



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

**Guidelines for implementing Part II of the Charter  
(working with tourism business partners) within  
the EUROPARC Nordic-Baltic Section**

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## Annexes

Annex 1: Charter principles → See separate document  
“The Charter Principles.pdf”

## Acronyms

BSR	Baltic Sea Region
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
ECST	European Charter for Sustainable Tourism
P&B	Parks and Benefits project

These Guidelines for implementation of Part II of the Charter (working with tourism business partners) within the EUROPARC Nordic-Baltic Section were initially developed in 2011. This revised version of the Guidelines was accepted by the EUROPARC Federation Council meeting in February 2021.

## 1. Introduction and Background

### 1.1. The European Charter of Sustainable Tourism in Protected areas

The *European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected areas* (ECST) belongs to the **EUROPARC Federation**, the umbrella organisation of protected areas in Europe. It was developed by a European group representing protected areas, the tourism industry and partners, under the EUROPARC umbrella, and builds on the recommendations of the EUROPARC study “Loving them to death? Sustainable Tourism in Europe’s Nature and National Parks” (1993).

The ECST is a valuable and **practical tool** for ensuring that tourism development in Europe’s protected areas is sustainable. **The ECST is thus neither a conventional quality label, nor a conventional partnership agreement, but combines elements of both to encourage and support a truly sustainable development of tourism in Europe’s protected areas.**

On an international and European level the ECST reflects important elements, expressed in the *Local Agenda 21* (1992), the *CBD Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism* (2004), and the *Sixth Environment Action Programme of the European Community 2002-2012*.

In becoming members of the Charter, protected areas demonstrate that they are cooperating to a higher level with local stakeholders and tourism partners to address strategic tourism issues, and receive official recognition for their achievements in this field.

The ECST has developed in three distinct but closely interlinked areas of development of sustainable tourism:

#### **Part I: for the protected area**

For individual protected areas of all kinds, with the aim to find the most appropriate direction for tourism in the area. The implementation entails the development of a strategy and Action Plan for sustainable tourism, which must be developed in partnership with local tourism representatives, other business sectors, and local people and authorities. For details see: <https://www.euoparc.org/sustainable-tourism/become-a-sustainable-destination-2/>

#### **Part II: for tourism businesses**

Part II envisages taking the involvement of tourism businesses and tourist offices / organisations in Charter Areas a step further, enabling them to work with the protected area authority to receive individual recognition as Charter Signatories. For details see: <https://www.euoparc.org/sustainable-tourism/become-a-sustainable-partner/>

#### **Part III: for tour operators**

Part III is developed at national/supranational level by EUROPARC Sections. It is supposed to focus on tour operators who incorporate the principles of sustainable development into their tourism product, and who are organizing tours to and within protected areas. For details please see:

<https://www.euoparc.org/sustainable-tourism/become-a-sustainable-tour-operator/>

## **1.2. Background**

The ECST has been in place at the European level since 2000, and in 2021 the network comprises of the total of 91 protected areas in 15 countries. The majority of Charter activities have taken place in Mediterranean and Western European regions and, so far, only a few protected areas in the Baltic Sea Region have been working with the ECST.

These guidelines have been developed as a **framework** for the protected areas in the Nordic-Baltic Section, to encourage more of them to work with the ECST. To some extent, the Charter II can also contribute to generating a **transnational regional identity**.

The need for such a regional approach has become more obvious since the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region was agreed on, as this strategy puts specific emphasis on the development of tourism and particularly sustainable tourism in the BSR.

The Charter Part II encourages a flexible partnership approach which reflects the Charter principles, existing quality marks and eco-labels, differing local needs and varying situations, together with the commitment of the individual tourism sector business to sustainability.

One of the guiding principles of the Charter is a flexible approach, which allows an implementation for the wide range of organizations and governance structures that exist amongst European protected areas. These guidelines have been written with the diversity of national circumstances within the Nordic-Baltic Section and the different governance structures of protected areas in mind: **The focus of the Charter Part II is to create a strong network in which all tourism stakeholders act in a best possible manner towards sustainability.**

## 2. Approach

The following approach is underlying this methodical framework for implementing Charter Part II in the Nordic-Baltic Section:

- Based on a **voluntary agreement** between the protected area and each business, centred on sustainable tourism (economic, social and environmental) and the principles of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism.
- Complies with the **requirements established by the EUROPARC Federation** in the official text of Section II of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism.
- **Agile, flexible** and **easy** to manage.
- **Realistic, with solid and reliable contents** allowing for traceability and monitoring by each accredited protected area and by the tourism Administration.
- Is *not* a customary normalized certification system (Q, EMAS, ISO).
- **Motivation for businesses** towards sustainability in their tourism offer and collaboration with the protected area.

To ensure that these guidelines are always up to date with the latest knowledge and experiences, they should, starting from the date of its first approval, be revised by the EUROPARC Nordic-Baltic Section every 5 years. However, the main certification body in the Charter Part II accreditation system is the Charter Park in question and the forum created under its leadership. All requirements regarding training on assessment techniques, avoiding conflicts of interests, etc. are to be followed closely by these instances.

## 3. Scope

### 3.1 Objectives

The objectives of these guidelines are to:

- strengthen the links and deepen the understanding between protected area managers and their partners in the business community in and around the Charter Area.
- create solid mutual commitments to progress towards more sustainable tourism.

