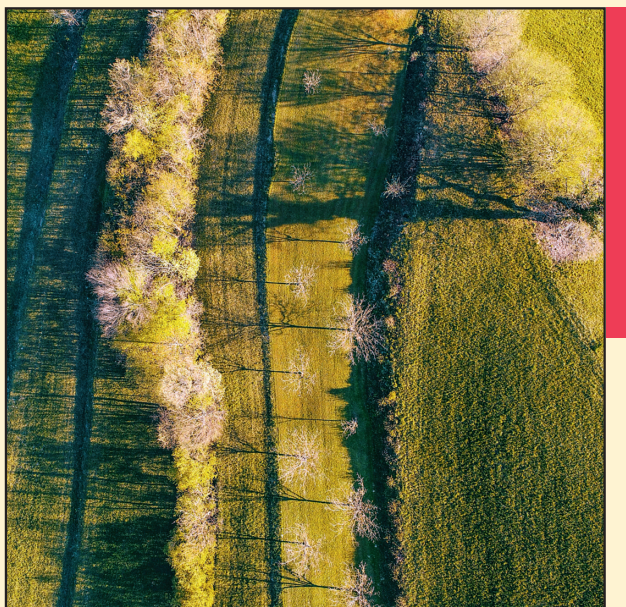


# ACTA GEOGRAPHICA SLOVENICA

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# ACTA GEOGRAPHICA SLOVENICA

## GEOGRAFSKI ZBORNIK

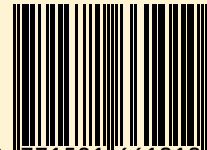
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**SPECIAL ISSUE**  
*Branding, labelling and certification*

EDITORS:  
Špela Ledinek Lozej  
Nika Razpotnik Visković  
Rok Ciglič  
Blaž Komac

# CERTIFICATION, LABELLING AND BRANDING IN TOURISM RESEARCH: SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

Nika Razpotnik Visković, Erik Logar



MARKO ŠINKO/VEČ

Figure: UNESCO World Heritage List – is it a label, a certificate or a brand?  
Klavže water barrier in Idrija is part of this List.

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**Nika Razpotnik Visković<sup>1</sup>, Erik Logar<sup>1</sup>**

## **Certification, labelling and branding in tourism research: systematic review**

**ABSTRACT:** The aim of this paper is to present a systematic review of tourism certification, labelling and branding research. To review the scientific literature, we followed the PRISMA methodological approach. We started by outlining the spatial and temporal distribution of research linked to certification, labelling and branding, carried out in the social sciences and humanities. In the second step, we extracted the theoretical definitions and characteristics of these three processes in tourism from a selected body of literature. We continued by analysing hierarchical and non-hierarchical relations between certification and branding, and by drawing conclusions linked to duality, or even contradictions that are emerging in this field of tourism research.

**KEY WORDS:** geography, business and economics, standards, label, hospitality, leisure, PRISMA method

## **Certificiranje, označevanje in znamčenje v raziskavah s področja turizma: sistematični pregled literature**

**POVZETEK:** Namen prispevka je s sistematičnim pregledom literature osvetliti rabo izrazov certificiranje, označevanje (ang. labelling) in znamčenje. Za sistematični pregled literature je bil uporabljen metodološki pristop PRISMA. V prispevku najprej predstavimo prostorske in časovne lastnosti relevantnih raziskav na področju družboslovja in humanistike. Iz nabora teh raziskav nato izluščimo teoretske opredelitve in proučimo njihove vsebinske značilnosti. V naslednjem koraku analiziramo hierarhijo odnosov med opredelitvami certificiranja in znamčenja ter oblikujemo zaključke o prepoznanih dvoumnostih in nasprotjih, ki se pojavljajo pri teh izrazih na področju raziskav v turizmu.

**KLJUČNE BESEDE:** geografija, podjetništvo in ekonomija, standardi, označbe, gostinstvo, prosti čas, metoda PRISMA

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# 1 Introduction

Tourism, as a growing industry on a global level, is facing several challenges. For the purpose of this paper, we mention two of them. The first is increasing competitiveness in the sector, the need to be recognised, visible, to stand out in order to attract tourist flows and revenues (Lorenzini, Calzati and Giudici 2011). The second is the need to preserve natural and cultural resources, together with ensuring acceptable living conditions for the local community, including seamless operation of services and businesses (Petrevska and Cingoski 2017). Both challenges call for the development of quality tourism but, to achieve this, tourism destinations, whether national, regional or local, need to be managed as an integral whole – the unity of numerous actors who work in coherence within tourism development strategies and policies (Polajnar Horvat and Ribeiro 2019; Šmid Hribar, Razpotnik Visković and Bole 2020).

The topics of competitiveness and resource management of destinations are majorly represented in tourism research in a wide spectrum of disciplines, including geography, urban studies, business and economics, social issues, environmental sciences, ecology and sociology. Studies analyse the competitiveness of tourism destinations, their management and organisation, the process of building a territorial brand and actions for ensuring the necessary quality in the industry. Another focal point in these discussions is the formation of competitiveness clusters in tourism (Hawkins 2004; Yotsumoto and Vafadari 2021) in relation to different types of actors and different types of tourism models, e.g., traditional mass tourism vs. small-scale niche tourism (Mic and Eagles 2019). Such clusters are also built around different labels and certifications, e.g., UNESCO World Heritage List (Hawkins 2004; Yotsumoto and Vafadari 2021) or European quality scheme Protected designations of origin (Ledinek Lozej 2020; 2021).

