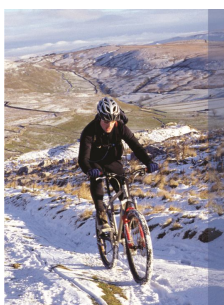


Title:

## An overview of EUROPARC Consulting activities

Recommendations  
Report to be noted

See also our website at [www.europarc-consulting.org](http://www.europarc-consulting.org) and our Facebook page [www.facebook.com/europarc.consulting](https://www.facebook.com/europarc.consulting).



Use the experience, knowledge and commitment of our professionals working with you and together we support the EUROPARC Federation - use us and we all win! All the professionals we use have first-hand experience of protected areas.

[www.europarc-consulting.org](http://www.europarc-consulting.org)



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## 1 Economic climate and EUROPARC Consulting

What we said in our last report to Council is still very much the case in many parts of Europe. The financial climate remains tough and all over Europe many protected areas – who are, after all, our main clients – are still experiencing cut-backs in staff and budgets. Projects are being shelved or abandoned. Competition remains fierce. Our conversion rate from tender to contract is now much less favourable than before. Our success rate used to be between 30 and 40% but is now considerably lower. However, because EUROPARC Consulting is a very lean and flexible organisation with an excellent expert base, we are still doing ok despite the current climate.

For this we want to thank all our clients, colleagues and experts from all over Europe who are giving us such great support, including the EUROPARC Federation Directorate team. We welcome the continued help and support of the whole EUROPARC family, the EUROPARC Sections in the different countries and all the EUROPARC members.

If even more members of the EUROPARC Federation were to give us an opportunity to tender for projects it would be of great benefit not only for the EUROPARC Federation but also for the whole EUROPARC network and, far beyond, for all protected areas.

Since 2008, EUROPARC Consulting has provided the EUROPARC Federation with 122,500.50 €.

Our regularly updated website [www.europarc-consulting.org](http://www.europarc-consulting.org) and constantly changing Facebook page [www.facebook.com/europarc.consulting](http://www.facebook.com/europarc.consulting) give further details of what we do and can offer our clients. Our work directly provides money to support the Federations work for all protected areas across Europe. Help us double our turnover by 2016 with the EUROPARC Challenge! (See 3 below.)

## 2 Examples of our work and clients over the past year

### ➤ Dinaric Arc Parks and Sustainable Tourism – Study visits continue to make their mark

For several years now we have been able to report that EUROPARC Consulting has gained a strong following for its hands-on study tours, described as “life changing” by some participants. These tailored tours consistently provide one of the most efficient ways for knowledge transfer across protected areas. They always come in at or under budget and score extremely well in feedback evaluation.

In May this year we took a group of 20 protected-area practitioners from 14 protected areas in the Dinaric Arc region and two representatives from WWF Mediterranean region (WWF MedPO) to Provence, France, to learn more about sustainable tourism and the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (the Charter).

The Dinaric Arc region stretches through Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo under UNSCR 1244, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia. EUROPARC Consulting has been working here since early 2012. One of our aims is to persuade as many protected areas in this



region to become first of all members of the EUROPARC Federation and then aim for European Charter status. 10 protected areas have already joined the Federation. With the help of this study tour plus workshops, conferences and steady advice from EUROPARC Consulting, we hope to achieve that aim for another 10 EUROPARC Federation members by the end of 2015.



*Kick-off meeting in Belgrade in 2012*

The study visit to France was an excellent opportunity to look at sustainable tourism and how it has been applied in a different environment. Over the course of three intense days, the 22 participants visited three regional nature parks in Provence: Luberon, Camargue and Verdon. All of these protected areas are Charter parks and active members of the Charter network. They illustrate brilliantly what a protected area can achieve with the Charter and are great places to examine the practical applications and benefits of implementing Charter principles.

Before the tour EUROPARC Consulting worked closely with the client to complete a “needs analysis” to find out what the participants wished to gain from the study visit. From this a number of relevant learning objectives were chosen to ensure that the participants get the most out of their visit. For this study visit the learning objectives focused on strategic planning for sustainable tourism using the Charter principles, problems and conflicts the Charter may have caused in the region, and best-practice sustainable tourism initiatives. Other areas of interest were visitor management and balancing tourism and nature conservation.



*Reception with the mayor of La Bastidonne (first on the right)*



It was a particularly proud moment for EUROPARC Consulting when we received the final report from the WWF MedPO for this visit. The report clearly lists not only the key lessons learnt but also actions that the participants now wish to undertake in their own areas. For the participants the “study visit was first-hand experience which has allowed us to compare where we are now and what we need to do to achieve our goals”. We very much look forward to seeing these ideas put into action over the next years in the Dinaric Arc Parks project and to assisting the Dinaric Arc Parks wherever we can.

