

## GSTC Interpretation Document on the GSTC Accreditation Manual v3.1

<b>Date:</b>	11th December 2023
<b>To</b>	Accredited Certification Bodies(CBs) and Applicant CBs for Accreditation  Cc: Accredia
<b>Document(s) Referenced:</b>	GSTC Accreditation Manual v3.1
<b>Document Section(s) Referenced:</b>	15. Group Certification
<b>Specific clause (s) Referenced:</b>	15.3. When a certification scheme accepts the practice of group certification, the following shall be required:  15.3.1. Group members shall be individual organizations that offer similar tourism services;
<b>Description of Ambiguity or Uncertainty:</b>	GSTC recognizes that there is some uncertainty in the field due to different interpretations among Certification Bodies regarding the definition of similar tourism services specified in the GSTC Accreditation Manual v3.1.
<b>GSTC Interpretation as of this date:</b>	<p>“Similar tourism services” for determining members of Group Certification shall be interpreted as: Organizations with a common profile, scale, complexity, and type of service offer.</p> <p>Organization from one of the two tourism activities to which certification shall be granted under GSTC Accreditation:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hotels/Accommodation,</li> <li>2. Tour Operators.</li> </ol> <p>It is not possible to combine organizations of the two tourism activities in a group certification.</p>

	<p>Furthermore, the individual organizations of the group shall share similarities based on the above-mentioned definition. This includes the following aspects for the group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Along with clause C1.3, the group establishes and defines a specific scope and categorization of organizations eligible for group membership.</li> <li>• Along with clause 15.3.5, the group verifies and monitors its members to ensure adherence to the defined scope and organizational type.</li> </ul> <p>The CB responsible for certifying the group, the following evaluations shall be conducted when assessing the group's member composition and sustainable management system:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The CB examines whether the definition of group members is stated in internal regulations or a similar document.</li> <li>• The CB verifies whether the definition of member describes the criteria for identifying similar tourism services, taking into account the factors: profile, scale, complexity, and type of service offered.</li> <li>• The CB evaluates whether the composition of the group aligns with the definition of the group member and documents its assessment of conformity accordingly, using the checklist or evaluation tool.</li> <li>• The CB evaluates whether differences in member profiles, scale, complexity, and type of service offered have any adverse effects on the consistent implementation of the sustainable management system and adherence to the GSTC criteria.</li> <li>• Along with clause 15.12, the CB takes into consideration the profile of the group members when performing the group's risk assessment.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Rationale:</b></p>	<p>The GSTC Industry Criteria are applicable only for 2 scopes: Accommodations and Tour Operators. Section 5. Scope of Accreditation in the AM v3.1 states two tourism activities to which certification shall be granted: 5.1.1.1 Hotels/Accommodation and 5.1.1.2 Tour Operators.</p> <p>In that regard, the interpretation of “similar tourism services” shall be related only to one of those activities: Hotels/Accommodations or Tour Operators.</p> <p>Furthermore, in order to ensure the effective implementation of the Sustainability Management System (SMS), it is crucial for a group to carefully select organizations</p>

	<p>with a common profile as its members.</p> <p>When there are significant differences in terms of profile, scale, complexity, and services among the member organizations, it can lead to a highly diverse group composition. Unfortunately, such diversity can have a negative impact on the consistent implementation of the sustainable management system. For instance, it can result in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Increased complexity in assessing risks associated with the group as a whole.</li><li>● Creation of specific areas or membership profiles with higher risk levels.</li><li>● Insufficient internal competencies within the group to effectively carry out activities.</li><li>● Goals could not be set in an effective and appropriate manner to improve sustainability among the members.</li><li>● An increase in implementation costs and financial risk associated with SMS operations.</li></ul> <p>By minimizing differences in profile, scale, complexity, and service among the group members, the challenges associated with the implementation of the sustainable management system can be mitigated. This, in turn, enhances the group's ability to achieve its sustainability goals more effectively and efficiently.</p>
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