



**PROPOSAL FOR AN ADHERENCE SYSTEM
FOR TOUR OPERATORS AND TRAVEL AGENCIES
TO IMPLEMENT THE PART III
OF THE EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM
IN PROTECTED AREAS**

**METHODOLOGY PROPOSED BY FEDERPARCHI EUROPARC-ITALIA
TO BE IMPLEMENTED IN ITALY**



EUROPARC
Turismo Sostenibile
nelle Aree Protette



This document summarizes the methodology proposed by Federparchi Europarc Italia for the implementation of the Charter Part III in Italy.

The methodology has been developed from the base of the Spanish methodology that has been adapted to the reality of Italy. It has been elaborated through an intensive participatory process that started in 2018 and ended in 2020 by sending the proposal to the EUROPARC Federation.

During this period Federparchi Europarc Italia has coordinated and dynamized a Working Group formed by people as representatives of:

- Federparchi Europarc Italia board members.
- Federparchi Europarc Italia staff members.
- Regional and national tourism experts.
- Managers and technicians of Charter Parks (Charter Part I) from Protected Areas.
- Representatives of tourism businesses
- Travel agencies.

1. SCOPE OF THE ADHERENCE SYSTEM

1.1 OBJECTIVES

- **Encourage marketing** of tourism in protected areas that respects the principles of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism, and therefore contributes to conservation and local development.
- **Contribute to the recognition of the benefits** of this specific tourism offer for conservation and local development.
- **Improve the visibility and recognition** of the Charter Areas and the Charter Partner Businesses that committed to sustainable tourism.
- **Recognize and differentiate the tour operators and travel agencies** for their commitment to sustainable tourism in the protected areas in which they operate, giving them the opportunity to collaborate with environmental authorities and local



stakeholders, and to benefit from working together on the preparation of unique and attractive bids for tourists.

1.2 TARGET ENTERPRISES

Companies that could adhere to the Charter Part III are the tour operators and travel agencies¹ that fulfil the requirements and complete the process of the Adherence System.

The entire company will adhere to the Charter Part III – as a Charter Partner – and could communicate so, but in terms of the publicity of tourism products the travel agency can only show the Charter logo on those products that are developed in Charter protected areas with whom they have a partnership agreement (Part III) and that involve Charter Partner businesses (Part II).

The EUROPARC Federation will be in charge of defining the conditions of use of the Charter Logo by the travel agencies adhered to Charter Part III. These conditions will be included in the “Partnership Agreement”.

1.3 TERRITORIAL SCOPE

The companies that could adhere to the Charter Part III are the travel agencies whose applications are submitted by an Italian Charter Park that has also implemented the Charter Part II, i.e., it counts with Charter Partner Businesses.

¹ (According to the EU legislation this definition of “tour operator” and “travel agencies” should comply with the following) DIRECTIVE (EU) 2015/2302 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 25 November 2015 on package travel and linked travel arrangements, amending Regulation (EC) No 2006/2004 and Directive 2011/83/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Council Directive 90/314/EEC. Adopted by Italy by DECRETO LEGISLATIVO 21/05/2018, n. 62.

Article 3 - Definitions

(7) **‘trader’** means any natural person or any legal person, irrespective of whether privately or publicly owned, who is acting, including through any other person acting in his name or on his behalf, for purposes relating to his trade, business, craft or profession in relation to contracts covered by this Directive, whether acting in the capacity of organiser, retailer, trader facilitating a linked travel arrangement or as a travel service provider;

(8) **‘organiser’** means a trader who combines and sells or offers for sale packages, either directly or through another trader or together with another trader, or the trader who transmits the traveller’s data to another trader in accordance with point (b)(v) of point 2.



1.4 ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE DIFFERENT ENTITIES INVOLVED

Federparchi Europarc Italia is committed to:

- Be the guarantor of the System and its implementation in Italy.
- Provide the necessary documentation to the protected areas interested in implementing the Charter Part III.
- Provide information to the travel agencies interested in adhering to the Charter Part III in Italy.
- Coordinate the Joint Committee for the Evaluation of the Charter Part III (*Commissione di Valutazione CETS*) in Italy.
- Validate the adhesion of tour operator and travel agencies - after hearing the comments and contributions of the Joint Evaluation Committee - and to deliver the “Certificate of Adherence”.
- Coordinate, monitor and disseminate the evolution of the Adherence System in Italy.
- Include on its website the list of travel agencies adhered to the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Italy (Part III).
- Enhance the coordination with the EUROPARC Federation and its Sections in order to promote the development of the Charter Part III in Europe and achieve its goals.