Tourism plays a crucial role as an economic contributor to the majority of countries (Chin, Chin and Wong 2018), but also causes environmental degradation through irreversible infrastructural interventions in the landscape, extensive use of natural and cultural resources, increased energy and water consumption, and waste production (Nistoreanu, Aluculesei and Avram 2020; Sahin, Baloglu and Topcuoglu 2020). Not only the natural environment, societies living in tourism destinations are also negatively affected. Urban areas face cultural commodification and gentrification (de Vries, Go and Alpe 2018), while rural areas are often reduced to »staging«, with the purpose of creating an authentic, traditional, stereotypic tourism experience, sometimes far from a modern way of life in the concerned area (Mannon and Glass-Coffin 2019; Topole in Pipan 2020; Poljak Istenič and Fakin Bajec 2021).

Such contrasting effects of tourism require leadership through national and regional policies and regulations. Those are mandatory, but can intervene on very different levels: from guaranteeing only minimum protection of local resources (including the protection of human rights, e.g., prevention of child labour, eradication of sex tourism ...) to providing a basic framework for the sector's operation (infrastructure, other public services to attract visitors) or more advanced interventions, such as absolute adaptation to a sustainable paradigm (Petrevska and Cingoski 2017; Razpotnik Visković 2020). The diversity of tourism challenges also calls for alternative voluntary approaches, which try to follow the expectations of public authorities, local communities, economic entities and visitors (Christian 2017). In this paper, we focus on branding, certification and labelling as three voluntary processes integrated into tourism strategies which address all abovementioned challenges in tourism.

Branding is a process through which a destination or business »actively seeks to create a unique and competitive identity to position itself, as best as possible on the home and foreign market.« (Cetinski, Perić and Smolčić-Jurdana 2006, 105) and communicates these points of difference internally and externally (Mearns 2007). Certification is a process in which an independent organization verifies whether a tourism product, process or service meets the particular standards. Verification is based on predefined criteria and standards (Razpotnik Visković 2020). The labelling process follows the certification process. It is a method of providing information about a product and it is a means of communication with the end users or visitors (Matus 2010). These are, however, only provisional and working definitions, since literature review shows inconsistent use of these terms and different roles they play within tourism strategies. The aim of this paper is therefore to provide a systematic overview of tourism certification, labelling and branding in the relevant scientific literature, namely their occurrence, terminology in use and observed interrelations. Firstly, we outlined the spatial and temporal distribution of the research linked to certification, labelling and branding, carried out in the social sciences and humanities. Secondly, we extracted the theoretical definitions and characteristics of these three processes. Finally, we analysed the evidence of hierarchical and

non-hierarchical relations between certification and branding, with a special focus on the complementarity and incompatibility of the two processes.

## 2 Methods

We used the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis) method in the review. This approach provides a systematic protocol for performing literature search, selection of papers, their overview and reporting of the results (Moher et al. 2009; Rigolon et al. 2018).

### 2.1 Definition of the basic search parameters

As a first step, we needed to set the basic selection parameters: the type of the literature we would review (articles, monographs, reports ...), the search databases, and the language of the literature. We decided to review scientific papers published in periodical peer reviewed journals in the English language, which is the most commonly used language in academic literature and also the language of the majority of reviews (Rigolon et al. 2018). We did not set any limitations on the time period of the publication since analysing the temporal development of these topics was one of our research objectives. Similarly, we also did not set any limitations regarding the scientific disciplines. We wanted to identify and explore all fields in which research of certification, labelling and branding in the tourism sector is conducted. Moreover, we wanted to make sure not to exclude any interdisciplinary journals from our review process (de Jong et al. 2018).

Only digitally available sources were included in the review process. We scrutinised the Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect and Emerald international databases. The first three are frequently used for searching the literature (Gusenbauer and Haddaway 2020; Zhu and Liu 2020), the latter was added due to its relevant tourism and hospitality journals. The reference date of the search was 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2021.

We consciously decided to exclude papers in other languages, scientific monographs, professional articles and gray literature in order to process manageable volume of texts.

### 2.2 Definition of the terms and search expression

In this step, we defined a search expression covering three main thematic groups: CERTIFICATION, BRANDING and TOURISM. For each group we selected key words that function as synonyms or as related terms (Table 1).

We searched through papers' title, key words and abstract. Each paper needed to contain at least one search key words from each thematic group. We built the following search expression: (»standard« OR »standardisation« OR »standardization« OR »standard\*« OR »certificate« OR »certif\*« OR »certification« OR »label« OR »label\*« OR »labelling«) AND (»brand« OR »branding« OR »brand\*«) AND (»tourism« OR »tourist« OR »touris\*« OR »leisure« OR »hospitality«).

Table 1: List of key words that we used in the search expression.

Group	certification	branding	tourism
Search key words	certification certificate certif* labelling label label* standardisation standard standard*	branding brand brand*	tourism tourist touris* leisure hospitality



Keywords in group »certification« were selected based on our previous research of certification in sustainable tourism, which showed frequent overlapping of root terms certificate, label and standard, and its derivations (Razpotnik Visković 2020).

## 2.3 Selection process with the PRISMA approach

The PRISMA method comprises four steps of literature review: identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion. In Table 2, we present the results of each step. All actions, from reviewing the elemental paper components (title, abstract, key words), to first and second reading of full texts, were done independently by two researchers. After each step, we compared our coding and refined the list of papers that would be included in the next step.

The most common reason for the exclusion of papers in the screening phase was the lack of focus on our selected key words. Sometimes these key words were used only as »buzz words«, but no real content was linked to them. The word labelling/label has several meanings, one of them being also »etiquette« or »naming« – this connotation was not relevant for our research scope. The word »standard« was also used in other contexts e.g., standard deviation, standardised regression coefficients, standard indicators, effect regression with robust standard errors, standardised method. Some articles were not really related to tourism and hospitality; instead they focused on the tobacco industry, textiles or medicine.

