



## 2023 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

**Title:** A step towards sustainability: the Green Seal Program.

**Destination, Country:** Itá - Brazil

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**In the category:** ☒ Destination Management ☐ Environment & Climate ☐ Thriving Communities  
☐ Nature & Scenery ☐ Culture & Tradition ☐ Business & Marketing

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**Summary:**

The road to sustainability is long and arduous, requiring planning, engagement, and collective work from the destinations. The county of Itá has been seeking to follow this path, and an important step was taken towards the goal of becoming a more sustainable destination: the creation of a collective, comprehensive, and free certification program, which identified practices developed by local businesses and entities, giving them visibility. It is the Green Seal Program.



## Good Practice Story:

### Destination description

#### *Brief background of the destination.*

Itá is a small county on the west side of the state of Santa Catarina, in the southern region of Brazil. Its territory is about 166 square kilometers, and its current population is over seven thousand people. Initially populated by indigenous, the land that makes up today the county of Itá was colonized by German and Italian settlers from 1919 on, they made a living from subsistence agriculture, the production of cachaça, and the trading of hardwoods, an economic cycle that lasted until the end of 1960s.

Nestled on the banks of the Uruguay River, the county of Itá had its history profoundly altered by the construction of the Itá Hydroelectric Power Plant, a process that began in the late 1970s and ended in the 2000s. During this period, the entire population of the central area had to be relocated, a new town was built, and a new economic scenario emerged. The Towers of the old Church of St. Peter the Apostle, the only building of the old city still standing in the middle of the Hydroelectric plant lake, became a tourist attraction; the discovery of thermal waters gave birth to new leisure and hotel businesses; several other services and tours were created and tourism became part of the economy of Itá.

Currently, the county's challenge is to become a more responsible tourist destination and a reference in sustainability, an audacious goal that, to be reached, requires the involvement of different sectors, and collective incentive actions, as is the case of the Green Seal Program.

### Issues faced

#### *Problems/issues solved with the Good Practice Story.*

In its strategic planning, carried out in 2021, the county of Itá defined one of its goals to become, by 2030, one of the reference cities in sustainability in Latin America. With this goal in mind, since 2021, the county has participated in the international contest "Top 100 Histories", which provides sustainability metrics for tourism destinations, helping to understand the theme in its social, environmental, and cultural dimensions, as well as, allowing the destinations to report all sustainable good practices adopted. For two years in a row, Itá was successful in the contest, telling its stories and reporting practices adopted by both: the public sector and some private sector businesses. This recognition helped to leverage sustainable initiatives; however, there was a disconnect, with a lack of information among the players. The experience learned through certification throughout sustainable development programs, proved that this process could enhance actions and practices, promoting integration between them.

Although many certification programs exist, local peculiarities, the difficulty of reporting initiatives, and above all, costs, tend to make programs unattractive to small local businesses, most of which are single-family enterprises. Moreover, adherence to nationally or internationally recognized certification programs usually happens on an individual basis and is requested by medium and large companies.

Given this scenario, the Technical Chamber of Sustainability of the Local Economic Development Program – LED, decided to map sustainable initiatives, practiced by local entrepreneurs and encourage them to adhere to new sustainability practices by creating the Green Seal Program, a local and free program that aims to recognize and certify sustainable initiatives and stimulate public entities, businesses, and organizations to adopt socio-environmental practices and actions. It represents an important step because, in the future, these entities could join certification programs at a national or international level; as they come to understand the dimensions of sustainability, map actions in progress, and are encouraged to adopt new actions. It also aims to stimulate consumers' critical sense and their preference for businesses, projects, and products that have environmental,

social, and economic responsibility, exposing them to information about sustainable measures adopted.

### Methods, steps, and tools applied

*Solutions implemented to address the sustainability problems or issues.*

The following steps were taken to implement the Green Seal Program:

1. Initially, the Technical Chamber of Sustainability defined the criteria that would be used to evaluate the businesses and entities enrolled in the Green Seal Program, using as a model the criteria of the "Top 100 Histories" and other programs instituted by Brazilian counties, as well as defining the score for each criterion.
2. Subsequently, the variety of businesses and entities that could join the program was defined, and to broaden the participation, leaving it open to businesses, private companies, and public agencies.
3. Next, the Technical Chamber of Sustainability prepared the public call for the Green Seal Program.
4. The Technical Chamber also prepared the evaluation questionnaire containing items related to the topics:
  - a. Electric energy consumption reduction;
  - b. Water consumption reduction;
  - c. Management of solid residues;
  - d. Effluent treatment;
  - e. Awareness raising for residents regarding sustainability;
  - f. Green areas existence;
  - g. Permeable areas existence;
  - h. Accessibility.
5. Fifth, the committee responsible for applying the questionnaire was defined, as composed of representatives from the Technical Chamber of Sustainability, the Chamber of Commerce, and Tourism Associations, and the teaching staff and students of the schools in the county.
6. The Technical Chamber created a model of the Program's identification for broadcasting and to be the trophy to be given to the businesspeople participating in the Program. A member of the Technical Chamber created and presented several models to the group for voting; three of them were chosen. These three models were submitted to a popular jury through the DEL Program and the City Hall communication channels, and one was chosen by the public and used as the mark of the Program and model of the trophy to be given to the participants who reached the minimum score.
7. Making the Green Seal trophies in recycled wood, carved by a local craftsman, valuing the county's cultural work, and reusing wood that would otherwise be discarded.
8. Launched and publicized the Program's call in the communication channels of the Itá City Hall.
9. Visits by members of the Technical Chamber to local businesses to publicize the Program's call and encourage participation.
10. Visits to evaluate the criteria and apply the questionnaire to the registered companies by the members of the evaluation committee.
11. Compilation of scores of the evaluated companies and elaboration of the score of each one.
12. Evaluation commission meetings to prepare the report of suggestions to evaluate businesses.
13. The Delivery Ceremony of Certificates to classified companies, took place during the opening of the Engineering and Architecture Seminar, giving more visibility to the initiative and encouraging other companies to join the Green Seal.
14. Visit by the evaluation committee to the classified companies to award the trophy and provide feedback on the diagnosis, with suggestions for improvement or expansion of sustainability practices in each of them.