Protected areas² are committed to:

- Submit the applications from the travel agencies, establish partnership agreements with them and monitor those partnership agreements.
- Provide the necessary information to the travel agencies for their adhesion to the Charter Part III (about the Implementation methodology, protected areas and the Charter Partner Businesses).

² The functions described here are responsibility of the protected area, but they may be taken up and developed by the Charter Forum - provided that the Forum has an adequate level of consolidation and operation- or other entity to whom the Protected Area and the Forum may delegate as, for example, a business association.



- Make an initial evaluation of the activities of the tour operators and travel agency.
- Keep Federparchi Europarc Italia informed about the implementation of the Improvement and Partnership Agreement signed with the travel agency and, in particular, the adequacy of the activities of the travel agency with the conservation objectives of the protected area.
- Review the adequacy of the tourism products designed and marketed by the travel agency in the Charter Area.

Travel agencies and Tour Operator (as defined in the EU Directive 2015/2302) are committed to:

- Are the recipients and beneficiaries of the Adherence System.
- Must comply with the requirements of the System to adhere to the Charter Part III.

EUROPARC Federation is committed to:

- Be the guarantor of the Charter Part III and its implementation in Europe.
- Coordinate, monitor and disseminate the evolution of the Charter Part III in Europe.
- Provide the necessary information to the Italian and foreign travel agencies interested in joining the Charter Part III.
- Promote and disseminate the travel agencies adhered to the Charter Part III and the Charter tourism products they sell.
- Include on its website the list of travel agencies adhered to the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (Part III) and disseminate the Charter products they sell.
- Involve the adhered travel agencies into the European Charter Network, encouraging the contact between travel agencies and tourism businesses recognized in the several countries and organizing meetings and workshops at European level for the network.

1.5 VALIDITY OF THE ADHERENCE

The “Certificate of Adherence” of the travel agency shall be valid for three years.



If in the course of those three years the protected area does not renew its Charter Award, the travel agency will maintain its adherence until the date of validity of its certificate, but after that, the travel agency should sign a “Partnership Agreement” with other Charter protected area.

If in the course of the three years Federparchi Europarc Italia or the protected area have objective evidence that the travel agency is not fulfilling its commitments, the adherence of the travel agency to the Charter could be invalidated and the certificate could be withdrawn.

2. PRIOR CONDITIONS

2.1 PRIOR CONDITIONS TO BE MET BY THE PROTECTED AREAS

The protected areas that wish to propose the adherence of a travel agency to Charter Part III or to sign a Partnership Agreement with a travel agency already adhered must:

- Be awarded with the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas by the EUROPARC Federation (Charter Part I).
- Have implemented the Charter Part II, and have, therefore, local tourism businesses adhered to the Charter.

2.2 PRIOR CONDITIONS TO BE MET BY THE TRAVEL AGENCIES

The travel agency that wants to join the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism shall:

- Have a commercial license in force or a document certifying its registration in the corresponding Register.
- Comply with the applicable legislation.
- Develop its activities in accordance with the Charter Principles.
- The activities of travel agencies in the protected area must be compatible with the management plans and sustainable tourism strategy.



3. THE ADHERENCE PROCESS

The Travel Agencies and Tour Operator adherence process is structured as follows:

- The Protected Area, CETS Part I certified and with Part II certified operators, identifies a Tour Operator who intends to develop activities in its geographical area.
- The Tour Operator receives all the information needed for its certification access.
- The Tour Operator compiles the descriptive documentation requested (Annex 1 and 2).
- The Protected Area and the Tour Operator define together an “improvement and collaboration” plan.
- The Protected Area and the Tour Operator fill out the necessary documentation for Membership (Annexes 3, 4, 5).
- Federparchi Europarc Italia, through its CETS Evaluation Commission, evaluates the documentation received.
- Federparchi Europarc Italia, communicates the result of the evaluation requesting any additions relating to the activities or documentation.
- Federparchi Europarc Italia delivers, to the proposing Protected Area, the Certificate of Accession to CETS Part III (Annex 6).
- The Tour Operator can begin to promote the tourism packages as part of its business.
- The adherence and recognition process by Federparchi Europarc Italia may have a cost of the services provided to be charged in order to ensure the sustainability of the system.

