

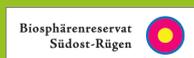
# D.C 3.2 - CEETO GUIDELINES FOR PROTECTED AREAS TO WORK WITH TOUR OPERATORS

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25 05 2020

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## A. Standalone document

### 1 - INTRODUCTION

#### *Progressive introduction and implementation of sustainable tourism in protected areas*

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: tourism we do not want > we accept > we want / we contribute to set up > until: tourism we wish to share with other protected areas (PAs).

Initially viewed as dangers or even not taken in account by PAs in spite of increasing visitor flows, 'tourists' have been progressively tolerated and they have now become 'visitors', as providers of resources.

On another side, most of PAs have gradually developed a management plan. Many parks dispose now of a such long-term reference document, so that they are in a position to integrate tourism in their management plan.

Most of protected areas now accept sustainable tourism and many of them are involved, to varying degrees, in a local and sustainable tourism offer.

Other public bodies and private actors are interested by tourism in PAs, viewed as additional 'niche' and as markets to take in consideration because of potential benefits and also because they are increasingly synchronized and in correspondence with people's concerns.

Here we can mention a gradation, which will help make a link with the ECST-PA (European Charter for Sustainable Tourism) and its step-by-step process, to be detailed later.

. *Step I*: a protected area has gates opened to visitors, but it must be sure of compliance with sustainability conditions, that is not affecting its tasks and the environment, particularly the sensitive sites and wildlife that it must protect.

. *Step II*: in order to set up a sustainable destination, the PA takes advantage of active partnerships (education, network of conservationists, guides, etc.), but it has to widen this collaboration to other local partners, operating in the tourism sector and other fields of activity. It has then to keep tighter relationships with them and their networks, and to contribute to some tourism activity like promotion.

. *Step III*: other tourist companies operating from outside the PA or little related with its management also propose tourism stays in its territory, involving local tourism businesses. The PA may decide to cooperate with them and then possibly with other PAs.

### 2 - ISSUES / CHALLENGES

Protected areas need tourism operators to manage and to control tourism activities but on the other hand some private operators may forget the protected area, its role and its management, just viewing the area as landscapes for their 'customers', particularly in areas with less restrictive access like those classified at level V by IUCN. In fact, they may think they are not compelled to refer to the PA management for most of their activities and therefore not compelled to cooperate.

This leads to consider a wider picture, in order to understand more about private tourism operators and, reversely, to make sure that they pay attention to the area and its protection rules and then to involve those operators to more sustainability in a win-win cooperation.



This implies knowing each other's point of view, constraints, opportunities, etc. Something made possible in a SWOT analysis to be shared and discussed, as a base to set up cooperation.

This leads to sessions of listening, consultation and exchange: punctual exchanges before links are created, which will allow regular consultation, then decisions and actions.

Listening first means being attentive to expectations.

## 2.1. Being attentive to expectations, practices and constraints

Tourism means 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, creating nice surprises and opening new horizons.

What protected areas wish, what they can offer to visitors, how they can meet their expectations, there are multiple and diverse expectations to be reconciled, for the collective success of all.

This leads to evoking words that are not familiar to PA staff, and even somewhat disturbing:

. *Marketing*, something strange but useful: “*study and management of exchange relationships, business process of identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer's needs and wants*”.

Meaning: listening to customers, therefore listening to visitors (but of course not only them).

A reference is commonly used in marketing: Maslow's hierarchy of needs (in Western civilization): basic > psychological > self-fulfilment (physiological > safety > love and belonging > esteem > self-actualization).

Providing services to meet needs, this requires taking it in consideration.

. *Competition*, in softer terms it can be called ‘emulation’, but not for private tourism businesses who work in a world of competition between tourist destinations.

Making distinctiveness, attractiveness and other marketing words are then relevant and necessary.

. *Cooperation* in the end, because tourism is made possible only by assembling different activities and services. Tourism means a transversal activity where different economic sectors have to work together.

Therefore, solutions cannot be found in standalone positioning and actions. It is essential to cooperate in order to make viable and autonomous specific markets, ‘niche’ markets of a sustainable destinations in a protected area.

### 2.1.1. Expectations from visitors

. *Some commonly expressed expectations*

Go green, get away for a few days, sport and outdoor activities are most often cited and highlighted: go hiking in the countryside, in mountain, walking, cycling, ... finding back own sensations and renewed experiences. Also stargazing and sounds of night or personal hobbies like painting, making sketches on site, and of course all ways of reconnection.

