staff development, guest communication and continuous improvement. This creates a practical management cycle in

which environmental performance is measured, weaknesses are identified, corrective actions are implemented and internal procedures are periodically reviewed.

Environmental labelling as a tool for the sustainable recovery and competitiveness of Ukraine's tourism industry

The adoption of environmental labelling can provide Ukrainian accommodation establishments with environmental and organisational benefits. Requirements for energy efficiency, water management and waste prevention encourage systematic monitoring of resource consumption and identification of operational inefficiencies. Sustainable procurement criteria can influence supplier selection and purchasing procedures while staff training and guest communication can strengthen environmental awareness and consistency in service delivery. As sustainability becomes an increasingly relevant factor in tourism development, environmental labelling can support the demonstration of compliance with recognised environmental requirements and responsible business practices (Beusch *et al.*, 2022; Chernykhivska, 2026).

However, the implementation of environmental labelling is constrained by several barriers that may affect accommodation establishments differently. Limited awareness of certification benefits can reduce management willingness to initiate certification while insufficient

experience in environmental management can complicate the introduction of monitoring and internal control procedures. The financial costs of infrastructure improvements may constrain the implementation of resource-efficiency measures, particularly in smaller establishments. Low guest awareness of environmental labels can also reduce their influence on purchasing decisions. These barriers can be addressed through management training, clearly assigned environmental responsibilities, systematic resource monitoring and phased investment planning. Research on sustainability strategy implementation in hotels similarly identifies organisational and resource-related barriers that require coordinated managerial responses (Guerra-Lombardi *et al.*, 2024).

These mechanisms should be integrated into the routine management of accommodation establishments. An initial assessment of resource consumption and environmental practices can be followed by the assignment of responsibilities, identification of priority improvements and development of an implementation schedule. Regular monitoring can then be used to evaluate progress and revise operational procedures. Such an approach transforms environmental certification from a formal compliance procedure into an instrument of continuous organisational improvement and management control (Beusch *et al.*, 2022). In the context of Ukraine's European integration and tourism recovery, environmental labelling can contribute

to the modernisation of accommodation management by establishing measurable environmental requirements and encouraging systematic organisational practices. Previous research indicates that sustainability certification can be associated with organisational performance and competitive responses in the hotel sector, although the magnitude and direction of these effects depend on the specific context and implementation practices (Bianco *et al.*, 2023).

Therefore, the potential contribution of environmental labelling to competitiveness and operating efficiency should be considered alongside its more direct effects on environmental management, transparency and alignment with European certification practices. The findings of this study demonstrate that the contemporary development of environmental labelling in the tourism and hospitality extends well beyond the traditional boundaries of environmental policy. The analysis of international certification schemes indicates that environmental criteria are increasingly embedded within organisational management systems and are being employed as strategic instruments for improving service quality, strengthening operational performance and enhancing the competitiveness of tourism enterprises. This evolution reflects a broader shift in which environmental certification has become closely associated with quality management and sustainable business development rather than serving solely as a mechanism for environmental protection (Fig. 1).

