

D.C 3.2 - CEETO GUIDELINES FOR PROTECTED AREAS TO WORK WITH TOUR OPERATORS

Executive Summary

25 05 2020





1 - INTRODUCTION

Consideration of tourism and the implementation of sustainable tourism in protected areas began several decades ago with a gradual change in attitude and in the way to approach tourism, from: 'tourists' we do not want to 'visitors' we wish to welcome, also providers of resources.

Public bodies and private actors are interested by tourism in PAs, viewed as additional 'niche' markets, bringing potential benefits and also synchronized with people's concerns.

. *Step I*: a protected area has decided to open its gates, it accepts visitors but it must be sure this will not affect its tasks and the environment, particularly sensitive sites and wildlife.

. *Step II*: in order to set up a sustainable destination, the PA takes advantage of existing partnerships but this has to be widened to other local partners of the tourism sector and other fields of activity.

. *Step III*: outside tourist providers propose tourism stays in the area, involving local tourism businesses. The PA may intend to cooperate with them and then with other PAs.

2 - ISSUES / CHALLENGES

To manage and to control tourism activities protected areas need to cooperate with tourism operators that is also with private businesses. PAs have to understand more about private tourism activities and reversely, they must be sure they know the area and its protection rules. This is made possible by sessions of listening, exchange and consultation. Listening means being attentive to expectations.

2.1. Being attentive to expectations, practices and constraints

Tourism means a structured hospitality, but in definite conditions of planning, promotion, reception and on-site organization. It also means reassuring visitors, professionals, local people, etc. and where possible to provide nice surprises and new horizons. This leads to words that are not familiar to PAs:

. *Marketing*; customers' hierarchy of needs and services to meet needs.

. *Competition* between tourist destinations, making distinctiveness and attractiveness necessary.

. *Cooperation* because tourism depends on assembling different activities and services. It is therefore essential to cooperate.

- Expectations from visitors are commonly expressed: go green, away for a few days, finding back sensations and renewed experiences, etc. And time free for reconnection: with nature, with the country life, with intangible heritage or with other people. But other and generally unplanned expectations are essential: being a 'country dweller', discovering local life, traditions, ... and buying local products.

- Local people expect from visitors to be considered for themselves, not just as elements of the landscape. Tourism designed for visitors must be also available for local people, also bringing resources to the local economic life.

- Local tourist operators expect visitors to act local, eat local, experience local, buy local, etc. Local operators expect visitors to perceive all the riches of their territory, something requiring time, not just a single day.

- Tour operators expect from their local partners a consistent partnership, based on shared vision and ambition, following the same engagement for sustainability, in compliance with the tour operating rules.

- Public tourism bodies are interested by tourism in their regional protected areas, as an additional 'niche' market and some of them indicate recommendations focussed on tourism, for example to enrich their tourism services, their attractiveness and their contribution to the regional tourism economy.

2.2. Tourism, an essential and productive Public-Private collaboration

Collaborating for sustainable tourism means cooperation of public bodies, municipalities with the private sector: tourism providers, tour operators and also with local private groups of interest. Collaboration appears as an opportunity to take together a step towards global sustainability in the area, also with local tourism providers and/or outside tour operators already managing tourism activities for years.



Sustainable tourism in PAs proceeds from contributions of the protected area itself together with conservation associations and interest groups, of national networks of PAs, of rural tourism, of outdoor activities, etc. Local government and public bodies are almost everywhere present for the construction and maintenance of infrastructures, in tourist offices.

It also proceeds from individual engagement of tourism businesses and their existing cooperation with the PA. But the determining factor often comes from the PA itself. The European Charter process (ECST-PA) gives examples of such process.

Cooperation of the PA with its public partners is commonly strengthened during professional meetings or media events, e.g. study visits and educational tours for tour operators.

3 - SOLUTIONS

Solutions cannot be found in standalone positioning and actions. This implies knowing each other's point of view, constraints, opportunities, etc., opening the way to a locally-shared vision and then to long-term orientations, prior to action through pluriannual strategy and action plan.

3.1. *The ECST-PA process (the Charter process)*

Sustainable tourism in PAs proceeds from an active cooperation, particularly from a productive public-private collaboration, highlighted in the three parts of the ECST process (the 'Charter process').