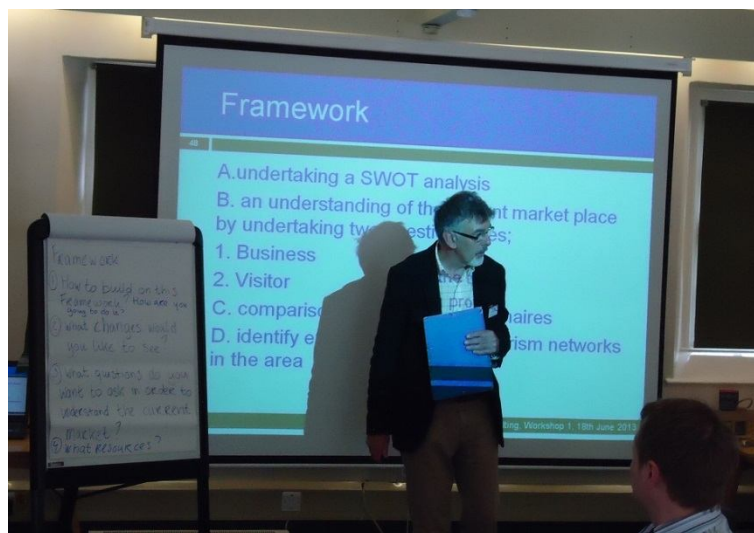
➤ **International COOL tourism project**

In January this year, EUROPARC Consulting started work on the COOL Tourism Project, an INTERREG programme to develop and promote the tourism offer in rural areas of the Cross- Channel region in France and the UK.

This European partnership of eleven local authorities and organisations in the east and south of England, and in the north-west of France, is based on the original idea for a rural tourism project by Visit Kent and Pas de Calais Tourism. It is being delivered with the support of the European cross-border co-operation programme INTERREG IV A, France (Channel) – England, co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund.

The project will look at opportunities to grow the rural tourism sector and identify obstacles and challenges. EUROPARC Consulting will help to create low-impact, environmentally-friendly sustainable tourism that cherishes, not destroys, and builds environmental awareness, whilst taking into account the needs of the environment, local residents, businesses and visitors.

The project will bring together staff teams with diverse skill-sets including tourism and marketing, countryside management, heritage and cultural management, community working and healthy living. It will use new technologies and bring in outside know-how from researchers and technical experts, such as EUROPARC Consulting.



*EUROPARC Consulting chairman Richard Partington at recent COOL workshop*



EUROPARC Consulting has been contracted to undertake crucial research, on behalf of the partnership, that will form the foundation for the success of the subsequent project activities. From this research and partnership working groups, we will design a common methodology that will eventually find its way into a COOL business toolkit.

At a time when the financial climate is very challenging for many small and medium-sized businesses we want to light a beacon which shows entrepreneurs a way forward to environmental and economic sustainability. Andrew Middleton, Assistant Project Officer for project lead partner Norfolk County Council, believes, "Working with EUROPARC will give the partnership an excellent opportunity to work with professional experts within the industry, to share experience and knowledge at a significant level, and to learn more from each other in one project than a single partner would achieve alone."

We are fielding a brilliant team with great expertise in rural sustainable tourism both in France and in the UK. All four team members are excellent communicators, which will be really useful in bringing the many project partners together. The COOL project gives us a fantastic opportunity to show that sustainable tourism can function in rural areas, both inside and outside protected areas/designated landscapes. Ultimately, all tourism should be fully sustainable.

#### ➤ Evaluation of "OUR LAND"

In October 2012 we won a contract to evaluate the progress of the project that involved a group of protected landscapes in the South East of England - two National Parks and seven Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). Called "Our Land", it is a four-year sustainable tourism programme funded by a UK government ministry to promote the co-operation in this area between these nine designated landscapes and private enterprise. It is backed by a national marketing campaign and web platform developed in partnership with a commercial company, ResponsibleTravel.com.



Part of this project was a full evaluation of its success or otherwise after the first two years. EUROPARC Consulting was given the task to assess the project delivery to date and making recommendations to ensure its continued success. The Final Report for the project has since been completed and passed on to the project partners.

Our consultants interviewed 16 partner representatives and 14 businesses by telephone. They were questioned about product development, PR and marketing, the project management, their overall views of “Our Land” and ideas for the future. The interview answers were analysed by the EUROPARC Consulting team to identify current strengths and issues to consider. Key issues were then highlighted for the remainder of the current project and for taking “Our Land” forward.

In workshops, we used a mix of interactive groups, plenary sessions and collective brainstorming to frame the discussion in a positive and pragmatic way and agree priority actions to address what needs to be improved now.

The future looks very promising and we hope that EUROPARC Consulting, with its work, will have made a valuable contribution for Our Land to build on and enhance current successes in the future.

For EUROPARC Consulting this evaluation was also a great learning process. Working with so many designated landscapes across the UK and their local tourism businesses was not only very interesting but also very insightful.

“Our Land” and subsequent work on the COOL Tourism project (see 2.2 above) has increased our expertise and knowledge of the co-operation between protected areas and the private sector.

