



**EUROPARC Federation
Report to Council
10th May 2013**

Title:

Overview of EUROPARC Consulting activities so far this year and 2012 results

Recommendation:

To take note of the report in general and the EUROPARC Consulting recommendation on page 3 of this report

1 General remarks

As reported at the last meeting of the EUROPARC Federation Council in Porto, the year 2012 turned out to be more complicated and more difficult than anticipated. Competition remains fierce and each project needs to be calculated ever more carefully in order to maintain our current profit margin.

As our 2012 Annual Accounts (submitted to the recent EUROPARC Consulting Board meeting with copies to the EUROPARC Federation President and Director) show, it has been, on the whole, a good year for EUROPARC Consulting. However, the continuing uncertainty about our future role in the Charter has diverted valuable efforts from other project developments.

What could have been a transformative year with more significant progress, still turned out to be a good year but it could have been better.

As the considerable financial implications of a possible change in our Charter role are still unclear, EUROPARC Consulting must be particularly prudent in its forward planning. The great difficulty in our line of business is its unpredictability. A reduction of Charter work involvement will inevitably increase that unpredictability. We therefore must ensure a more cautious approach to our cash management and future work.

Our turnover for 2012 was 243,515.20 € (compared to a turnover of 174,984.34 € in 2011). The balance of income over expenses (our surplus) was 26,013.71 €. At the recent meeting of the EUROPARC Consulting Board it was agreed to set aside 22,000.00 € of that surplus as our contribution to the EUROPARC Federation in 2013. That compares well to our contribution of 17,500.00 € in 2012.

Bearing in mind the difficult economic situation right across Europe we must be proud of the achievements in 2012. We should like to thank all who have contributed to it.

2 Continuing uncertainty about our future role in the Charter

As mentioned in the General Remarks above, the continuing uncertainty about our future role in the Charter is making planning for the current year and the following years much more difficult, increasing the unpredictability of our work. Without the medium- or longer-term security of the Charter work, pre-financing of new larger projects remains problematic, as we described in our reports to the Genk Council meeting.

Following the last Council meeting in Porto and various email exchanges between the EUROPARC Federation President and the EUROPARC Consulting Chairman, it was our understanding that a draft paper containing the proposals for the “Charter Management Structure”, together with its business case, risk assessment and defined roles, should have come to the EUROPARC Consulting Board meeting in April.

This is what Council members agreed and what the EUROPARC Consulting Board members had been expecting, particularly as the EUROPARC Federation Council discussions were clear that the “Charter management structure” should contain a business case, identifying and addressing risks and setting out who does what (including an agreement with EUROPARC Consulting setting out its part).

Following the discussions in Porto, we assumed that Council Members would expect a draft paper to come to the EUROPARC Consulting Board meeting on 20th April so that the Council could have the confidence that EUROPARC Consulting's Board had discussed the matter and its view considered.

Unfortunately, no such paper was available at the meeting of the EUROPARC Consulting Board. We have had no further input into the future planning of the Charter management. That is regrettable, given the importance of the Charter in the life of the EUROPARC Federation and EUROPARC Consulting. A clear, well-structured paper (as was asked for by Council members) would have enabled a clear decision in which all parties could have confidence.

EUROPARC Consulting sees the best way forward in **an evolutionary approach**, rather than in a wholesale re-structuring of something which is working well. It is always better to build on something that is functioning well, rather than trying to start from scratch.

Our recommendation:

Taking into account the Council's decision at the Porto meeting, we feel it would be best if EUROPARC Consulting continued its work in administrating the evaluation and re-evaluation process: from receiving the application dossiers each December (via appointing verifiers, invoicing fees to applicants, organising evaluation visits, receiving the reports, acting as secretariat to the Evaluation Committee and sending the report to Council with Evaluation Committee recommendations, followed by drafting the decision letters) but, at the same time, looking for a more streamlined procedure with possible savings, all in discussion with the EUROPARC Federation, of course.

Any savings found could be ploughed back into all the other necessary Charter work which would be carried out by the Federation, but with the additional funding found through savings.

This way, we would avoid unnecessary bureaucracy, duplication of work, additional staff time and loss of experience.

3 Projects completed or in hand

3.1 Dinaric Arc Parks programme: Work on this programme continues. The project aims to introduce around 75 protected areas in the Dinaric Arc region (Western Balkans) to the idea and practice of sustainable tourism. The countries involved are: Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo under UNSCR 1244, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia.

So far we have been able to bring 10 protected areas from this region into membership of the EUROPARC Federation. They applied earlier this year for membership and were given the go-ahead by the EUROPARC Federation Council. They will now register as Charter candidates and start preparing for Charter application.