In the second elimination step (eligibility), which required a full-text revision, we faced additional content-related shortcomings: the lack of focus on any of certification, branding or tourism. Some papers were not published entirely in the English language, while some of them were not published in periodical journals.

## 2.4 Content analysis of the reviewed papers

After the PRISMA selection process, we created a codebook, which was necessary to perform further analyses. The first part of the coding was descriptive:

- year of release,
- discipline(s),
- topic(s),
- geographical scope of the research,
- method(s).

For determining the disciplines, we relied on nomenclature used by the Web of Science database. We did not by default choose the discipline in which the journal is officially listed. Rather than that, we verified the actual content of each individual paper and selected the discipline accordingly. Topics were already identified during the first full reading of the papers in the previous step. A maximum two prevailing topics

Table 2: Results of the PRISMA approach.

PHASE	RESULT			
Identification	Web of Science	ScienceDirect	Scopus	Emerald
	136	11	222	27
	Total papers	Unique papers	Duplicate papers	Tripled papers
	396	167	83	21
Screening	Papers after duplicates removed		Papers excluded based on title, abstract and keywords screening	
	271		216	
Eligibility	Full-text papers assessed for eligibility		Full-text papers excluded, with reasons	
	55		29	
Included	Papers with relevant full-text			
	26			

Table 3: Final list of selected papers.

Title	Authors	Journal	Year
The natural state: Nature-Based Tourism and Ecotourism Accreditation in Tasmania, Australia	Matysek and Kriwoken	Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality and Tourism	2003
Sustainable tourism competitiveness clusters: Application to World Heritage Sites network development in Indonesia	Hawkins	Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research	2004
»Brandscaping«: From traditional cultural landscapes to »label regions«: A strategic scheme to achieve sustainable regional development in the Swiss Alps	Boesch, Renner and Siegrist	Mountain Research and Development	2008
Environmental management in Slovenian tourist enterprises	Jurinčič and Bojnec	International Journal of Sustainable Development and Planning	2009
The benefits and challenges of sustainable tourism certification: A case study of the green tourism business scheme in the West of England	Jarvis, Weeden and Simcock	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	2010
Territorial brands for tourism development: A statistical analysis on the Marche Region	Lorenzini, Calzati and Giudici	Annals of Tourism Research	2011
Analyzing Social Responsibility as a Driver of Firm's Brand Awareness	Mattera, Baena and Cerviño	Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences	2012
Culinary Tourism Packages and Regional Brands in Czechia	Spilková and Fialová	Tourism Geographies	2013
World Heritage site as a label in branding a place	Azizul and Mizan	Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development	2015
Enhancement of the »Blue Flag« Eco-label in Italy: an empirical analysis	Pencarelli, Splendiani and Fraboni	Anatolia	2016
Protecting tourism labor? Sustainable labels and private governance	Christian	GeoJournal	2017
Confronting sustainable development in two rural heritage valorization models	Ducros	Journal of Sustainable Tourism	2017
Branding the green tourism in Macedonia [Brendiranje zelenog turizma u Makedoniji]	Petrevska and Cingoski	Sociologija i Prostor	2017
Expectations of residents and tourists of agriculture-related certification systems: analysis of public perceptions	Uchiyama, Tanaka, Matsuoka and Kohsaka	Journal of Ethnic Foods	2017
Altruism or entrepreneurialism? The co-evolution of green place branding and policy tourism in Vaxjö, Sweden	Andersson and James	Urban Studies	2018
New Zealand Winegrowers attitudes and behaviours towards wine tourism and sustainable winegrowing	Baird, Hall and Castka	Sustainability	2018
The Implementation of Green Marketing Tools in Rural Tourism: The Readiness of Tourists?	Chin, Chin and Wong	Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management	2018
The Necessity for a Local Level of Gastronomic Tourism Standardization: The Case of Torino's City Branding	De Vries, Go and Alpe	Modeling Innovation Sustainability and Technologies	2018
Habiba Community: brand management for a family business	Hamed	Emerald Emerging Markets Case Studies	2019
Do green awards and certifications matter? Consumers' perceptions, green behavioral intentions, and economic implications for the hotel industry: A Sri Lankan perspective	Lee, Lee and Gunarathne	Tourism Economics	2019
Cooperative branding for mid-range ec lodges: Costa Rica case study	Mic and Eagles	Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism	2019
Analysis of green marketing tools on tourist satisfaction of staying in Bali village	Kartika, Sumada, Sasmita and Komara	International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation	2020
Is green marketing a label for ecotourism? The Romanian experience	Nistoreanu, Aluculesei and Avram	Information	2020
The Influence of Green Message Types on Advertising Effectiveness for Luxury and Hotel Segments	Sahin, Baloglu and Topcuoglu	Cornell Hospitality Quarterly	2020
Antecedents to the creation of 'Thai Select Unique' restaurant brand equity	Sornsaruht	African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure	2020
Comparing cultural world heritage sites and globally important agricultural heritage systems and their potential for tourism	Yotsumoto and Vafadari	Journal of Heritage Tourism	2021

were assigned for each paper. For analysing geographical scope, we identified the concrete location of study cases (where relevant) and geographical scale (global, national, regional, local). In the methodology section, we categorised methods into basic qualitative and quantitative groups and identified the main sources of data (official or internal documents, websites, interviews or surveys with tourists, managers, certificate holders, statistical databases, articles).

