

EUROPARC Federation
Report to Council
16th June 2011



Title:

Suggestions for the implementation of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in France

Summary :

Motion by the French section to help French parks to overcome the long delays in preparing Charter re-evaluation documents by making all tools and techniques necessary for the successful completion of an assessment available to the French protected areas.

Recommendations :

- ❖ To consider the motion



Suggestions for the implementation of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in France

1) Protected areas in France

a- National Parks

France has 9 national parks, 3 of which are overseas. Each forms an area that brings together exceptional natural, cultural and environmental heritage.

The special nature of the Parks emerges from a unique combination of geology, biological diversity, landscapes and human activities. The originality of a national park thus results not only from an original natural heritage of very great value but also from the presence of human activities that fulfil the needs of local populations while respecting their natural environment.

Setting up a national Park enables conservation management to be promoted, the aim of which is to consolidate ecological, economic, social and cultural solidarity that exists between this zone and the territories that surround it based on sustainable development founded on a partnership between the State and Local Authorities. The classification of a National Park therefore demonstrates the political will to give strong national and international visibility to this area, to pursue an exemplary and integrated policy of protection and management as well as nature education and recreation and to transmit a conserved heritage to future generations.

45 years after the founding act of 1960, the parliament and government sought, in 2006, to modify the legal texts on National Parks in order that they be better adapted to today's issues. The Act of 14th April 2006 relating to National Parks thus gave them greater involvement in the safeguarding of biodiversity by providing, through the "Park charter", a framework to the solidarity between the heartland and the surrounding areas.

Protection of the National Park heartland is the bedrock upon which the charter is based. This active conservation is handled by the National Park public authority, under the aegis of its mostly local board of directors. Apart from conservation of the heartland, the goal is to establish sustainable development throughout the region. The charter is a shared project, created by those active in the territory, which federates individual commitments within a shared vision. Everyone undertakes to implement their own expertise in line with mutually agreed approaches. For the local councils, companies and men who act in these territories, joining this group project signifies a commitment to a consistent approach **over a period of 15 years.**

b- Regional Natural Parks

The Regional Natural Parks were created to protect and promote large inhabited rural areas. A territory that is predominantly rural and whose countryside, natural environment and cultural heritage is of outstanding beauty, but the balance of which is fragile, may be listed as a Regional National Park. A Regional National Park is organised around a devised plan of sustainable development that is founded on the conservation and promotion of its natural and cultural heritage.

The Regional Natural Parks are distinctive in their territorial management as they have adopted a predominant role in the conservation and promotion of heritage.

The management of Park territories has 3 priorities:

- territorial effectiveness: a renewable charter for 12 years,
- scope shared between the State and the Regions,
- the will to convince, rather than to compel.

The Regional Natural Park charter is the contract that confirms the plan of conservation and sustainable development drawn up for its territory. It establishes the goals to be reached, the different approaches to be taken for the conservation, promotion and development of the Park, as well as the measures that will enable the Park to implement this plan. The charter ensures the consistency and coordination of actions carried out in the Park territory by the various public groups. It is **valid for 12 years**; a charter review procedure enables the Park, in the light of actions undertaken, to redefine a new plan and to renew its classification.

The capacity of a Regional Natural Park to conserve nature lies above all in its capacity to have the charter's goals, which have been defined by the signatories, upheld through cooperation. The action of a Regional Natural Park is mainly concerned with information, coordination and raising awareness of the territory's rich heritage.

Today there are 46 Regional Natural Parks in France.

2) French protected areas and the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism

French protected areas are intensely involved in the construction and implementation of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (the Charter). Right from its inception, a pilot mission was carried out by the Federation of Regional Natural Parks of France, with the participation of the National Parks and Regional Natural Parks.

The first protected areas in France to sign the Charter were:

- the Regional Natural Parks of Luberon and Vexin Français in 2001,
- the Regional Natural Park of Marais du Cotentin et du Bessin and Cévennes National Park in 2002.

Since then, French protected areas have ceaselessly invested in the Charter, which, since the relaunch of the Europarc French Section in 2009, has become one of the 2 priorities of work in France. The Charter remains an important subject for reflection that generates exchanges and suggestions between the French protected areas. Work is underway for Part 3 of the Charter, the reassessment or integration of large-scale operators into the device.

At the end of 2010 in France:

- 19 signed up protected areas,
- 1 protected area in the process of applying,
- And 2 protected areas had declared their intention to begin the application process.

Comprising 22 territories, broken down as follows:

- 4 National Parks,
- 17 Regional Natural Parks,
- and a nature reserve association.

3) Reassessment of applications

a- Situation report

Given the timing of the first applications, the first reassessments were carried out at the end of 2005 – beginning of 2006, and they took place without any particular problems.