Over the three-year period of the project it is planned that 10 more protected areas in the region will join the EUROPARC Federation. There is keen interest and it is hoped that it may result in the creation of a EUROPARC Federation section in that region.

The work also involved our participation in a most successful conference with workshops in Bosnia i Herzegovina at the end of last year. This was not only useful work but also showed the

positive effects of taking part in a high-profile event. Our Facebook reach during that time increased by more than 700% leading to a weekly audience of well over 2000 “fans”.

We are currently preparing a study tour of 20 protected-area managers from the Dinaric Arc region to Southern France in May this year. There will be another conference with our involvement towards the end of 2013.

- 3.2 Work for the EUROPARC Conference 2013: After EUROPARC Consulting’s low profile at the EUROPARC Conference in Genk last year we are pleased to record a much greater involvement in this year’s EUROPARC Conference in Hungary. The organisers have asked us to organise the workshops and prepare the Conference report. Work is going well and ahead of schedule.

We very much hope that we can use this platform to re-introduce ourselves to EUROPARC Federation members and create better opportunities for us working for them.

- 3.3 COOL Tourism project: This contract for 26,000 € was awarded in March this year. EUROPARC Consulting will be working with partners in France and Southern England such as Agence de Développement et de Réservation Touristiques, Pas de Calais (FR), Gîtes de France Pas de Calais (FR), the Comité Départemental de la Somme (FR), Norfolk County Council (EN), Essex County Council (EN), Kent County Council (EN), Visit Kent (EN), Somerset County Council (EN), West Somerset Council (EN), Sedgemoor District Council in Somerset (EN) and Exmoor National Park Authority (EN).

The COOL Tourism Project aims to develop and promote the tourism offer in rural areas by enabling better understanding of the motivations of the visitors interested in rural tourism, and to design and implement new and innovative ways of bringing diverse businesses, networks and resources together to support and sustain rural tourism.

The project includes researching and developing a business support methodology and producing a toolkit framework that all project partners within the partnership can use and apply to undertake their own local research in their area. The research will identify precedent and best practice for delivering sustainable rural tourism, co-ordinate local research and help identify the hidden resources, challenges and opportunities in their area. We shall also develop a common methodology for the COOL toolkit with an online system for recording the best practice and examples of opportunities for businesses.

This is the first phase of the project. A possible second phase next year is likely to deal with the monitoring and evaluation of the whole programme.

- 3.4 “Our Land” project: Although this was not a huge contract, approx. 8,500 €, it involved us working closely with nine protected areas in the South of England. We have just delivered the final report and the client was very satisfied with the result.

- 3.5 Handbook “Practical, profitable, protected”: This project in 2012 generated a good surplus for us and provided us with around 2,000 copies of an excellent handbook. We have used the handbook successfully at several conferences and workshops and will continue to distribute it Europe-wide.

3.6 The Charter: 2012 saw a high number of Charter applicants. However, for 2013 the number of applicants is half of last year's. It has become noticeably more difficult to encourage protected areas to become applicants. Even more difficult is making a case for re-evaluation. Efforts need to be increased by all sides to keep Charter membership attractive.

4 EUROPARC Consulting Limited (UK)

EUROPARC Consulting Limited started trading in July 2009. The company is not registered for VAT and will keep its turnover below the VAT limit of GB£ 68,000 until we are sure that we regularly exceed this amount. If we do, EUROPARC Consulting Limited will have to register for VAT.

The main target market for the company is the UK where, due to severe cuts in the protected area sector, very few contracts are to be had. We continue to keep close contact with all stakeholders we can think of and thank Richard Partington in particular for his constant liaison work with possible UK clients.

During the financial year 2012 EUROPARC Consulting Limited managed a turnover of £16,722 (approx. 20,000 €). The final result showed a loss of £961 (approx. 1,150 €), mainly due to EUROPARC Consulting Limited funding the UK incurred expenses on behalf of EUROPARC Consulting GmbH. The current year, 2013, will be much better and is likely to see a turnover close to the VAT limit of GB£ 68,000.

Grundtvig project: One of the projects in which EUROPARC Consulting Limited is involved was sub-contracted to us by the EUROPARC Federation. It is part of the Grundtvig volunteering work and amounts to 12,300 €. It is being carried out by EUROPARC Consulting Limited because (a) the team working on it is situated in the UK and (b) this way the cost is reduced by 19% as EUROPARC Consulting Limited is not liable to charge VAT, a saving for the Federation of more than 2,300 €. The final report is ready for delivery to the Federation this week..

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EUROPARC Consulting

6th May 2013