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Self-catering classification system in CesR EU partner countries - SUMMARY

The purpose of this summary is to provide an overview of the 8 different systems of self-catering categorisation in the countries involved in CesR project: France, the Czech Republic, Poland, Cyprus, Latvia, Spain, Slovenia and Ireland. The only country, among CesR partner countries, without any classification system for self-catering accommodation is the Czech Republic.

The 5-question survey indicates that **classification systems already exist at a national and regional level in most countries**. Self-catering grading is, for the most part, either *legislated and enforced by government-appointed officials* (Spain), or *managed by national organisations*, as is the case in France (Atout France), Poland (Polish Federation of Rural Tourism), Cyprus (Cyprus Tourism Organisation), Latvia (Hotel and Restaurant Centre) and Slovenia (Ministry of Economic Development and Technology).

The survey reveals that there is **a significant variety** of categorisation systems of self-catering accommodation in CesR countries. Slovenia has a mandatory classification system while Poland decided on the voluntary solution. France chose a double classification system: national and internal categorisation within existing brands (Gîtes de France, Clévacances and For Accueil Paysan) whereas in Ireland it is sub-contracted out by Failte Ireland (Ireland National Tourism Authority) to two companies.

The grading systems give an indication of the level of standard offered by self-catering establishments in each country, enabling consumers to make an informed choice. **The categories are most often described in stars**, somehow to refer to hotel market ratings, some systems label their level of services and comfort in terms of **keys** (France – brand classification), **apples** (farms with accommodation in Slovenia), **numbers** (rural accommodation in Latvia ranging from I to IV), other in more **descriptive way**. In case of Cyprus, there is a 3 level system (luxurious, first class, second class), Andalucía in Spain has 2 levels: basic and superior, one of French brands - Accueil Paysan provides: detailed description of each accommodation without any classification scale.

The benefits stemming from being approved by the categorisation organisations **mainly focus on promotional activities** provided by these bodies being in charge of the system. Interestingly the Slovenian case shows that the compulsory categorisation offers better market positioning when competing with international operators. The Slovenian system as the only system among CesR partner countries foresees penalties for the violation of rules (due to its compulsory character).

Based on the findings of this survey, **4 out of 7 countries have official organisations which represent and lobby on behalf of self-catering owners**. In France – all three brand associations are at the same time representing self-catering owners, Cyprus has 2 associations (Cyprus Agrotourism Company, Organization of Registered Tourist Villas) whereas one exists in Spain (ASETUR) and in Ireland (The Irish Self-Catering Federation).

The applied criteria within the systems vary from one country to another and from one geographic region to another (e.g. Spain). Differences in culture and geographical situations explain the variation in the criteria and methodology of the systems of classification currently in force in the CesR EU partner countries. Questions by whom the system is inspected, what criteria must be met within the systems, what are the benefits, and whether they are made mandatory by law, also add major elements to the diversity.

The follow-up works within CesR partnership could lead to select recommendations for self-catering accommodation in Europe in order to facilitate the task of booking internally and internationally. In order to facilitate the choice of self-catering accommodation to the foreign tourists, an overview of existing rules and categorisation basis existing in each country could be provided. From the perspective of customers, the information about types of ratings and their basis (what conditions must be fulfilled to receive each rate/grade) would be crucial in making their choices. The elaboration of such an overview might become one of the practical effects of the exchanges of good practices among CesR project's partners. Provision of concise information about self-catering classification systems in different countries in Europe could be completed with an overview of qualities (with a special attention paid on additional services offered by accommodation providers) that are required to receive the best grade.