Vacations mean having time free (‘vacation’, from the Latin word ‘vacuum’: space) for personal sensations.

Vacations in protected areas would particularly mean reconnection: with nature, with the country life, with intangible heritage or with a feeling of usefulness for the planet, for wildlife or for other people.

Visitors can rediscover their roots as a part of nature and also to learn from nature. (*Scientists declare that prehistoric people could master and use much more global knowledge from nature than modern individuals*).

Vacations mean reconnecting with nature, ... but not only: there are a moment to share in family, with friends or with people sharing the same hobby or passion, thanks to activities done together, rambling, cycling, discoveries, adventure games, trails, ... Some visitors are then ready to take part to useful,



sustainable volunteering projects, to restore built heritage, to nature conservations works or to days of participative science.

. *Something generally unplanned, but essential:*

*“In Rome, do as Romans do”*: tourist information matter is of course necessary and expected, if possible also accessible from mobile apps, but visitors expect more and differently, particularly in a protected area where they wish to fit into the local environment, being a country dweller, just for a while but fully: somehow rooted like surrounding inhabitants, at the moment of a local event: wedding, folk music, rural fair in a village, drinking in a café beside (or better: together with) inhabitants, strolling in a local market, discovering local produce and local recipes, ... and buying local products.

Unplanned memories and souvenirs (not just selfies) are those they wish to bring back and to share with friends.

### 2.1.2. Expectations from local people, businesses and communities

This recalls the title and *the raison d’être* of a recent European project: *“we are the landscape”*: visitors have to consider local people for themselves, not just as elements of the landscape. Inhabitants of villages in a Switzerland’s protected area declare with pride: *“we are the park”*.

This means that tourism done for visitors must be also available for local people.

It must respect and not affect the local life in all its aspects, and it must contribute as far as possible to bring resources to the local economic life.

### 2.1.3. Expectations from local tourist operators

Local first! Something like moving in a pinball machine, or in other words in Italy: *“Km.0”*.

Visitors are invited to move around but within the limits of the area: walk local, eat local, experience local, buy local, etc.

Local operators are in fact keen to make visitors perceive all the diverse riches of their territory but a deeper approach requires time, not just a single day.

And visitors are expected to come also during off-seasons, so that they help maintain the jobs and activities that they are happy to find in summer.

For example, strolling or cycling, admiring landscapes of aromatic plants, visiting a distillery plant are particularly appreciated in summer but learning about essential oils in a rural “autumn university” will provide new experiences and new skills.

In the same way, walking or snowshoeing in a mountain valley in winter with a mountain guide will awaken senses and keep them alert to grasp different and unsuspected messages from wildlife.

### 2.1.4. Expectations from outside tour operators

Outside tour operators expect as well from their local partners -and with the support from local public bodies- a genuine, consistent network of local operators, sharing the same vision also in the long term, a network to be used first to cooperate between them and then to cooperate together with outside operators, during the peak season and as much as possible during off-season.

Tour operators expect their local partners to comply together with the tourism operating rules, in the long run, with shared ambition and following the same engagement for sustainability.



### 2.1.5. Expectations from public tourism bodies

Public tourism bodies, regional tourism organizations implement decisions of their public authorities, which are increasingly interested by an alternative tourism in protected areas. But they want this additional 'niche' market follow their orientations and objectives.

As examples, the guidelines below give an idea of prescriptions/recommendations indicated by Region's tourism authorities to regional protected areas. In this case, the French Region Provence Sud to its eight regional nature parks and also to its area's national parks:

- integrate new activities and operators of the tourism sector,
- enrich and renew attractiveness of the area,
- use marketing tools and new approach of their visitors,
- improve competitiveness of the tourism businesses,
- contribute to a better territorial balance of local economy and services,
- contribute to enable tourist sites e.g. ski resorts having to adapt to climate change,
- contribute to tourism statistics and surveys,
- inform public tourism bodies about updated tourism trends, demands and practices.

Some of those orientations and recommendations can likewise be put forward by a more local group of municipalities locally in touch with PAs. This will frequently determine some financial support, and also access to EU structural funds managed at a regional level.

But nature protection comes first in some areas for visitors and also for public bodies, which then contribute to nature protection and limited access to some nature sites.

