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"SUSTAINABLE HOTELS: EXPLORING THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR VALUE CREATION"

## The Swiss ibex sustainability scheme

### *A comprehensive sustainability orientation for hotels*

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## **Abstract**

'*ibex fairstay*' is a label for hotels denoting the hotels' level of sustainability performance and management. In a comparative study, the *ibex fairstay* was seen as one of the best sustainability labels in tourism. Some 55 hotels and hostels are certified against the 'ibex' method, a dozen of which with the highest 'platinum' level. The methodology allows a hotel to assess – and ultimately to improve – its sustainability level in five dimensions: management, economic, environmental, societal and regional/cultural. The *ibex fairstay* is built similarly to the ISO management standards (9001 and 14001), but focuses on actual content compared to management system. A full management system according to the Swiss Tourism Quality Program can be built up with the *ibex fairstay* as well, leading to the highest QQQ level. The *ibex fairstay* improves the quality of management as much as it spurs improvements towards more sustainable performance of hotels. The article describes the *ibex fairstay* structure, as well as some detailed analyses of hotels' performance in selected environmental and societal issues, such as energy, waste, staff related management and more. In addition, the article presents learnings from participating hotels and across all ibex certified houses.

## **Keywords**

Sustainable hotel; sustainability label; sustainability assessment; sustainable tourism;

## 1. Introduction

To bring broad sustainability orientation into the hotel business – a key industry of Switzerland – and use its innovation potential, the local NGO "ö-plus" in 2001 asked the authors of this article to develop a full sustainability assessment for hotels: the "*ibex fairstay*" scheme and label<sup>1</sup>. Today, some 50 hotels use the *ibex* for the assessment, improvement and labelling of their environmental, social, cultural, financial and management performance. In 2010, a broad comparative study by Lucerne University on sustainability schemes for hotels and tourism<sup>2</sup> identified the *ibex fairstay* as one of four top sustainability labels globally.



Fig. 1: The *ibex fairstay* logo

## 2. Sustainability in the Swiss hotel sector

Sustainability is a widely discussed topic in Switzerland: societal convictions, a generally high quality of life, and accordingly to the legal framework all support this. The Swiss hotel and tourism organisations have to some extent supported sustainability orientation for many years, mainly with an environmental focus. Formal uptake among hotels was limited, though, with some 10 EU flower labels, 50 *ibex* labels, next to some self-declared environmental hotels. In this context, the *ibex* is the only broad sustainability assessment.

The major quality scheme in Swiss tourism, "Q"<sup>3</sup> (not to be confounded with Q, James Bond's chief engineer ...), which exists in three levels (Q to QQQ), covers sustainability issues to a limited extent. While hotel chains often use the ISO management standards (ISO 9001 for Quality Management, ISO 14001 for Environmental Management), the Swiss Q label supported the entry of smaller organisations like individual hotels, cable cars, local bus lines, etc. into the quality management world.

To ease uptake of the *ibex*, its methodology was enlarged over time and today can include certification against the EU flower label and/or the Swiss QQQ at the same time.

In addition, various other sustainability oriented programs and labels can be found among Swiss hotels and tour operators' signage of hotels. Examples range from the general industry standards on environment (ISO 14001), food safety (ISO 22000) and organisational health and safety (OHSAS

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<sup>1</sup> Braunschweig, A., Saladino, D. (2006/2009/2012): *Steinbock-Label. Schweizer Nachhaltigkeits-Label für Hotels. Fragebogen zur Zertifizierung für Steinbock-Label, Qualitäts-Gütesiegel Stufe III, EU-Umwelt-Zeichen*; (unpublished). For some background information see: [www.steinbock-label.ch](http://www.steinbock-label.ch).

Note that until 2012 the *ibex* scheme was named in its various language versions, i.e. 'Steinbock' in German and 'Bouquetin' in French.

<sup>2</sup> Barth, M., Weber, F. (2010): *Nachhaltigkeitslabels in Tourismus und Hotellerie, Schlussbericht*. Institut für Tourismuswirtschaft, Hochschule Luzern.

<sup>3</sup> See Fédération Suisse du tourisme STV-FST, [www.swisstourfed.ch](http://www.swisstourfed.ch), search term 'programme qualité', or direct link to (french version) [http://www.swisstourfed.ch/index.cfm?parents\\_id=939](http://www.swisstourfed.ch/index.cfm?parents_id=939) (24.06.14)

18001)<sup>4</sup>, to the international sector label "Green Globe", against which 11 Swiss hotels are currently certified<sup>5</sup>, the European Ecolabel for hotels<sup>6</sup>, to local or even individual sustainability charters<sup>7</sup>.

### 3. The structure of the ibex: ecology, society, culture, finance, management

The *ibex fairstay* scheme<sup>8</sup> consists of

- . a systematic assessment in 5 dimensions: *environmental, social, cultural and regional, financial, and management* quality;
- . the assessment of performance in all these dimensions;
- . a certification system, with tri-annual external audit and independent certification board.

The ibex assesses a hotel based on criteria and on activities, in all five dimensions mentioned above. With better performance and more activities, a hotel gets a higher ranking, from bronze (= entry level) to platinum ibex. Roughly a dozen out of some 55 hotels and hostels currently carry a platinum ibex.

Examples of performance assessment and of activity assessment are given in the following table:

	<b>Performance assessment, e.g.:</b>	<b>Activity assessment, e.g.:</b>
Management Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Targets and Goals on multiple sustainability areas</li> <li>◆ Quality improvement groups</li> <li>◆ ...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Strategy</li> <li>◆ Quality Management</li> <li>◆ Fostering of (various) staff capabilities</li> <li>◆ Mystery checks</li> <li>◆ ...</li> </ul>
Environmental Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Energy cons. per guest night</li> <li>◆ Water cons. per guest night</li> <li>◆ Soil use per bed</li> <li>◆ Share of organic F&amp;B</li> <li>◆ ...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Share of freshly cooked food</li> <li>◆ Waste management</li> <li>◆ Rain water use</li> <li>◆ TVs etc. are off (not on stand-by)</li> <li>◆ Daylight / shadowing of rooms</li> <li>◆ Quality of building materials</li> <li>◆ Teaching energy issues to kitchen staff</li> <li>◆ Ecological quality of chemicals used</li> <li>◆ ...</li> </ul>
Regional Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Share of regionally produced F&amp;B</li> <li>◆ Share of guest arrivals with public transportation</li> <li>◆ ...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Regional food specialties</li> <li>◆ Staff command of local languages</li> <li>◆ Offering bikes, electric cars, etc. to guests</li> <li>◆ Co-operation with local cultural groups/regional cultural programs for guests</li> <li>◆ ...</li> </ul>

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. <http://www.swissotel.com/news/green/swissotel-sustainability-report/> (28.08.14)

<sup>5</sup> See <http://greenglobe.travel/category/switzerland/> (28.08.14)

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.ecolabel-tourism.eu/>, or <http://www.bafu.admin.ch/recht/00245/12705/index.html?lang=en&msg-id=7644>, for its application in Swiss tourism.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. with the new Andermatt resort, which includes the "Chedi" Hotel (<http://www.andermatt-swissalps.ch/en/about-us/sustainability.html>, 28.08.14), or the Davos Intercontinental Hotel, which is part of the IHG hotel group and its 'green engage' program, (<http://www.ihg.com/intercontinental/hotels/gb/en/davos-dorf./zdvda/hoteldetail/about-the-hotel/green-engage>, 28.08.14), to name just a few.

<sup>8</sup> See <http://ibexfairstay.ch>. Information on the certification can be found under "ibex fairstay". (20.06.14)