The next steps expected of the Green Seal Program are as follows:

1) Campaign through the media to value certification and publicize the initiatives adopted by each business, also stimulating consumers' critical sense and the seeking for more responsible commerce and products.

2) Elaboration and application of a questionnaire with participating businesses and entities to identify whether improvements were made or the adoption of new practices based on participation in the Program were applied.

Congruent with the Green Seal initiative, the DEL Program offered local businesses training aimed at forming a Sustainability Center, clarifying the criteria adopted in international certification, where trades that adhered to the Green Seal might also be participating, showing their interest in the theme; and the will of the local businesses to become more responsible.

### Key success factors

*Critical elements that led to successfully solving the issues.*

The success of the Green Seal Program is linked to the fact that it was adjusted to the local reality. The technicians who developed the methodology for analyzing the actions had extensive knowledge of the most significant environmental impacts for the evaluated public, as well as the actions that could mitigate them. Additionally, the approach to these issues proved to be deeply transformative for the businesses involved. The simple fact of being aware of the need to adopt mitigating practices for the impacts caused by their activities resulted in the adoption of several new actions, some very simple and inexpensive, which provided significant progress in dealing with the sustainability of these trades.

Nevertheless, the evaluation committee itself had the opportunity to make a very accurate diagnosis of the practice of sustainable actions by local businesses. This represents important feedback for new programs to be developed by the community.

The engagement of local entities, such as the Chamber of Commerce (Retailers as well as other businesspeople), and the Association of Tourism was essential while mobilizing businesses and entities to participate in the Green Seal Program, as in the exchange of knowledge about the subject. The Itá City Hall was responsible, besides the technical and advertising support, for the cost of making the trophies and certificates.

### Lessons learned

*Challenges faced while implementing the Good Practice and their solutions.*

Challenges faced in implementing the Best Practices and their solutions.

Establishing metric parameters for evaluating sustainability actions, even though it is possible to count on a broad literary framework, proved to be quite complex. The great diversity of establishments evaluated, from small family-run businesses to resorts, required a very accurate study of the impacts of each of the activities and a very significant learning curve of how each one of them interacts with the environment.

It was found that, in many cases, despite the interest in adopting sustainable practices by the owners, many fail to do so due to a lack of technical knowledge of the solutions and not only because of the cost of implementation.

It was noticed that most of the destination's environmental education actions are aimed at children and young people, dealing with issues that are not always consonant with reality and needs experiencing by shopkeepers and service providers, much less with their age group. Promoting the integration of these programs with the mentioned public can stimulate children and young people to develop new practices to improve the sustainability of these enterprises.

In the same way, the creation of a multidisciplinary team, made up of technicians residing in the county, as well as expanding the possibilities of solutions on the dimensions of sustainability, confirms the local commitment to carry the initiative forward.

## Achievements and Results

*Direct and indirect results of the Good Practice.*

Among the results of the Green Seal Program, there was the adhesion of sixteen (16) businesses and entities from the county of Itá: tourism companies, academies, a supermarket, consulting companies, accounting, and schools, among them.

This adhesion of different sectors has made it possible to map sustainable actions locally developed and, based on this, generation of an individual report and guidance provided by the committee of the Seal, aiming to improve actions already undertaken and the adoption of new ones.

The businesses and entities awarded with the Green Seal gained visibility during the Award Ceremony, which took place during the Seminar of Engineering and Architecture, one of the main and most renowned events in Itá, and will also have their practices disclosed in videos that will be created and posted in the local and social networks of the county in a next stage of the Program scheduled for the second half of 2023, which is also a way to attract other entities/businesses to join the Program next year (2024).

The practice of sustainable actions by certified companies has raised the awareness of customers, who are attracted to the topic, both by posts related to certification and by the physical presence of the Seal in the establishments.

## Tips for other destinations

*Your suggestions or recommendations for other destinations facing the same issues or implementing similar solutions*

Some points were fundamental for the project to be successful and accomplish its objective, among which we can mention:

Involvement of the Tourism Trade and local associations in the conception, dissemination, and engagement of businesses and entities.

The creation of a multidisciplinary judging committee, formed by professionals with experience in different areas.

The committee also counted on the participation of teachers and students from elementary and high school, intending to enlighten young people about sustainable practices and the difficulties faced by businesses in their implementation, a fundamental point for the continuity of the program.

The Seal's annual validity stimulates constant vigilance of the evaluated practices and encourages the implementation of new actions. It creates a spirit of continuous evolution in adapting the processes of the companies involved, which ends up spreading to others in a very promising feedback cycle.

## Recognitions and Additional references

*Recognitions and awards the Good Practice received and supporting evidence.*

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