The second part of the codebook was open-ended. We focused on the use of terminology and definitions of certification, labelling and branding; and searched for links established among them.

Analysis of content was also conducted with the use of the Atlas.ti computer program. This software enables analysis by coding the information in text (Urbanc 2008). Those codes could be treated as a category of answers to proceed data segmentation on the basis of research questions (Kozina, Bole and Tiran 2021). In such way quantification of several results of literature review were done (i.e., categorisation into disciplines and topics, analysis of methods used, year of publication, country and spatial level of research) as well as a qualitative analysis of papers' content (i.e., definitions of terms and identification of linkages and (non)hierarchical relations between certification and branding, identification of reasons for certification and standardisation inclusion into branding strategies).

## 3 Results

### 3.1 Brief descriptive analysis

Selected papers were categorised into six disciplines according to the Web of Science classification. Three papers were classified into two disciplines and the remainder into one. Certification and branding were most often studied in Business and Economics (16), followed by Geography (7). Being present also in other disciplines (Social Issues, Environmental Sciences and Ecology, Sociology and Urban Studies) indicates that tourism research is interdisciplinary oriented. Articles that were classified into two fields of research were always combined with Business and Economics – this is the discipline in which newest scientific knowledge about tourism branding and certification is currently concentrated.

Selected papers addressed several interrelated topics. Based on papers' keywords and content we identified ten. In most cases, studies referred to sustainable development (9) and territorial development of rural areas, cities and tourist destinations (8). Seven papers were related to visibility aspects, i.e., to be more recognised or differentiated. Governance, environmental management, tourist perception, customer perception and behaviour of visitors were addressed by three papers. Authenticity and competitive clusters were addressed once. All these topics reveal the diverse contexts of the integration of certification and branding into tourism strategies and their role in governance.

The most common method used in the selected studies was literature desk review (including web pages and social media contents, gray literature and similar non-scientific sources), which was used in 11 papers. A questionnaire or survey was used in 8 papers and interviews were carried out in 7 studies. Respondents in these cases were most commonly the representatives of different groups of stakeholders: visitors, members of associations, representatives of governance structure etc. Qualitative methods prevailed over quantitative methods. Qualitative analysis of texts was conducted either by software programmes or manually, altogether it was used in 6 cases. Statistical analyses such as the multiple regression method or multivariate analysis of covariance were used in 4 papers. Other less used methods were the descriptive method, case study or sampling method.

Temporal analysis of the publication revealed increased interest in this topic in recent years. Selected papers were published from 2003 to 2020, with different dynamics. At the beginning, we recorded a small number of publications (one per year and not even in all years), but trends changed. Out of 26 papers, 16 of them were published in the period from 2017 to 2020 (Figure 2).

In the analysed papers, most of the research was conducted on national (11) and local levels (10). Studies on a regional level were presented in 4 cases, while one paper covered the findings on a global level. Most of the studies were focused on Eurasia (13 studies in Europe and 7 in Asia). Other articles cover areas in North and Central America, Africa and Oceania.