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

Collaboration appears then as something inevitable and bringing an opportunity to take together a step towards global sustainability in the area.

Here come back '*insiders*': local tourism providers. They live inside, they are experienced but often unknown, they have been working there and managing tourism activities for a long time, and often long before the PA shows interest in tourism. And some of them also deliver their tourism services to outside tour operators.

Collaborating for sustainable tourism means cooperation of public bodies, of municipalities with the private sector: tourism providers, tour operators and also with local private groups of interest, for example hotel or rural accommodation groups, agriculture and craft federations, public transport companies, etc.

### 2.2.1. What P-P collaboration brings to a sustainable tourism offer

#### . *Contributions of the protected area*

Everything takes its origin in the territory and everything must come back to it. The protected area, its wildlife, its landscapes, its fields, its heritage, also its rules, its infrastructures, knowledge and capacities of its rangers, ... Protection, conservation and then enhancement proceed from a complex set of cooperation. The same goes for tourism.

#### . *Contributions of conservation associations and interest groups*

some PA partners are active in the tourism sector and they also contribute to some conservation missions, to outdoor activities, to guiding services, to education, culture, etc.

. *Contributions of outside tourism operators*: they bring visitors to the area thanks to tours organized in agreement with their local tourism partners.



*. Contributions of national networks*

Federations of PAs, of rural tourism, of outdoor activities, etc. are in touch with national tourism boards (also for lobbying). Their promotional activities and branding may also contribute to enhance sustainable tourism and they can be ready to promote territories where a PA plays an active, even decisive role.

*. Contributions of the local government*

Public bodies, municipalities are almost everywhere involved in the construction and maintenance of infrastructures, also in national park buffer zones, for example to build a site intended to host park activities, or for project funding, etc.

*. Contribution of the public bodies*

Tourist offices, visitor centres are places of information and reception where public and private tourism activities often coexist: contacts from and to visitors, collection of data for example from accommodation providers, enquiries and local statistics, etc. to deliver tourism surveys, visitor profiles and trends, etc. Public tourism bodies also run marketing campaigns to promote their territory, often taking advantage of assets from their protected areas.

## 2.2.2. Examples of successful P-P cooperation

*. The PA with its local operators*

Tourism in protected areas generally proceeds from an individual engagement of tourism businesses, followed by their cooperation with protected areas. But the triggering and determining factor must often come from the PA itself, together with some local selected partners (e.g. nationally-awarded, park-branded, PA sub-contractors, etc.). The European Charter process (ECST-PA) gives the most telling example of such process.

And from its start, relationships and cooperation are not limited to tourism players: they involve other local partners, through their respective and convergent initiatives, for example from farmers, breeders, foresters, craftsmen, artists.

This involving process can then take advantage of their commitment and their contribution to PA activities and events, to local tourism fairs, to Ambassador representations, etc., thus contributing to improve the effectiveness of their local tourism offer.

*. Cooperation of the PA with its public partners, then together with public tourism bodies*

Such cooperation is commonly staged and enhanced during tourist professional meetings or media events: when public tourism bodies organize study visits and ‘*eductours*’ (educational tours) for tour operators, thus getting into touch with them, etc. Same about for the shooting of films or documentaries that will highlight the area, including the PA and its partners.

## 3 - SOLUTIONS

It is often emphasized that tourism is a transversal activity, therefore solutions cannot be found in standalone positioning and actions. This implies knowing each other’s point of view, constraints, opportunities, etc. something like a shared diagnostic, 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)

### 3.1.1. A progressive development, from its Part I to its Part III

Together with different pilot protected areas and park federations, EUROPARC set up in 1995 the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (ECST-PA or ECST). Its guidelines work as a set of tools to enable areas become a sustainable tourism destination, in accordance with five base principles:

1. giving priority to protection
2. contributing to sustainable development
3. engaging all stakeholders
4. planning sustainable tourism effectively
5. pursuing continuous improvement

See: [https://www.euoparc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/EN\\_EUOPARC-Good-for-Parks-Good-for-People\\_ECSTPA.pdf](https://www.euoparc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/EN_EUOPARC-Good-for-Parks-Good-for-People_ECSTPA.pdf)