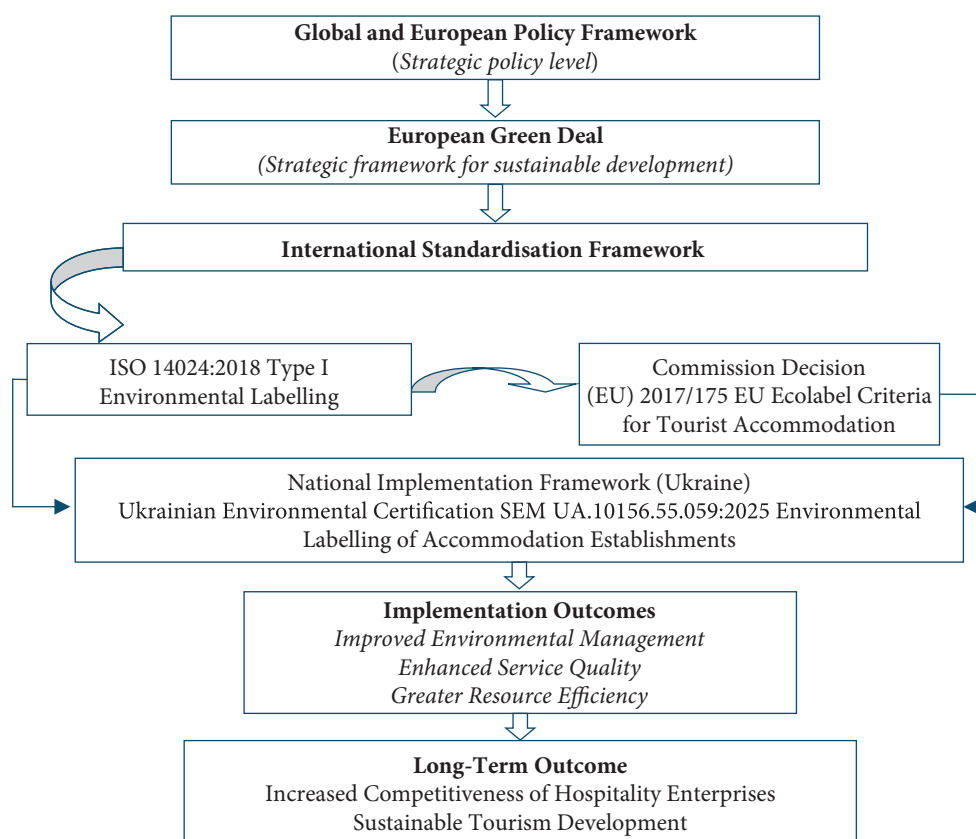


Figure 1. Hierarchy of environmental certification for sustainable tourism and hospitality

Source: compiled by the author

Figure 1 illustrates how international and European environmental requirements are translated into the national certification framework and subsequently into the management practices of Ukrainian accommodation establishments. At the strategic level, the global and European policy framework establishes general objectives for sustainable tourism development, while the European Green Deal provides a broader policy framework for resource efficiency, environmental protection and the transition towards more sustainable economic activity. These strategic priorities are subsequently operationalised through international standardisation requirements and environmental certification frameworks (European Commission, 2019). The international standardisation level provides the methodological basis for this transition. ISO 14024:2018 establishes the principles and procedures for Type I environmental labelling, including defined environmental criteria and independent third-party certification, while the EU Ecolabel criteria for tourist accommodation translate these principles into specific requirements applicable to accommodation services (Commission Decision (EU) No. 2017/175, 2017; DSTU ISO 14024:2018, 2018). These frameworks therefore provide the reference basis from which environmental requirements can be adapted to the Ukrainian regulatory context rather than directly replicated.

At the national level, the SEM UA.10156.55.059:2025 framework transforms these general principles into criteria applicable to Ukrainian accommodation establishments. At the organisational level, their implementation involves assigning responsibility for environmental management, monitoring energy and water consumption, managing waste, applying sustainable procurement procedures, training staff and informing guests about environmental practices. The implementation of these procedures is expected to improve environmental management, increase resource efficiency and support more consistent service processes. The graded certification structure further allows establishments to identify their current level of environmental performance and determine priorities for subsequent improvement. The lower levels of the model represent the expected long-term implications of this management process. Systematic implementation of environmental requirements can strengthen the environmental and operational performance of accommodation establishments and, when supported by credible certification and continuous improvement, contribute to stronger competitiveness and sustainable tourism development. Figure 1 therefore presents environmental certification as a transmission mechanism between strategic environmental policy and enterprise-level management, showing how international and European requirements can be progressively transformed into national standards, operational practices and longer-term development outcomes in Ukrainian tourism and hospitality.

Discussion

The findings of this study support the view that environmental labelling in tourism and hospitality is increasingly

connected with organisational management rather than being limited to environmental compliance. The analysed certification schemes consistently incorporate requirements related to resource efficiency, waste management, sustainable procurement, staff involvement and environmental communication. This finding is consistent with P. Beusch *et al.* (2022), who emphasised the integration of sustainability indicators into organisational management and performance evaluation, and with V. Guerra-Lombardi *et al.* (2024), who demonstrated how environmental practices can be embedded into routine operational management. R. Dani *et al.* (2021) similarly examined the application of an ecological approach to sustainability in hotel operations. The present study extends these findings by showing that this management logic is incorporated into the assessment criteria of environmental certification systems for accommodation establishments.