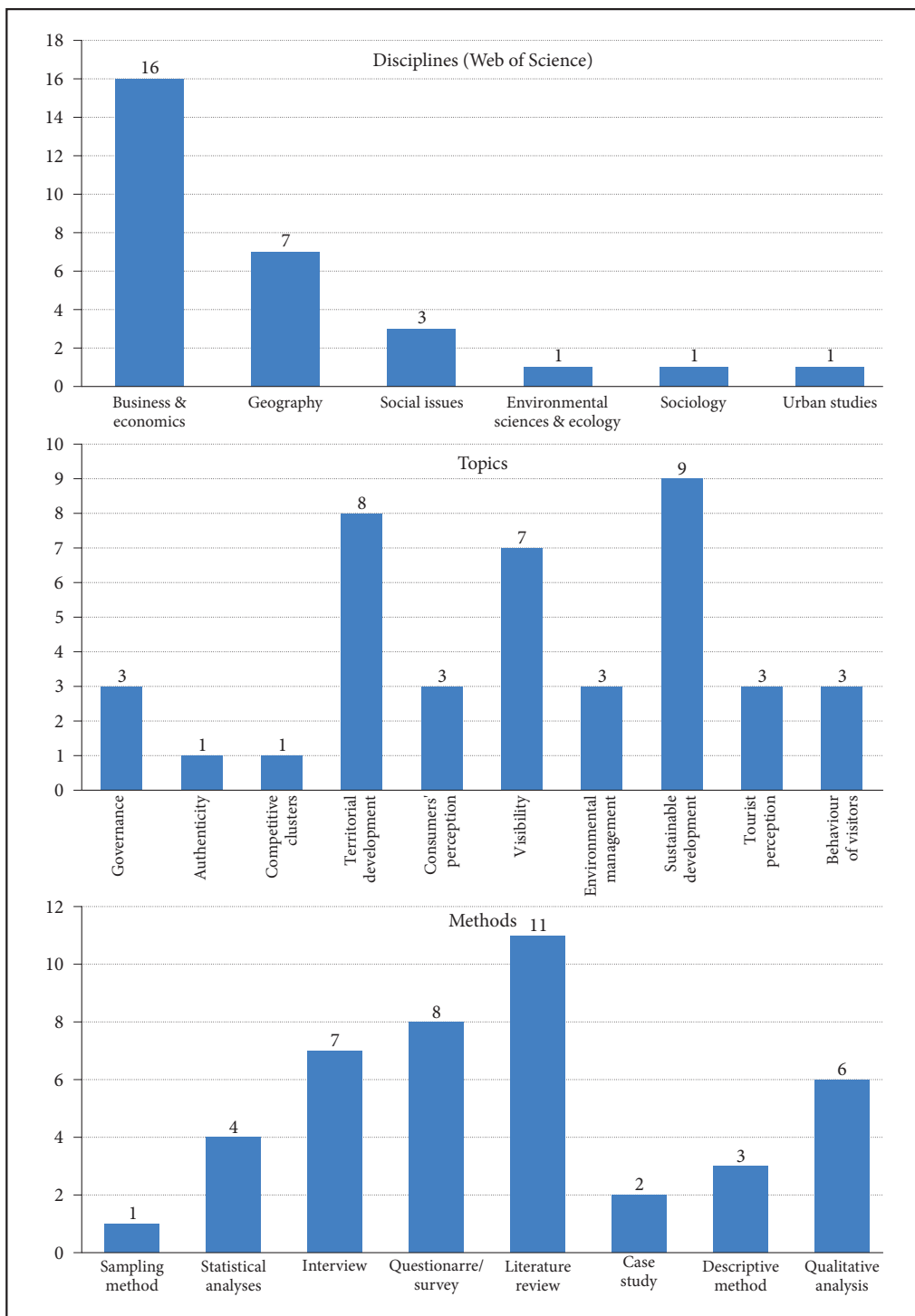


Figure 1: Representation of discipline, topics and methods in selected papers.

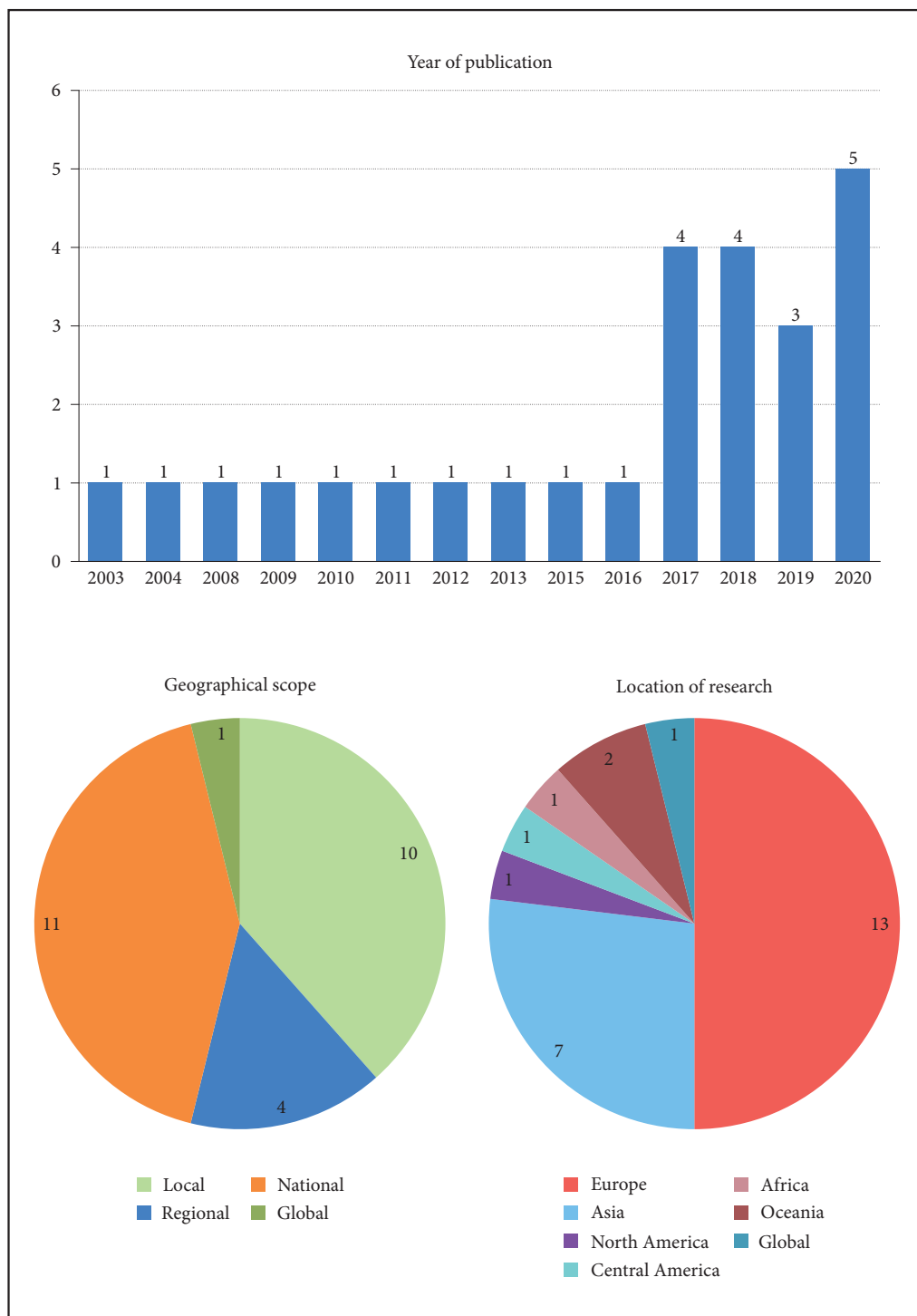


Figure 2: Temporal and spatial distribution of the studies.

### 3.2 Definitions of the terms

The qualitative analysis of terms branding, certifications and labelling showed that they were most commonly referred to as a marketing tool or governance method (8, 4 and 4 times respectively). Certification and labelling were also used as an assurance of the quality of products and services (8 times each). The term labelling was used as an indicator of quality or achieving developmental goals (9), while the term certification was recognised as a guideline for achieving concrete strategic goals (7). Certification was also frequently used as an approach to image improvement (4) and as a decision-making tool (4).