- . The first principle: giving priority to protection is particularly emphasized in CEETO reference documents.
- . In phase with the second principle the different CEETO partners are eager to contribute to sustainable development in their areas.
- . The third principle highlights the necessary involvement and commitment of local partners: the stakeholders, generally referred to as the 'Forum'. It is as well formalized and developed within CEETO, particularly the Capacity Building Workplan (see Guidelines and Manual).
- . The fourth principle requires an upstream shared vision, orientations and then strategy and effective actions. Something that brings back to the shared vision already underlined as essential in the initial steps of the ECST process. It can as well be related to the CEETO action plan, approved by the partner protected areas.
- . The fifth principle puts the stress on the fact that a protected area cannot stick to an international award or prize or something like a gold medal. Its missions include an overall action, in which tourism must take its part, in an evolutive and progressive way, which requires permanent monitoring. And monitoring implies indicators as those from the tourism flow monitoring system within CEETO. Having reached this stage, it becomes important to dispose of practical tools that have been already tested by experienced PAs.

### 3.1.2. Implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reports

The fourth principle reminds that the implementation of sustainable tourism requires an upstream shared vision, then long-term orientations and then strategy and effective actions.

The list of key sustainability issues leads to key actions to be included in the action plan. This ensures that beyond the diversity of contest and situations for each PA the essential points are addressed and managed.

Strategy and action plan must be in accordance with the PA management plan. They cannot be in contradiction with decisions from stakeholders and from public bodies, particularly those who have brought a technical contribution (e.g. tourism private businesses) or a financial support (e.g. municipal or regional public bodies). This is why indicators, monitoring and progress reports are important for the effective implementation of the action plan and also as tools of communication and debate between stakeholders during Forum sessions.



As detailed before, sustainable tourism in protected areas proceeds from an active cooperation between stakeholders, particularly from a productive public-private collaboration. This is described and highlighted in the three parts of the ECST process (the ‘Charter process’), actually three rings of the same disc.

### 3.1.3. The ECST and circular relation between its 3 parts.

The implementation of the ECST Part I effectively makes possible to create a territory of sustainable tourism destination but the effective sustainability and duration of its tourism offer will depend on its main players: the tourism businesses and other private actors, including also tour operators. This is why the ECST process must be understood in its entirety, in its three parts or three rings.

Here are some practical examples:

- **Cohesion (‘Forum’)**: team building and ongoing relationships with partners give consistence and ‘raison d’être’ to the Forum, thus providing team feeling ... and pride. This proceeds from the third principle: an active Forum ensures more efficiency, mutual trust and feeling to be stronger together. *The whole is worth more than the addition of its parts.*

. **Engagement and commitments**: such statements are underlying in the fourth and fifth principles, they require mutual and long-term commitments also into action: projects, tourist services, and also bringing solidarity in case of difficulties. For example, the PA commits for 5 years, with an action plan that often includes contracts entrusted to operators over several years, with potential financial benefits and outcomes for those subcontractors.

. **Part I, the base and core circle**:

The above mentioned five principles must govern the sustainable tourism in PAs. Governance, engaging all stakeholders is of particular importance to be able to implement the ECST not only in the first step but also in its three parts: *“All those affected by sustainable tourism should be able to participate in decisions about its development and management”*.

This implies the permanent Tourism Forum established between public bodies, conservation and community organisations and representatives of the tourism businesses.

Meetings must be arranged in order to give the private tourism sector the possibility to share the same information and to take part to decisions, including the preparation and the implementation of the sustainable tourism strategy and the action plan.

Commitments of public bodies and other partners provide professionals with the assurance and guarantee of being able to ‘embark’ onto tourist operations and to invest with some certainty of profits.

- **Part II, the circle of the middle, carrying bond and permanent cooperation**:

Some local tourism operators are also park partners as ‘subcontractors’, and therefore essential to the PA in some of its missions: education, conservation, promotion, etc.

The engagement of local businesses is inevitable and vital to the effective development and management of sustainable tourism. Many actions listed in a PA’s Part I action plan are in fact proposed and managed by private businesses and associations, taking their risks and of course expecting returns on their investments.

- Among all partners involved in some actions of the action plan, some tourism providers can decide to go further through other personal actions, complying with a methodology proposed by the PA and approved by EUROPARC. Consistency and continuity of such partner’s commitment make possible to recognize such operators as certified sustainable partners. Their three-year certificate granted by the Charter PA brings a mark of recognition of consistent, durable partnership with them.



Marks of recognition are in fact expected from the PA. In accordance with the ECST Part II process, certificates of individual recognition delivered and enhanced by the PA (together with other Forum partners), can be shown with pride by operators and displayed for their own promotion.