It was from 2006 onwards that the first reassessments started to become overdue, with:

- 1 year overdue for the Regional Natural Park of Livradois Forez,
- 2 years overdue for the Regional Natural Parks of Pilat, Scarpe-Escaut, Vercors, Boucles de la Seine Normande and for the Rhin-Vivant association,
- 3 years overdue for the Regional Natural Park of Marais du Cotentin et du Bessin,
- Up to 4 years overdue for the Cévennes National Park,
- And at least one year overdue for Luberon and Vexin Français for their second reassessment, as well as for the Regional Natural Park of Avesnois and Mercantour National Park.

These delays can be explained by:

- **the desire of the Regional Natural Parks undergoing charter review and for the National Parks in the process of drawing up a charter to have their charter coincide with the European Charter,**
- ignorance of the actual reassessment schedule on the part of the contracting French protected areas in general,
- the French protected areas' lack of preparation for Charter assessment,
- the specific case concerning the exceptional and particularly long stoppage in the operation of services in the Cévennes National Park.

b- The difficulty of connecting the European Charter with the charters drawn up by the Parks

We have previously seen that Park charters are strategy documents with a time line of 12 to 15 years. They are drawn up using diagnoses of territories based on wide consultation of all the partners in the different Parks, in all fields of interest: nature conservation, farming, tourism, businesses, etc. Many meetings are organised by the Parks who also seek to involve the local population as much as possible in this particular drafting phase of the territory's sustainable development project. Public meetings are organised, journals are printed and disseminated, Internet forums are set up, etc. Taking all into account, the drafting of a charter generally takes an average of 2 to 3 years, and takes place during the last years of existence of the previous charters.

If this approach is new for the National Parks, it has always been a requirement of the French State for the Regional Natural Parks, with the same risk of losing the “Regional Natural Park” label for a territory that does not meet process requirements in both form and substance.

This method of drafting charters therefore resembles the method sought by Europarc to draw up the European Charter. Once the territory charters have been drafted, each Park can extract all the information necessary to compile a European Charter application file from the documents already produced (territorial diagnosis, minutes of meetings, strategies, action plans, etc.).

The question still remains, however, on the scheduling of these two processes. Indeed, if both processes are carried out concurrently, that is if the debates and drafting of strategic charter documents are carried out in the aim of also filing an application to the European Charter for the “tourism” part of the charters, these processes are transparent and clearly comprehended by the partners and culminate in application files with sound content, that may even be too ambitious.

On the other hand, if the charter drafting or review schedule is postponed by a few years in relation to European Charter reassessment, the French Natural Parks are tempted to delay the reassessment procedure.

4) Europarc French Section’s suggestions

a- Actions that the French section wishes to conduct

In the face of the accumulated delays, the French section of Europarc wishes to rally in support of the French protected areas that must currently reassess their Charter application or do so within the next few years. This mobilisation began in December 2010 through the performance of a mission drawing up an inventory and collection of experience feedback involving 6 Parks.

This mission highlighted several avenues of work that are going to be submitted to the European Charter workgroup during its meeting to be held on 19th April 2011 with implementation during the course of the year:

- detailing the concepts of assessing a strategy and action plan during training days,
- organising technical exchanges based on tools that can be mobilised for the assessment,
- drafting a memo for the protected areas with an eye to building and sharing on this matter,
- organising group work, based on a questionnaire and guide for reassessment, in order to assist and support the protected areas in starting their assessment.

The aim is to make all the tools and techniques available to the French protected areas that are necessary for the successful completion of an assessment and for the preparation of application files for subsequent assessments.

b- The French section's request

By drawing up this memo, the French section would like to attract Europarc's attention to the specific nature of the French protected areas that have territorial charters at their disposal, the drafting schedule for which constrains the schedule for the drafting a European Charter.

It is therefore requested that Europarc examine the possibility for French protected areas to have ECST for the duration of their territory project (12 years for regional parks and 15 years for national parks).

During this period of engagement, and as it can not be any major changes in strategy of the ECST, there will be no questioning of the approval unless ECST obvious failure to commitments ECST.

The French section propose to explore with EUROPARC the practical application of an appropriate evaluation system, such an assessment slight mid-term follow-up or "continuous" every 3 years.

This adaptation of the European Charter process to the Park charters would be life-saving for the future of the European Charter in France. Indeed, the incompatibility of the procedures threatens to create serious difficulties for the Parks, in terms of financing, coordination of territorial stakeholders, transparency and efficiency of the work of the Parks in protected territories. Some protected areas might even abandon the European Charter process although it is complementary to the Park's charter.