Content analysis revealed that branding had a strong processual component, emphasised in the fields of marketing, governance, adding value and differentiation. For example, in selected papers branding was defined as:

- a value-added process leading to the creation of the customers' experiences (Mattera, Verónica and Cerviño 2012),
- a method of product differentiation and marketing (Christian 2017) or
- an approach in which corporate branding is used to express core values, beliefs, organisational cultures; the objective of place branding is thus usually to attract visitors, new residents and business investments (Andersson and James 2018).

On the other hand, labelling had a more static or even symbolic meaning – it was often perceived as evidence of assurance or an indicator for either quality or developmental goals:

- a statement label that showed environmental aspects and one of the tools in the framework of environmental management (Kartika et al. 2020),
- an external mark to show the type of protection (Yotsumoto and Vafadari 2021) or

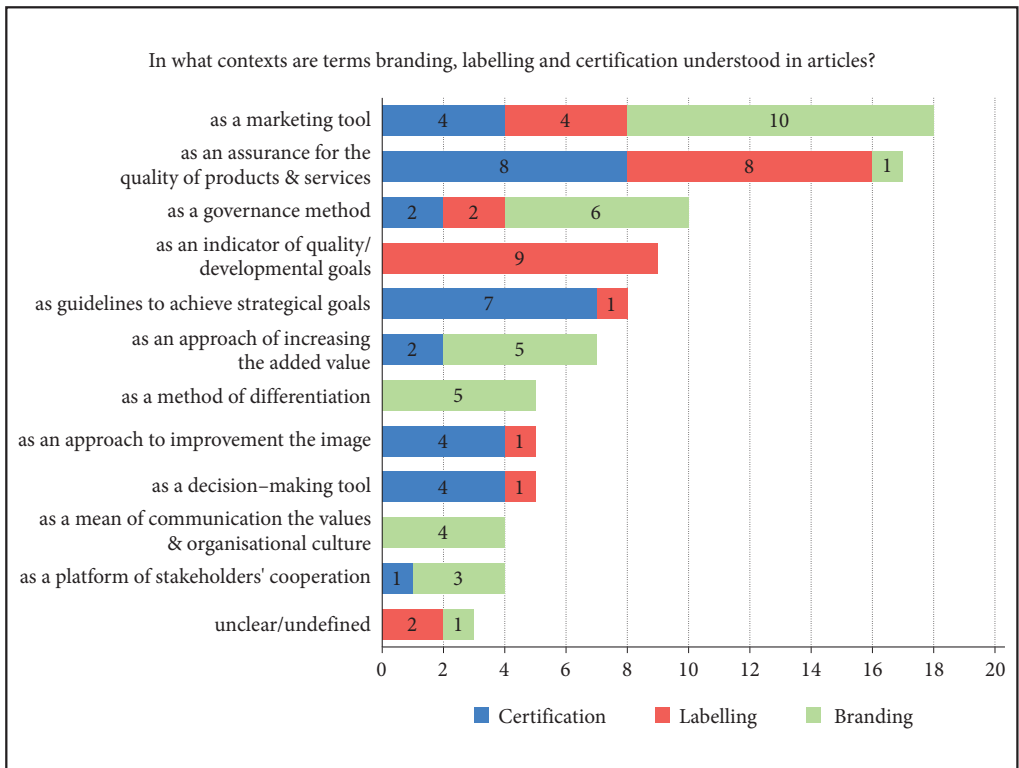


Figure 3: The contexts in which branding, certifications and labelling were understood in the papers.

- an indicator for quality assurance, sending important signals to the market about the offer achieving high quality standards and about the existence of control that procedures are undertaken by independent authorities (Pencarelli, Splendiani and Fraboni 2016).

Certification was used as a guarantee of quality and a guideline for reaching specific developmental goals. According to definitions provided in papers, certification:

- provided guidance to those who recognized that respect for society and environment was a critical success factor (Mattera, Verónica and Cerviño 2012),
- was the process of providing documented assurance that a product, service or organisation complied with a given standard (Jarvis, Weeden and Simcock 2010) or
- was a means of achieving an innovative development scenario (Boesch, Renner and Siegrist 2008).

### 3.3 Link between certification, labelling and branding

Certification can be a part of branding strategy. In 17 out of 26 papers, studies revealed that certification (and standardisation) formed an integral part of building a brand or developing a branding strategy. The purpose of this integration is threefold (Boesch, Renner and Siegrist 2008; Sahin, Baloglu and Topcuoglu 2020):

- boosting a green and sustainable image and reputation (certification became a principal indication of sustainability in the strategy),
- emphasising the excellence of the branded entity (destination, business, product) and
- reinforcing the credibility of a brand by using the system of criteria.