In addition, they can also apply for Europarc star awards.

Such marks of recognition and trust arousing pride and commitment remind the previously mentioned Maslow's hierarchy of needs, particularly: basic safety > love and belonging > esteem > and then self-actualization.

ECST certification granted by the PA authority implies requirements for those partners:

- . They have to take part to the sustainable tourism Forum and to progress report meetings, something requiring real efforts, especially from small businesses with a small team, who must work first for their clients. But this gives them access to decisions and to future orientations.

- . Demonstrating their compliance to sustainable criteria is generally rather easy for their managers because of their upstream personal commitment to sustainability. However, such certification requires personal investment and it represents a cost because of mandatory sessions, audit visits, reports to be provided, etc.

- Close relationships are then strengthened with the PA, with other businesses and with other stakeholders engaged with the Charter. Such commitment is generally within their reach due to already existing cooperation, including subcontracts concluded with the park.

. *Part III, the larger circle open to outside*

In its Part III, cooperation is obviously essential but at this step, it is up to the Charter-awarded PA to get contacts with tour operators and travel agencies. For example, a local certified operator specialized in cycling trips has previously set up agreements with an outside tour operator, in order to host its visitors for touring in the PA area.

On the other hand, a PA who wants to create and develop an offer of sustainable stays - also to be able to better control it as an effective sustainable destination - will turn to tour operators: something like a proactive positioning, together with selected local partners and also to counterbalance other ones.

It will of course rely on existing cooperation, particularly between its Part II certified operators and their tour operator partners.

It requires skills, time and financial resources and this is why such work is generally entrusted to a group or an association supported and supervised by PAs as board members, for example from the same region. This contributes to consistent networks of sustainable tourism activities.

At this stage, it becomes necessary to know more about the tourism sector, about different tourism providers and particularly about tour operators (TOs).

## 3.2. Part III - Working with tour operators (TOs)

### 3.2.1. Understanding the tour operating ecosystem

. *Why tour operators and what for?*

For a protected area, this means another step wider, to look over its boundaries and beyond its core activities, but this in fact will also contribute to some PA basic missions, in touch with its own partners as it was already mentioned.

- **Tour operators** design and then promote a package holiday by combining different travel elements, commonly: transportation, tour and different travel components including accommodation, guiding services, etc. They advertise and produce brochures to promote their products, holidays and itineraries.



They are usually specialized in definite tourism activities.

- **Travel agents** (travel agencies, including web agencies) promote and sell holiday packages, but they may also contribute to their designing and packaging.

- **Inbound tourism businesses** host, deliver tourism services to visitors, and they often contribute to design tourism stays and to establish and keep up contact with local partners.

There can be links between those three functions, in the same company or in the same network.

In addition, belonging to the same network is viewed by them as important because it indicates adherence to shared values, particularly about tourism: responsible tourism, ecotourism and more globally sustainable tourism.

But on the other hand, despite networking support, those tourism businesses have also to face an increasing competition caused by de-packaging propositions B to C: business to consumer, direct contact between tourism providers and clients: “DIY”, do it yourself. Such tourism stays are frequently proposed on the web, also about stays in protected areas (and risks of fake green, falsified tourism stay).

Hence the importance for them to emphasize their link with PAs, their distinctiveness particularly attested by certificates delivered by PAs.

#### . *Legal aspects*

legal aspects are important, once again linked to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs: safety. Following EU directives, new EU rules bring stronger protection to many aspects of a travel and therefore of package holidays delivered by travel agencies and tour operators.

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/factsheet\\_package\\_holidays\\_2018.06\\_en\\_web.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/factsheet_package_holidays_2018.06_en_web.pdf)

National legislations usually go beyond EU rules, generally with more detailed prescriptions for example about transportation, about the payment of deposits to travel agencies during the booking phase, etc.

#### . *Some terms commonly used by the tour operating ecosystem*

Some terms can illustrate requirements and activities related to tour operating:

- **Accreditation**: it refers to legal aspects. Selling tourism services is possible only to appointed businesses. Accreditation data are usually displayed on their website and on their documents.

- **Allotment**: allotment of rooms by an accommodation provider to a travel agency. This explains the necessary anticipation, commitments and contracts between partners because of decisions to be taken by clients (visitors) before they come to the selected destination. Particularly in case of touring.