#### ➤ **European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas**

Following the May 2013, Latvia Council decision we received a short draft service contract on 6th August 2013. It raised for us a number of important questions which we summarised in our “Notes for clarification” for the Directorate to consider and discuss. We further responded and gave additional clarifications on VAT and the need for contracts on 16th August.

Concerned that some of the suggested procedures would result in an over-complicated and bureaucratic procedure we also highlighted again our original proposal for top-slicing the Charter fee so that the Federation would receive up-front not only the registration fee of 500 € per new Charter candidate but also 1000 € per Charter up-front, thus saving a lot of hassle, unnecessary tax payments, etc., still allowing for any additional surplus at the end of the process finding its way to the Federation through the tax efficient Resource Recompense.

We understand that the draft contract and our original proposal are being considered “in tandem” and subject to discussions between the Federation Treasurer and Director. However, at the time of writing this report (25th September) our future involvement in the Charter remains unclear.

EUROPARC Consulting remains dedicated to the closest possible co-operation on the Charter. We are still very keen to undertake the full administration of the Charter verification and are convinced that we can offer the indispensably independent scrutiny as well as the most streamlined, profitable and tax-efficient process, leaving the Directorate to concentrate on all other aspects of the Charter management, development promotion and communications.





One day or one week: our study visits, training seminars or learning workshops are great value - use us to learn the latest European innovations on Rangers, sustainable tourism, management plans, eco-system services and more...

[www.europarc-consulting.org](http://www.europarc-consulting.org)



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### **3 A challenge to all EUROPARC members to double our turnover**

EUROPARC Consulting has been successfully working in many countries with members of the EUROPARC Federation over the past ten years. We have built a wide and skilled pool of experts with knowledge of all parts of protected-area work. We have the capacity to double our turnover which is something we should like to achieve before the end of 2016.

However, we can only achieve this if more members of the EUROPARC Federation give EUROPARC Consulting an opportunity to tender for projects. This will be helped if we can implement the EUROPARC Federation President's suggestion at the April meeting of the EUROPARC Consulting Advisory Board that it should be possible for EUROPARC Consulting to send out material directly to EUROPARC Federation members using the Federation mailing list (for example, a thematic E-newsletter).

The challenge for EUROPARC members is: please check that we are on the tender list that their organisation uses when seeking external contractors, specialists or advice.

### **4 EUROPARC Consulting GmbH origins and its Advisory Board**

Not all Council members may be familiar with some of the details of the origins and background of EUROPARC Consulting GmbH. It all started in 1999 with a funding commission appointed by EUROPARC Federation Council to explore ways of generating funds for the work of the Federation.

Two initiatives were selected by the Federation Council for further development:

1. Preparing a donor/sponsor membership category which would seek to engage corporate funding support with a range of benefits for the corporate member – however, with a non-voting status.
2. Or setting up of a commercial consulting unit, which would be:
  - a) wholly owned by the Federation,
  - b) providing expert protected-area management consultancy services,



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- c) using the range of member expertise from across the Federation's network, in open competition with other commercial companies.

These two initiatives were presented to members at the General Assembly and were endorsed unanimously by members for further development. The funding commission obtained funds from outside the EUROPARC Federation from a private foundation, sufficient to provide start-up capital for EUROPARC Consulting GmbH.

They also asked lawyers to carry out research on the most appropriate legal basis for the company and its relationship to the Federation. They were advised to operate as a commercial trading company, where representation on the board by Federation office holders was required not to exceed 40%.

A five-member board was therefore assembled with the following Federation representation:

- the holder of the office of President, also acting as the only shareholder on behalf of the Federation (share capital reserves of 25,000 EUR) and
- the EUROPARC Federation Director.

Three other board members, not having official office holder or voting status within the Federation, were chosen from the original funding commission, from different parts of Europe, then Germany, Spain and the UK. The board appointed its chair from the independent members. All board members were required to act in an unpaid capacity.

Currently our Board consists of the two ex-officio members from the EUROPARC Federation, the President, Thomas Hansson, and the EUROPARC Federation Director, Carol Ritchie. In addition, there are the three independent members, Norbert Heukemes (BE), the Board Chairman, Richard Partington (UK), and Hans Schiphorst (NL). The Board also co-opted Richard Blackman as advisor to the Board with his long experience as the Federation's past deputy Director.

Legal advice obtained stressed the importance of EUROPARC Consulting keeping an appropriate legal distance from the Federation in order to guarantee its commercial trading integrity. They chose as the most appropriate structure the status of a GmbH (limited company) which required registration according to German law with appropriate tax status and financial regulations. In 2001, the detailed proposal for the new company was approved by Federation Council, presented to and endorsed by the General Assembly in open session.

EUROPARC Consulting GmbH, as a commercial organisation, must be separate from the EUROPARC Federation which fully owns the company. However, we are registered in Regensburg where we share our headquarters with the offices of our parent organisation, the EUROPARC Federation.

