



NOTE

15 June 2012

### **Commission proposal on a European Tourism Label for Quality Systems**

This note outlines Danish considerations regarding the European Tourism Label for Quality Systems (ETQ) initiative as set out by the Commission.

First of all, it is a good idea to evaluate and ensure quality in the European tourism sector. With high international growth rates in tourism and increasing global competition it is important that the European tourism product is characterized by a high degree of quality and service. If there is a demand for a new European Tourism Label for Quality Systems, such a system could potentially be a useful tool for European tourism companies in pursuing this goal of high quality and service.

Below, specific considerations regarding the ETQ as set out in the Commission's consultation document are described.

#### **Demand for the initiative**

There are a number of well-functioning quality labels operating in Denmark, which all are operated by private actors (e.g. Green Key, Accessibility Label Scheme and other).

Given the fact that a number of quality systems already exists, there is a risk that the new ETQ will be functioning side by side other existing labels with a risk of confusing the consumer. Therefore it is crucial that the development of the ETQ is market driven and does not duplicate already existing and widely used schemes – both at national and international level. One option could be to treat the label as a service label e.g. in an initial testing phase (see below).

It would be appropriate to disseminate information and documentation describing and empirically proving the demand for introducing the ETQ.

#### **Scope and testing of the ETQ**

If the European Commission decides to develop an ETQ Label it should be voluntary and it would be appropriate to first test the label on a limited target scope before considering how to continue the initiative. In this way, there is more room for improvement and assessment of the real added value of the initiative.

It could be a fruitful idea to treat the ETQ as a pilot project in such a "testing phase". The pilot project could then be applied on a limited scope

– for instance the service level in the accommodation sector – for a given number of years followed by a thorough evaluation. On the basis of this evaluation it should be possible to decide whether the ETQ provides a clear added value to the European tourism sector, and thus if the project should be completely stopped, modified or extended unmodified.

If the ETQ will eventually include not only direct tourism services as accommodation, but also services and attractions in the cultural sector, such as cultural sights and institutions, there is a risk that the ETQ will be either superficial - since cultural experiences can only be measured directly by the quality of practical service, transport and surroundings (toilets, restaurant, accessibility, cleanliness etc.) and not by the quality of the cultural experience - or demand a very complex system.

Furthermore, there are already international labels for the cultural sector such as the European Heritage Label and the UNESCO World Heritage Label. The same is also true for environmental issues and other sectors. Therefore, the ETQ should mainly focus on tourist services.

### **Organization of the ETQ**

In the consultation paper it is stated that: “The governance of the possible initiative would be ensured by a European Board, in which all relevant tourism stakeholders would be represented. Those Member States, which have the capacity and would like to be involved more thoroughly in the initiative, would be invited to set up national governance bodies. These bodies, after they are put in place, would be delegated certain tasks, such as the preassessment, certain administrative and promotional tasks.”

It can be supported that the governance of the possible initiative will be ensured by a European Board, in which relevant tourism stakeholders would be represented. A European Board – as opposed to national boards in each member state – will also help ensure comparability and competitiveness throughout Europe. It is also a more simple administrative structure than national boards.

### **The criteria of the ETQ Label**

Generally the criteria of the ETQ Label should be as focused as possible on outcome and results rather than process. In relation to this point, it is crucial that the ETQ does not create any unnecessary administrative burdens for the tourism companies. The system shall allow for flexibility, in order to allow establishments to adjust to the criteria with the least possible financial and administrative burden on them.

Thus, it is important that the criteria are developed and elaborated in close consultation with the tourism companies and other relevant stakeholders, which will be affected by the ETQ-criteria.