- *A progressive development, from its Part I to its Part III*: set up by EUROPARC, the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (ECST-PA or ECST) provides a set of tools and relevant actions to enable areas become a sustainable destination, in accordance with base principles of shared commitment to sustainability, to action, to evaluation and continuous improvement.
- *Implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reports*: the list of key sustainability issues leads to key actions to be included in the action plan. Strategy and action plan must be in accordance with the PA management plan. In addition, indicators, monitoring and progress reports help control its effective implementation, also as tools of communication and debate between stakeholders during Forum sessions.
- *The ECST circular relation between its 3 parts*: the implementation of the ECST Part I effectively makes possible to create a territory of sustainable tourism destination. As the base of the core circle, governance and engaging all stakeholders is of particular importance in order to implement the ECST in its first step and then in its three parts. This implies a permanent Tourism Forum between public bodies, conservation and community organisations and representatives of the tourism businesses.
- *The Part II carries bond and permanent cooperation*: the engagement of local businesses is vital to the effective development and management of sustainable tourism. Many actions listed in a PA Part I action plan are in fact proposed and managed by private businesses and associations. In addition, consistent commitment of some tourism businesses makes possible to recognize them as certified sustainable partners, thanks to an ECST certificate delivered by the PA.
- . *Part III opens to outside*: the Charter-awarded PA looks outward and shows a proactive attitude with tour operators and travel agencies, together with its selected local partners.

3.2. *Part III - Working with tour operators*

- PAs need to understand how the tour operating ecosystem works, its different tourism providers, all of them delivering tourism services to visitors. In touch with local partners, they often also contribute to design tourism stays.

Legal aspects ensure safety to visitors thanks to EU rules bringing stronger protection to many aspects of a travel and therefore of package holidays. National legislations usually go beyond EU rules.

- TO, travel agencies highlighting their sustainable commitments have common characteristics: an experienced company, complying with legal and professional tourism requirements, they are managed by a responsible and engaged team operating in binomial work their local partners. They highlight clear positioning and commitments to sustainable/responsible tourism, also through websites and catalogues, with clear deliverables.



3.3. Working with tour operators: some case studies

- The Charter Part III provides an opportunity for operators and travel agencies to be recognized and therefore to promote -and market- their tourism packages in Charter-awarded destinations. Together with other ones in Spain and Italy, some French protected areas are already active on that long-distance navigation. The example was given by a French national park getting involved in the ECST III framework together with its local partners and with IPAMAC a regional association of protected areas, nature parks and national parks together, focusing on sustainable tourism and on the ECST process.
- Some Region's tourism bodies have also understood the interest of supporting tourism in their protected areas, their grouping and progressive involvement in the three Parts of the Charter process. Other public institutions have set up similar tourism stays.
- Some travel agencies specialized in specific outdoor activities are already present in PAs of different European countries, also in Charter parks, and work in touch with local tourism businesses.

3.4. Awarding scheme and business recognition

Tour operators can be specifically recognized for their engagement with PAs.

- EUROPARC Star Awards: tourism providers working sustainable destinations can apply for EUROPARC Star Awards, to be assessed and possibly awarded by an international jury composed by sustainable tourism experts.
- Some local brands are also much appreciated, particularly when it brings to the operator an additional existing distinctiveness.

3.5. Benefits

- Cooperating with PAs and with certified local partners ensures to TOs distinctiveness, visibility. Their cooperation with PAs may help them improve their tourism services and provides security.
- Benefits for local tourism businesses and tour operators bring as well benefits for the local economy where tourism fallouts are got and kept by local businesses and local areas.

3.6. Communicating about sustainable tourism

Networking efficiently requires communication between local partners and with other tourism bodies. Collective commitment is then put forward by EUROPARC, by tourism operators but also by local Charter park networks.

Sustainable tourism will increasing respond to a growing demand but will remind as a niche market, to be heard and visible thanks to joint communication from PAs engaged in order to reach a critical mass. Charter-awarded parks commit to communicating their recognition and their action, and local partners involved in the Part II are likewise invited to do the same. And to give a wider extent particularly at the Part III level, such public-private cooperation is then essential.

4 - CONCLUSIONS

Marketing, competition will be always present but also networking and cooperation: cooperation already exists between European PAs through different projects, like CEETO and some European PAs are in fact already used to cooperate also for cross-border, borderless tourism. The effective implementation of the Charter Part III in different countries and the cooperation between PAs, their tour operators and tourism partners are an achievable goal for PAs and as well for their national or regional networks.