Note 1: the initiative of becoming a Charter Part III may also come from a travel agency. In this case, the travel agency must contact the protected area (already Charter Part I) with whom wishes to work as a sustainable tourism destination. Next steps will follow the same procedure as established for invited travel agencies in particular the Forum participation and recognition.

Note 2: a travel agency already recognized as Charter Part III and already working with a Protected Area, may work with other Charter Part I destinations as long as they agree with the new Protected Area the submission of a new “**Improvement and Partnership Agreement**”. The



procedure is similar to the first recognition without the need to be recognized once more by Federparchi Europarc Italia as an adherent travel agency.

Note 3: in order to encourage the European network of Sustainable Tourism Destinations of Charter Part I and Part II, travel agencies that have been already recognized as Charter Part III in other countries (currently Spain and Francia in January 2021) may also become recognized in Italy.

In order to achieve that:

- a) They should present to Federparchi Europarc Italia the recognition they already have (equivalent to annex 1, 2 and 3) from the original country they have been initially recognized.
- b) Federparchi Europarc Italia will provide possible contacts with the existing Italian Charter Part I protected areas with whom the travel agency might be interested working with.
- c) The protected area and the travel agency will draw up an “**Improvement and Partnership Agreement**” following the similar procedures as the Italian travel agencies for this stage of the process (annexes 5)

Note 4: for the countries that have an approved Charter part III methodology there is a rule of reciprocity, considering the same rules and rights for the Italian travel agencies recognized as Charter Part III to work with Protected Areas in those countries.

3.0 COMMUNICATION TO FEDERPARCHI EUROPARC ITALIA THE START OF THE PROCESS

The protected area that is going to start the process of identifying a tour operator or travel agency for its adherence to the Charter will communicate it to Federparchi Europarc Italia.

3.1 IDENTIFICATION OF THE TRAVEL AGENCY BY THE PROTECTED AREA

The Charter Park identifies a travel agency interested in joining the Charter Part III (on its own initiative or by initiative of the Forum or any of its members).

The **protected area** will provide the following information to the travel agency:

- The official text of the Charter.



- The text of the Adherence System to implement the Charter Part III in Italy.
- Basic information about the protected area.
- Information about the Charter Partner businesses in the protected areas.

The **travel agency** will provide the following information to the protected area:

- Document for the identification of the travel agency and for the submission of the application (Annex 1).
- Diagnosis of the travel agency (Annex 2).
- A statement regarding the compliance with the applicable legislation (Annex 3).
- Optional documents of the travel agency (promotional documents, contracts, etc.).

The protected area - in collaboration with the Forum - must review the contents of the diagnosis provided by the travel agency.

Finally, the protected area will send to Federparchi Europarc Italia the complete application dossier of the travel agency.

3.2 VALIDATION BY FEDERPARCHI EUROPARC ITALIA

Federparchi Europarc Italia receives the application dossier, reviews it and sends it to the members of the Joint Committee for the Evaluation of the Charter Part III composed by:

- a) Federparchi Europarc Italia that chairs and ensures Secretariat;
- b) A representative of the Protected Areas adherent of the Charter Part I;
- c) A representative of the Tourism Businesses adherent to Charter Part II;
- d) A representative of the consultants recognized by Federparchi as Charter consultants;
- e) An Environmental NGO with relevant work in Sustainable EcoTourism and Environmental Education;
- f) A representative of CAI – Club Alpino Italiano.



The Joint Committee for the Evaluation of the Charter Part III is responsible for taking the final decision to validate, postpone or refuse the adherence of the tour operator, considering also the comments and contributions given by parks and local tourism enterprises.

When the decision is finally positive, Federparchi Europarc Italia registers the applicant on the National Register of travel agencies adhered to the Charter Part III and provides the necessary information to the EUROPARC Federation to proceed with the registration also at European level.

To proceed with the validation of the application and the registration in the National Register of tour operators adhered to the Charter Part III.