- **Inbound/incoming tourism**: visitors come from other places, from other countries, which implies special additional services and guarantees.

- **Tour package/inclusive tour/all-expense tour/all-in tour**: a tourism stay always results from the assembly of different services, hence the interdependence of different tourism providers, the importance of relationships with recognized and reliable partners and travel agencies.

More information on **Glossary of tourism terms**: <https://www.unwto.org/glossary-tourism-terms>

### 3.2.2. Working with tour operators and travel agencies

TO, travel agencies, particularly those highlighting their sustainable commitments have common characteristics:

- . *An experienced travel agency*: complying with tourism business requirements: travel license, insurance, local classifications. They like to display and highlight their partnerships -including partnerships with protected areas-, with certificates, labels, brands, etc.

- . *A responsible and engaged team*: their engagement is commonly based on a consistent binomial work between agency staff and local guides and operators.



. *A clear positioning and concept:* declared commitments to sustainable/responsible tourism: self-produced charter, certificates delivered by protected areas (ECST) or marks of involvement in sustainable tourism. In addition, they often mention their involvement into actions to protect and to enhance the environment, to compensate carbon footprint, etc.

Note: such actions can be related to the above mentioned ECST key topics.

. *A clear and easily accessible catalogue, on the company's website and other partners' websites:* with clear deliverables, for example about reception at the nearest station, routing transport, selection of accommodation, luggage transport during the stay, provision of equipment and specific tools like astronomy instruments, etc.

### 3.3. Working with tour operators: some case studies

#### 3.3.1. Examples of cooperation in the framework of the ECST process, Part III

The Charter Part III provides an opportunity for operators and travel agencies organizing tours within PAs to be recognized and therefore to promote -and market- their tourism packages of sustainable stays in Charter-awarded destinations. But this Part III represents for PAs an additional stage of integration, of decision and cooperation between stakeholders, as indicated above.

Together with Spain and with Italy, French protected areas and their federation of nature parks were already present at the beginning of the ECST adventure. They embarked on that long-distance navigation several years ago; the ocean is vast, but also its perspectives.

The launch of this phase was made possible by a strong initiative set up by a national park (Cévennes NP) and its local partners (Cévennes Écotourisme) and then the creation of IPAMAC a non-profit association focussed on sustainable tourism and the implementation of the ECST Charter process through its three parts. IPAMAC was created by the consortium of all PAs, regional nature parks and national parks together, situated in Massif central, the large mountainous centre of France.

IPAMAC could take advantage of a pre-existing, large and consistent network encompassing the massif and several administrative regions, and also of a long tradition of solidarity.

IPAMAC is also -technically and financially- supported by PAs, by some public funding and by solid networks of local tourism operators, thus making possible to build a large array of sustainable stays, with diverse activities in different areas, in cooperation with travel agencies.

Partner tour operators are small tourism businesses, generally located in rural areas (also in PAs for some of them), not depending on multinational tour agencies but clearly committed to alternative sustainable tourism.

Their catalogues -in French with some limited webpages in English- do not stick to Massif central and they already propose other destinations either in France or in other countries, thus opening opportunities of cooperation with other European PAs.

<http://www.parc-massif-central.com>

[http://www.parc-massif-central.com/association-ipamac\\_7.html](http://www.parc-massif-central.com/association-ipamac_7.html)

[http://www.parc-massif-central.com/preparer-son-sejour\\_3.html](http://www.parc-massif-central.com/preparer-son-sejour_3.html)

Examples of travel agencies, also partners of Charter-awarded parks:

- Escapéo

<https://www.escapeo.fr>

including tourism stays for visitors with special needs, particularly physically-impaired people.

Morvan nature park, involved in the IPAMAC network, was for example awarded EDEN destination, European destination of excellence, some years ago for their accessible tourism stays and activities.



- Sud-Randos

<https://www.sudrandos.com>

With clear indication of links with the European Charter and with nature parks. They were awarded in 2019 Europarc Stars awards. See below section 3.4.1

- Chamina

<https://www.chamina-voyages.com>

Thanks to their recognized expertise in organizing discovery tours and stays, they also collaborate to hiking guidebooks at national level.

- La Balaguère

<https://www.labalaguere.com/randonnee-pyrenees-espagnoles.html>

In addition to IPAMAC partners, this travel agency also cooperates with British partners, with Spanish partners in transnational Pyrenees and also in other Spanish regions including PAs.