Hamed (2019), for example, recognizes certification as an initial but temporary tool for building trust in the brand. After a period of time, certification is no longer needed – the brand becomes trustworthy on its own. Certification can also have a more operational role. This can be demonstrated in the case of a corporate social responsibility, whereby certification doesn't serve only as a tool for raising awareness of a brand but also provides concrete guidance to achieve this objective. Other authors similarly argue that certification and standardisation increase the quality of a service or product (Lorenzini, Calzati and Giudici 2011) and demonstrate the existence of sustainability practices (Boesch, Renner and Siegrist 2008) or environmental management systems (Petrevska and Cingoski 2017). Some tourism providers are aware of the threat of greenwashing or »empty« green marketing and see certification as protection against the abuse of green initiatives/practices (Andersson and James 2018; Hamed 2019). Certifications, labels or awards are also used as a means of communication with visitors and other businesses (Lee, Lee and Gunarathne 2019). This role is increasing since, according to Sahin, Baloglu and Topcuoglu (2020), a green orientation is »a new normal« for tourists. The rise of private initiatives, both in the area of certification supply and demand, indicates an important shift from mission-driven motives (aspiration for environmentally friendly operation, ethical reasons, responsibility) to market-driven motives (boosting the green image and reputation). Moreover, private governance is taking over fields traditionally under the supervision of public governance (e.g., working conditions, social responsibility), because it's marketable (Christian 2017). With certification, tourism businesses go beyond minimum legal requirements, because this becomes a marketable feature that induces a positive perception by tourists and other businesses (Mattera, Verónica and Cerviño 2012).

Certification can also be an alternative to branding in tourism. Some authors of the reviewed papers see certification and branding as two incompatible concepts. Certification, which is based on the standardisation and unification of criteria, can vouch for a certain level of quality, comparability and can help visitors to set their expectations regarding the services and offer in advance (Andersson and James 2018). However, there is also concern that such »generalisations« are not emphasising the uniqueness of businesses and destinations. Due to the lack of differentiation, the visibility of the destination could be contested (Mic and Eagles 2019). De Vries, Go and Alpe (2018) ask a similar question: how to create a brand, based on authenticity and standardisation; are those concepts compatible, in conflict or even contradictory? Authenticity has become a powerful marketing and branding tool. Any form of standardisation can limit »the expression of local identity, a key driver of authenticity and branding« (Mic and Eagles 2019, 210).

Certification and branding can be seen as two alternative or even opposing processes of tourism management. Branding is understood as an open process, which allows co-creation and wider engagement of the directly involved actors, while in the case of certification, due to following predefined standards and

criteria set by a third-party organisation, possibilities for co-creation are very limited (Baird, Hall and Castka 2018; Mic and Eagles 2019).

Chin, Chin and Wong (2018) presented a triangular model of green marketing tools, in which eco-labelling and certification, eco-branding and environmental advertising interplay as three individual but interlinked elements. According to the authors, eco-branding is »a name, symbol, or design of products that is environmentally harmless« (Chin, Chin and Wong 2018, 264). The features of eco-brands allow consumers to differentiate them from other non-green products. Eco-label communicates the product's collective environmental performance while green advertising »promotes a green lifestyle with or without highlighting a product or service, or which reveals an environmentally responsible corporate image« (Chin, Chin and Wong 2018, 265).

Numerous authors treat certification, labelling and branding either as synonyms or as hierarchically equivalent but not competitive nor interlinked concepts. In these papers, clear definitions of terms are usually not provided or distinctions are perceived as faint. Kartika et al. (2020), for example, mention eco-labelling and eco-branding separately; eco-labelling in the context of preserving the environment, the quality, cleanliness and beauty of the environment, while eco-branding as something linked to tradition, as eco-friendly or using local materials.

Table 4: Reasons why certification and standardisation are part of branding strategies – evidence from the studies.

Contribution	Entity	Paper
to achieve sustainability and to demonstrate it	area – region; business – service sector; heritage sites	Boesch, Renner and Siegrist 2008; Mattera, Verónica and Cerviño 2012; Azizul and Mizan 2015
to support regional/urban/rural development	area – region; city; villages; ecomuseums; area and products	Boesch, Renner and Siegrist 2008; Ducros 2017; Uchiyama, Tanaka, Matsuoka and Kohsaka 2017; Andersson and James 2018
to apply/compete for public funding (federal, sectorial)	area – region	Boesch, Renner and Siegrist 2008
to assure credibility, transparency, comparability and consistent handling	area – region; business – accommodation; hotels	Boesch, Renner and Siegrist 2008; Azizul and Mizan 2015; Petrevska and Cingoski 2017
to reach a certain level of quality	area – region; beaches, marinas; destinations	Boesch, Renner and Siegrist 2008; Lorenzini, Calzati, and Giudici 2011; Pencarelli, Splendiani and Fraboni 2016
to improve image/visibility/reputation	area – city; business – general; service sector; lodge; accommodation; beaches, marinas; businesses; area and products; destinations; heritage sites	Jurinčič and Bojnec 2009; Lorenzini, Calzati and Giudici 2011; Mattera, Verónica and Cerviño 2012; Azizul and Mizan 2015; Pencarelli, Splendiani and Fraboni 2016; Christian 2017; Uchiyama, Tanaka, Matsuoka and Kohsaka 2017; Andersson and James 2018; Hamed 2019; Lee, Lee and Gunarathne 2019; Mic and Eagles 2019
to help achieving corporate social responsibility (CSR)	business – service sector	Mattera, Verónica and Cerviño 2012
guidance for implementing an environmental management system (EMS)	area – region; business – general; accommodation	Boesch, Renner and Siegrist 2008; Jurinčič and Bojnec 2009; Petrevska and Cingoski 2017
excellence	area – villages; ecomuseums; heritage sites	Azizul and Mizan 2015; Ducros 2017
environmental tool, environmental commitments	business – general; lodge; destinations	Jurinčič and Bojnec 2009; Lorenzini, Calzati, and Giudici 2011; Hamed 2019; Mic and Eagles 2019
communication with the outside world	business – accommodation; service providers	Christian 2017; Hamed 2019
direct economic benefit: to add value; to receive pay premium, to increase the volume of tourism visits	business – accommodation; beaches, marinas; products; heritage sites	Azizul and Mizan 2015; Pencarelli, Splendiani and Fraboni 2016; Uchiyama, Tanaka, Matsuoka and Kohsaka 2017; Lee, Lee and Gunarathne 2019
to raise awareness, to educate	beaches, marinas	Pencarelli, Splendiani and Fraboni 2016,
to fight against greenwashing and empty green marketing	business – general; area – city	Andersson and James 2018; Hamed 2019