The comparative analysis also confirmed that environmental certification schemes have a common environmental core but differ in their institutional structures and implementation mechanisms. This finding corresponds with K. Bučar *et al.* (2022), who emphasised the role of Type I ecolabelling, independent assessment and transparent criteria in sustainable tourism development. At the same time, the results of the present study indicate that methodological convergence does not eliminate differences between certification schemes. EU Ecolabel, Green Key, Green Globe, Nordic Swan and GSTC differ in scope, governance and certification functions, while maintaining common requirements concerning environmental performance. The results further support the relationship between environmental management and organisational competitiveness. S. Bani-Melhem *et al.* (2023) demonstrated that green innovation can strengthen adaptability and competitive performance in the hotel sector, while S. Bianco *et al.* (2023) identified a relationship between sustainability certification, hotel performance and competitive action. J. Sun & A. Nasrullah (2024) further emphasised the influence of market forces and customer dynamics on sustainable performance in the hospitality industry. The present study does not establish a direct causal relationship between certification and financial performance because its design is documentary and comparative. It nevertheless shows how certification requirements can create organisational conditions for improved resource management, operational efficiency and market differentiation. Thus, competitiveness should be considered a potential outcome of effective certification rather than an automatic consequence of obtaining an environmental label.

The environmental dimension of certification is also closely connected with organisational resilience and efficiency. C. Calafat-Marzal *et al.* (2025) demonstrated the relevance of resilience factors to green efficiency in the European context, supporting the interpretation of environmental performance as part of broader organisational capacity rather than as an isolated compliance indicator. In the present study, resource efficiency, waste reduction,

environmental management and systematic monitoring similarly appear as interconnected components of certification requirements. This suggested that environmental certification may contribute to organisational resilience when its criteria are incorporated into regular management processes and continuous improvement practices. The role of human resources identified in the Ukrainian framework is also consistent with previous research. S. Silva *et al.* (2025) associated sustainability implementation with organisational learning and workforce development, while the certification criteria analysed in this study explicitly incorporate staff training and environmental awareness. This indicated that environmental certification requires changes in employee competencies and everyday operational behaviour. Certification can therefore support organisational learning when environmental requirements are incorporated into staff responsibilities, internal procedures and performance monitoring rather than treated as a formal external requirement.

Environmental communication supports the effectiveness of environmental certification by conveying information about certified practices to guests and other stakeholders. M. He *et al.* (2023) demonstrated that environmental communication can influence pro-environmental intentions and behaviours in tourism, while T. Chen and G. Liu (2025) linked environmental policy innovation with green tourism and consumer behaviour in the transition towards a circular economy. The effectiveness of such communication depends on the credibility, transparency and recognisability of the certification system. B. Paddison & J. Hall (2024) considered regenerative tourism development as a practice-led response to crisis, emphasising approaches that move beyond reducing negative environmental impacts towards generating positive outcomes for destinations and local communities. This perspective extends the conventional environmental management approach and suggests that certification frameworks can increasingly incorporate regenerative principles alongside established environmental performance criteria.

The Ukrainian findings are consistent with the growing body of national research emphasising environmental responsibility, sustainable hotel management and the relationship between environmental practices and service competitiveness (Kalenska & Liubchenko, 2023; Zelenko & Kozodub, 2024; Chmil & Tsiatska, 2025). At the same time, studies addressing standardisation and certification in Ukrainian tourism have considered these issues mainly within the broader context of service quality and sustainable development (Yakymenko-Tereshchenko *et al.*, 2023; Nestoryshen *et al.*, 2026). The present study adds a more specific certification perspective by comparing the Ukrainian SEM framework with established international schemes and identifying the areas of methodological convergence. A specific finding concerns the Ukrainian Bronze-Platinum rating structure. Unlike a purely binary certification model, the graded approach differentiates levels of environmental performance and creates a basis for progressive

improvement. This supports the broader interpretation of certification as a management mechanism that can encourage enterprises to move from minimum compliance towards more advanced environmental practices. The graded structure is also consistent with the broader understanding of environmental performance as a process of continuous improvement rather than a single certification event. However, the existence of an appropriate certification framework does not itself guarantee implementation. The effectiveness of SEM will depend on the capacity of accommodation establishments to meet the criteria, the credibility of verification, managerial commitment, staff competencies and recognition of the ecolabel by consumers and the tourism market.

Thus, the findings indicate that the Ukrainian environmental certification framework is substantially consistent with the management principles identified in the international and Ukrainian literature. Its main contribution is the translation of these principles into a structured national framework for tourist accommodation. The study therefore supports the interpretation of environmental certification as a link between environmental responsibility, quality management and organisational development. Further empirical research is required to determine whether this methodological alignment produces measurable improvements in resource efficiency, service quality, competitiveness, organisational resilience and consumer behaviour among Ukrainian accommodation establishments. Environmental certification should therefore be regarded by Ukrainian accommodation managers not only as an external labelling procedure, but as a structured framework for organising internal environmental management systems. Its value depends on the extent to which certification criteria are translated into everyday managerial practices, employee competencies, resource-efficiency measures, transparent environmental communication and continuous organisational improvement.