Europarc Spain has as well developed a strong network of sustainable tourism partners in the framework of the ECST implementation in its protected areas.

Red Europarc - <http://www.redeuroparc.org/actividades/carta-europea-turismo-sostenible/empresas-adheridas-a-la-cets/consulta>

### 3.3.2. Other examples of involvement with tourism providers

- 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.

Region Occitanie, France - <https://www.tourisme-occitanie.com/sejours-dans-les-parcs-naturels>

- Other public institutions like ONF -a national forestry agency-, have set up similar tourism stays, generally in forests of protected areas. Unsurprisingly some of their partners including some hiking and travel agencies also take part to other networks of PAs involved in the Charter process like IPAMAC.

Retrouvance - <https://gitesetrandonnees.onf.fr/nos-partenaires/>

- Tourism and travel agencies marketing sustainable tourism stays in PAs

. 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. The German company E-bike Holiday cooperates for example with different local operators in Italy, like MoVelo in Colli Euganei nature park -and Charter park- and as well with areas of CEETO members, in Germany, Austria, Italy, Slovenia, etc.

Veneto emotion MoVelo e-biking - <http://www.venetoemotion.com>

Contacts with such tourism companies may help build sustainable destinations

E-bike Holiday - <https://www.ebike-holiday.com/e-bike-urlaub/service-infos/ueber-ebike-holiday>  
<https://maps.ebike-holiday.com/de/tourenplaner/>

. Vélo Loisir Provence was created by a group of local tourism partners specialized in cycling activities in protected areas. They have been cooperating for more than 20 years with different PAs -also Charter parks- of Southern France in order to develop and propose cycling activities and tourism stays, through their network of local partners and travel agencies like Chemins du Sud.

Vélo Loisir Provence - <https://www.veloloisirprovence.com/sejours-velo> and  
<https://www.veloloisirprovence.com/page/bonnes-adresses-verdon>



Chemins du Sud - <https://www.cheminsdusud.com>

### 3.4. Awarding scheme and business recognition

In relation to the Charter Part III, tour operators can be specifically recognized for their engagement with PAs and with the Charter process. This requires tour operators to commit to sustainability criteria in their own operations and management, something they generally put forward in their introduction. Related to cooperation with Charter parks they must confirm their adherence to the Charter vision, its mission and principles. They should also be engaged in partnership working with protected area authorities, communities and local businesses.

#### 3.4.1. EUROPARC Star Awards

EUROPARC Star Awards received applications from partners working with Sustainable Destinations across Europe. Candidates are assessed by an in-country jury and a representative from EUROPARC, and the finalists, the best from each country in each category, are then evaluated by an international jury composed by sustainable tourism experts, who selected the overall winner in each category.

Here are two examples of Charter park partners awarded in 2019. Details from Europarc webpage:

- *Hotel Caminetto: partner of the Adamello Brenta Charter park, Italy, it can be considered a role model of a sustainable hotel committed to respect the environment and protect natural resources without giving up comfort. The communication policy of Hotel Caminetto aims to make guests fully aware of the culture and nature of the place, so they can better value it.*

- *Sud Randos: partner of Cévennes National Park and IPAMAC member, it was awarded in the category Building my Community. When organising tourism experiences, farmers, artisans, craftsmen, artists, and local nature are the lead actors and objects of discovery for visitors.*

#### 3.4.2. Other recognition marks, branding, quality standards

Local branding for example of an area encompassing the PA perimeter is also much appreciated, particularly when the operator can take advantage of an existing distinctiveness, for example brought by the reputation of a known destination (mountain, coastal area, outstanding landscape, renowned hiking route, etc.) or of famous local products (wine, cheese, aromatic plants, etc.).

Local branding including park branding contributes to strengthen local relationships, solidarity and local pride.

Example of quality tourism branding in Spanish protected areas:

Calidad Turística - <http://www.redeuroparc.org/system/files/shared/Triptico-Sistema-de-Calidad.pdf>

Example of regional branding in Andalusia, including tourism services in PAs:

<http://andanatura.org/marca-parque-natural-de-andalucia-2/>

Similar approach in other protected areas and Charter parks, for classification of local accommodation and other tourism services - <http://es.turismegarrotxa.com> (nature park of Garrotxa volcanic zone, one of the first awarded Charter parks), for specific outdoor activities like astro-tourism (dark sky areas) or for visitors with special needs.