The use of terms strictly as synonyms is not rare (Spilková and Fialová 2013; Mic and Eagles 2019; Nistoreanu, Aluculesei and Avram 2020; Sornsaruht 2020). This is especially common in the papers dedicated to the UNESCO World Heritage List. The list is sometimes called a brand, a label or even certification, with no real attention given to differentiation of these terms (Hawkins 2004; Azizul and Mizan 2015; Yotsumoto and Vafadari 2021). Ducros (2017) similarly states that in the case of The Association of the Most Beautiful Villages in France, the label is a brand, but standardised, subjected to an evaluation process or respect for the collective charter.

Lorenzini, Calzati, and Giudici (2011) see eco-labels and sustainable certification as one form of territorial branding but, at the same time, mention that certification is often linked to quality and meeting standards, thus becoming part of branding when quality needs to be emphasised. In this case, the hierarchical relation between terms is not always comprehensible.

Certification or label can also be seen as a brand on its own. The branding of certification or label defines its visibility, success and benefits for certified entities and requires all elements of branding, such as visual identity, logos and websites (Hawkins 2004; Jarvis, Weeden and Simcock 2010). Entities (destinations, businesses, sites) that join certification schemes have certain expectations regarding the benefits that certification brings. They count on increased media attention, the advertising of a whole cluster and its individual members and access to the knowledge and experiences of other members of a cluster (Hawkins 2004). They also express criticism when these expectations are not met. On the other hand, members of these clusters share the responsibility to maintain the good reputation of the certification (together with the auditing process) by respecting the standards of quality and rules of communication e.g., use of logos, images, fonts (Jarvis, Weeden and Simcock 2010).

## 4 Discussion

In this chapter, we draw some findings linked to duality or even contradictions emerging in the field of tourism certification, labelling and branding research. We also discuss review limitations and implications for future tourism development.

The review of the scientific literature showed that certification, labelling and branding are not three distinct processes with clear definitions and roles in tourism development. We observed an inconsistent use of the terminology and lack of definitions for each term (Hawkins 2004; Azizul and Mizan 2015; Kartika et al. 2020; Yotsumoto and Vafadari 2021). Only a few papers provide a definition, but these definitions differ (see chapter 3.2). It must be noted that only English papers were included in the review. Adding other languages (French, Spanish ...) could reveal even larger terminological inconsistency.

In the review, we identified the variety of different roles that certification can have on tourism development and the complementarity of certification and branding (Table 1). De Vries, Go and Alpe (2018), however, have the opposite view on this complementarity and pose a question as to whether standardisation (as a basis for certification and labelling) could become a threat to establishing destination brand uniqueness. The result of this dilemma is the demand for differentiation – adaptation of standard for different entities, e.g., hotel vs. cottage (Mic and Eagles 2019). These observations raise two questions. Firstly, are certification and branding two compatible processes (de Vries, Go and Alpe 2018). Secondly, when taking into consideration the cluster of entities owning the same certification, where is the compromise between cooperation and competition, the balance between following the standards and standing out?

In this conceptual review we included papers that addressed different certified, labelled and branded entities, showing at the same time the richness of the research and also the extent to which these concepts are applied: territories (destinations) and variety of hospitality businesses (accommodation, catering, wine-makers, tour operators). Data were gathered from the point of view of label/certificate/brand owner (private entities or public officials), users (managers, owners, employees of certified entities) and visitors. This brings some comparative advantages (insights into visibility and benefits of, e.g., inclusion in certification, discrepancy between expectations of the businesses and actual perception of the visitors). However, variety also has limitations, since different perspectives (e.g., owners' users' and visitors' points of view) are not integrated into a single study.

The public versus private role in certification and branding shows an important duality as well. We observed a reluctance about mandatory, often nationally led certification and branding initiatives, which are primarily

linked to marketing activities abroad, e.g., winegrowing in New Zealand (Baird, Hall and Castka 2018). In contrast, voluntary, privately led governance is taking over fields that were traditionally under the supervision of public governance, e.g., environmental standards, working conditions, social responsibility (Christian 2017). One reason could be found in the flexibility, adaptability and possibility of meeting the expectations of different providers. Certified entities, either destinations or tourism providers, are also sensitive to the question of whether standards and criteria are result- or progress-oriented (Jurinčič and Bojnec 2009). More and more certificates are progress-oriented (Foh Lee 2001), their standards are being modified according to technological development and customer requirements (e.g., EU Ecolabel, Blue Flag, Green Key) or new initiatives are being created (e.g., TravelLife, Booking.com – Travel sustainably), which respond to new requirements.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper provides a systematic overview of tourism certification, labelling and branding in relevant scientific literature. Despite being omnipresent in tourism research (or because of it), the three terms are inconsistently used. The review revealed the complexity of the hierarchical/non-hierarchical and complementary/contested relations among certification and branding. Despite the dilemma about the complementarity of standardisation and uniqueness, the first represents the base for achieving quality, credibility and responsibility in one of the world's fastest growing industries. The benefits of certification, when taking part in branding strategies, have been identified in numerous papers and thus confirm the strong link and co-habitation of the two processes in practice. This link is especially important and viable in the implementation of sustainable tourism and its adaptation to climate change at different territorial levels.

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