3.3 COLLABORATION

Once the adherence of the travel agency has been validated by Federparchi Europarc Italia, the protected area and the travel agency draw up an “**Improvement and Partnership Agreement**” for the next three years (Annex 5). This Partnership Agreement should at least contain joint actions to:

1. **Design and / or market** ecotourism products in the protected area.
2. **Support conservation and local development** in the Charter Area
3. Continuously improve the **sustainable management** of the travel agency.
4. Ensure proper **communication** and transmission of information between the travel agency and the protected area.

Some **criteria and guidelines** for the definition of each of these lines of collaboration are mentioned below:

1. Design and / or market ecotourism products in the protected area

Ecotourism products designed and promoted under the framework of the Charter Part III must meet, as far as possible, the following criteria:

- Be based on the discovery of the Charter Area and its natural and cultural values, with an important component of communication and interpretation of those values.



- Be formed by services of the Charter Partner Businesses in the territory (Charter Part II). Only when a service cannot be offered by a Charter company, the travel agency may include other companies but always attending to sustainability criteria.
- Promote a respectful tourist behaviour towards natural and cultural resources and the local community.
- Cover different themes: ecotourism, agrotourism and traditional products, and cultural and historical heritage.
- Avoid bringing customers to the more sensitive or crowded areas, and to minimize the impacts of the activities.
- Contribute to improving the quality of life of the local community and to have a positive impact on the local economy.
- Promote a balanced development of the territory, covering all activities and services in the municipalities where there are Charter Partner Businesses.

2. Support conservation and local development in the Charter Area:

- Support monitoring and conservation activities of the natural and cultural heritage of the protected area.
- Support economic development activities in collaboration with local stakeholders.

3. Continuously improve the management of the travel agency applying sustainable development criteria in its activities and developing actions for environmental, social and economic improvement of the company.

4. Ensure proper communication and transmission of information between the travel agency and the protected area. To do this, the following actions are suggested to be performed by the travel agency:

- Provide information about any incidents detected during the activities.
- Provide information about the Charter Ecotourism Products sold, type of customers and their satisfaction.



- Report about the outcome of the actions committed by the travel agency within the Partnership Agreement.

For its part, the **protected area** and the local partners of the Sustainable Tourism Forum will develop actions to support the travel agency, such as:

- To give **support to design** the ecotourism products.
- To facilitate the use of the **public facilities** of the protected area and the territory.
- To **disseminate** the travel agency and the ecotourism products designed.
- To support the **identification of possible collaborative actions** to contribute to conservation and local development.
- To provide **training** on the protected area and the whole Charter Area for the personnel of the travel agency.
- Provide updated **information** on the protected area.

When the “Improvement and Partnership Agreement” is drawn up and signed, the protected area sends it to Federparchi Europarc Italia.

Once Federparchi Europarc Italia has received and reviewed the Partnership Agreement, it delivers the “Certificate of Adherence” of the travel agency, a document that guarantees that a travel agency is adhered to Charter and collaborates with the protected area that presented the candidacy. In Annex 6 there is a model of the “Certificate of Adherence”.

The protected area and the travel agency jointly will prepare an annual report of the results of the actions developed and will send it to Federparchi Europarc Italia. The report shall specify:

- The actions developed by the protected area and its local partners and the results.
- The actions carried out by the travel agency, indicating at least:
 - Number and type of Ecotourism products (packages) designed.
 - Number of those packages sold (number of customers).
 - Number and type of promotional activities of those products.
 - Actions developed to support conservation and local developments, and results.
 - Actions to improve sustainable management of the travel agency, and results.



- Actions to improve communication and information sharing with the protected area.

4. RENEWAL PROCESS

At the end of three years of collaboration, the protected area and the travel agency will prepare a final evaluation report and a new Partnership Agreement for the next three years. To renew the adherence of the travel agency to the Charter Part III the protected area will send to Federparchi Europarc Italia the following documentation:

- Final evaluation report with the results of the collaboration during the three years.
- Dossier of the ecotourism packages designed and marketed under the Charter framework.
- A new “Improvement and Partnership Agreement” for the next three years.

Federparchi Europarc Italia will review renewal dossier, will send it to the Joint Committee for the Evaluation of the Charter Part III in Italy, and will follow the established procedure to make the decision and to inform the interested parties about the outcome.

Then Federparchi Europarc Italia will issue a new “Certificate of Adherence” for the travel agency and will update the National Register of the Charter Part III.