Similar quality sustainable tourism in Alpi Marittime nature park and associated PAs in Italy:

<http://www.parcoalpimarittime.it/visita>



## 3.5. Benefits

### 3.5.1. Benefits for the tour operators

- Cooperating with PAs and with their certified local partners ensures distinctiveness, visibility, thus fostering their promotion also by other stakeholders.
- They can progressively improve their tourism services, taking advantage of expertise from the PA staff and from other partners, particularly when they can take to Forum and to training sessions.
- They can plan their tourism business activities and invest more serenely due to security provided by reciprocal commitments.

More detailed about benefits to tour operators are listed on EUROPARC website:

<https://www.europarc.org/sustainable-tourism/sustainable-tour-operators/>

### 3.5.2. Benefits for the local economy

Benefits for local tourism businesses and tour operators bring as well benefits for the local economy. Tourism fallouts are got and kept by local businesses and local areas.

Example of a message from a village shop selling newspapers and magazines: a large part of its sales is made during holidays, thanks to tourists.

*Unlike in some countries or areas where most of benefits produced by balneary resorts are 'captured' by foreign multinational groups, meaning that very limited resources are left to the local businesses and the community, and often in activities far from their local and genuine identity.*

## 3.6. Communicating about sustainable tourism

*„Networking, fare rete, gemeinsam statt einsam, etc.“*

Different PAs, different languages but the same objective: networking efficiently requires communication, first between local partners and then with other tourism bodies.

But it is as well crucial that collective commitment to sustainable tourism and to its implementation be put forward not only by EUROPARC and individually tourism operators but also by local Charter park networks.

This brings back to the context and to expectations described in section 2.1, particularly: marketing, competition, cooperation.

Sustainable tourism is still a niche market, that is to a large extent unknown, but it responds to growing demand. In a world of communication, the network of PAs engaged to sustainable tourism must reach a critical mass sufficient to be heard and visible by potential visitors and their expectations.

The ECST Part I indicates that Charter parks must communicate and put forward their awarding and their commitment. This is likewise to be done with local partners involved in the Part II. In this case a common promotion of local partners is necessary, something often supported by public bodies and by the use of a local territorial brand.

But local partners may have to accept to promote also the other members of their network, in accordance with guidelines that can be suggested by the local Forum.

And to give a wider extent particularly at the Part III level, public-private cooperation is essential to reach the expected critical mass faced to the strong presence of 'other' tourist proposals.



In this case, some toolkits may be useful. See for example those produced in the framework of the former INTERREG IV-A COOL English-French Tourism Project (2012-2015). One of their prominent cooperation objectives was to create different toolkits, tailored for different tourism providers, in order to help them progress in a local sustainable tourism offer.

All of those tools are useful and one is focussed on communication: *communicating effectively* - Managing (website) as the official tourism website; join the website (brand); promoting the whole area; taking some marketing initiatives.

Find them on Exmoor NP's website (former COOL partner), in pages dedicated to tourism providers:

<https://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk/living-and-working/info-for-tourism-providers/marketing-and-business-support>

## 4 - CONCLUSIONS

We want sustainable tourism: *"let's have a dream"... together.*

Marketing, competition will be always present but also networking and cooperation.

Cooperation already exists between European PAs as it is demonstrated by different projects, like of course CEETO.

The effective implementation of the Charter Part III in different countries and the cooperation between their tour operators and tourism partners are an achievable goal within reach of PAs and their national or regional networks. As a follow up of the CEETO project, this could be proposed in the coming new INTERREG programme or in the framework of some EU call for proposals.

In addition, team building can be progressively developed with support from P.P collaboration:

- . Team building sessions, including study tours between involved PAs and their partners,
- . Contribution to tourism fairs: regional, national and then European,
- . Hosting TOs in educational tours,
- . Contribution to future LEADER transnational projects,
- . Participation to European and/or international events together with other PA partners: Dark Sky day, European Week of Mobility, European Day of Parks, wildlife day, Europe's Day (9 May), etc.

Success is possible if it is shared with and by peer-partners, something possible between European partners because they share the same basic and long-term vision of conservation, of enhancement and of sustainability in all of its aspects.

They can likewise share the same spirit of cooperation and of win-win relationships between involved PAs and between their tourism partners involved.

Some European PAs are already used to cooperate facing same issues and also for cross-border, borderless tourism. Then yes, if we really want, the dream can come true.