Conclusions

This study demonstrated that environmental labelling can serve as a practical management instrument for the sustainable transformation of tourism and hospitality in Ukraine. The comparative analysis showed that leading international certification schemes share core priorities of resource efficiency, waste management, sustainable procurement, staff involvement and continuous improvement. The analysis confirmed substantial methodological alignment of the Ukrainian framework with ISO 14024 principles and established European approaches. Its 22 mandatory criteria and the Bronze-Platinum rating system create a structured mechanism for assessing and progressively improving the environmental performance of accommodation establishments. The managerial value of environmental certification lies in the integration of environmental requirements into everyday organisational processes rather than in formal compliance alone. Its contribution to service quality and competitiveness depends on effective implementation,

managerial commitment, staff competencies and the credibility of independent verification.

International certification systems such as the EU Ecolabel, Green Key, Green Globe and Nordic Swan place particular emphasis on measurable environmental performance, operational monitoring and systematic improvement. The Ukrainian framework incorporated the principal operational dimensions identified in international practice, including energy and water efficiency, waste management, environmentally preferable products and organisational environmental practices. The principal distinction is therefore not the absence of these dimensions in the Ukrainian system but their specific regulatory formulation, degree of standardisation and adaptation to the national context. International schemes generally provide broader opportunities for voluntary differentiation and integration with global sustainability branding, whereas SEM UA.10156.55.059:2025 establishes a nationally standardised framework for environmental assessment of tourist accommodation. Overall, the findings confirm that the Ukrainian environmental labelling framework is

conceptually compatible with established international approaches while retaining a distinct national structure. The identified convergence creates a basis for further harmonisation of Ukrainian environmental certification with European practices, whereas the established differences indicate specific areas for methodological development, particularly in measurable performance indicators, monitoring procedures and the comparability of certification outcomes. Future research should empirically assess certified accommodation establishments in Ukraine, focusing on resource efficiency, operating performance, competitiveness and consumer response to environmental labels.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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Екологічна сертифікація та маркування у сфері туризму та гостинності

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Анотація. Екологічне маркування стало важливим інструментом підвищення екологічної ефективності, якості послуг і конкурентоспроможності підприємств сфери туризму та гостинності. Гармонізація нормативно-правової бази України з європейськими екологічними вимогами актуалізувала необхідність формування ефективної системи екологічної сертифікації засобів розміщення. Метою дослідження було оцінювання екологічної сертифікації та маркування у сфері туризму і гостинності на основі порівняльного аналізу міжнародних систем та нормативно-правової бази України, а також визначення пріоритетних напрямів їх подальшої гармонізації з європейськими стандартами. У дослідженні використано методи порівняльного, нормативно-правового та документального аналізу, а також узагальнення для вивчення міжнародних систем екологічної сертифікації, європейських нормативних документів і національної системи екологічної сертифікації засобів розміщення. Результати дослідження засвідчили, що провідні міжнародні системи екологічної сертифікації ґрунтуються на спільних методологічних принципах, серед яких незалежне оцінювання, екологічний менеджмент і безперервне вдосконалення. Встановлено, що українська система екологічної сертифікації значною мірою гармонізована з європейськими підходами завдяки впровадженню міжнародно визнаних критеріїв енергоефективності, раціонального використання водних ресурсів, управління відходами, сталих закупівель, екологічної комунікації та організаційного управління. Визначено, що особливістю національної системи є застосування рейтингового оцінювання, яке стимулює безперервне підвищення екологічної ефективності засобів розміщення. Обґрунтовано пріоритетні напрями подальшого розвитку системи, зокрема розширення практики екологічного менеджменту, підвищення обізнаності зацікавлених сторін і поглиблення гармонізації з європейськими підходами. Доведено, що екологічне маркування є дієвим інструментом управління якістю та сталого туризму. Практичне значення результатів полягає у можливості їх використання для вдосконалення національної системи екологічної сертифікації, розвитку екологічного менеджменту засобів розміщення та підвищення конкурентоспроможності підприємств сфери туризму і гостинності.

Ключові слова: екологічні критерії; екологічний менеджмент; засоби розміщення; сталий розвиток; європейські стандарти