### 3.2 Eligibility

- Tourism businesses which meet the requirements specified in Chapter 4 (here the term “business” is used in the widest sense: every organization regardless of its legal status, public or private bodies, developing relevant products and services for visitors and the local community).
- Businesses as a whole will be accredited, not particular entrepreneurs, products or services.

### 3.3 Territorial Scope of Action

In this first version, these guidelines are set up for protected areas in the countries that are part of the Nordic-Baltic Section of the EUROPARC Federation: Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania.

In each protected area, the territory of application will coincide with the territory of application of the ECST which has been established by the area in its Candidacy Dossier. However, exceptions may be made if the protected area considers this relevant for its sustainable tourism strategy. The territorial scope of action in “local terms” is **the Charter Area** as defined by each protected area together with their respective Charter Forum during the Charter accreditation process.

In principle, the Charter Area shall comprise the protected area and the area of immediate economic, social and ecological influence.

### 3.4 Term of Validity

The Partnership Certificate is valid as long as the business partner has a partnership agreement with the Charter Park, and as long as the park has a valid Charter Certification.

If, during the certification period, the Charter Park has evidence that the business is not complying with its commitments, the Charter Park may invalidate the accreditation of the business by the ECST and take away the partner's accreditation.

## 4 Conditions of Access

### 4.1 Conditions of Access for Protected Areas

To implement Part II of the ECST, the protected area must:

- **communicate** to EUROPARC Federation its wish to implement the ECST Charter Part II in its Charter Area.
- **designate an individual to oversee** the implementation of Charter Part II, who will be the main contact person in the Charter Area.
- **Prepare the necessary documentation** on implementation of Charter Part II on area level and send it to EUROPARC Federation)
- **obtain approval** of the EUROPARC Federation

### 4.2 Conditions of Access for Tourism Businesses and Tourism Offices/Organisations

To become ECST partners, the tourism businesses and tourism offices/organisations must:

- **be located or carry out its activities in the Charter Area** (see also Chapter 3.3).
- **comply with the applicable legislation** in force (opening license, economic activity license, and registration of the business with the tax authorities, be recorded on the tourism register, etc.)
- **develop Sustainability Action Plan** and assure that their activities will be compatible with the strategy of sustainable tourism and that they will follow the regulations governing the protected area (regulations, planning and management instruments, European Charter sustainable tourism strategy). The **Action Plan** should contain following information:
  - ✓ Data regarding the business
  - ✓ Actions in favour of sustainable tourism (\*model content see box below)
  - ✓ Schedule and if possible rough budget for implementation and
  - ✓ Monitoring indicators which show compliance with the actions.
- Where an **eco-labelling scheme** exists and is recognised by the Forum, the business may use this form of eco-accreditation and have its agreed actions/Action Plan adjusted accordingly.
- Where neither a suitable scheme nor the resources to put one in place exist, the business partners should **demonstrate a positive attitude to environmental**



**management**, backed by action. This should be verified as part of the agreed Action Plan.

- be a **member of the Sustainable Tourism Forum** created in each Charter Area in the framework of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism. This participation must be active, carried out either individually or through a tourism association.

Additional requirements of the businesses may be defined at the protected area level, and these requirements will have to be agreed on by the Sustainable Tourism Forum.

\*Model content for Sustainable Tourism Action Plan for business

The business plans to take actions during the Charter accreditation period falling under the following headings:

- ✓ Innovation and organisational development (Vision)
- ✓ Protection of habitats and species
- ✓ Water management
- ✓ Waste management
- ✓ Energy management
- ✓ Carbon management
- ✓ Environmental education of staff and employment policies with regards to local people and diversity)
- ✓ Mobility services and logistics
- ✓ Accessibility
- ✓ Purchasing and Local / regional products / suppliers
- ✓ information management and dissemination
- ✓ Security of services
- ✓ Budget and schedule for the activities
- ✓ Development of new tourism products and services based on authentic values of the territory.

## 5 Commitments

### 5.1 Commitments of Protected Areas

The protected areas must undertake the following actions (minimum) to favour and distinguish those tourism businesses which are accredited with the ECST:

- Practice **partnership** with the accredited businesses by **coordinating, facilitating** and opening **additional marketing opportunities** to them, specifically **disseminating information** about these businesses at park homepages, visitor centres and information points, as well as in information and publications regarding protected areas.
- Provide information about the accredited businesses to be disseminated at the **BSR and European level**.
- **Provide additional training and information** to the tourism businesses accredited as Charter Partners. This should include relevant area, contact and marketing information as well as information regarding the implementation of the Action Plan.
- **Renew its ECST Certification** every 5 years or duly inform accredited business in case there is no intention to renew ECST Certification.
- **Report to the Charter Forum** (and the EUROPARC Federation) on an annual basis about the activities and progress referred to in the Strategy and in the Action Plan (see also section 9).

**Additional benefits and advantages** applicable in their territory can be offered to accredited businesses.

All of the commitments undertaken by the protected area and its partners are to be duly included in Partnership Agreement between Charter Area and the tourism business.

### 5.2 Commitment of Tourism Business and Tourism Offices/Organisations

- The business shall formally agree to the aims and objectives of the current **sustainable tourism strategy**, policy or other official statements of the protected area.
- The business **implements the Sustainability Action Plan** and yearly reports the fulfilment to the Charter Park and to the Forum.
- An **eco-label**, to which the business was accredited while getting access to the Charter certificate, **must be maintained**.

- The business agrees to **promote Protected area information** and interpretative material as appropriate (visitor and customer information).
- The business is encouraged to **display following logos**, wherever possible:
  - ✓ European Charter for Sustainable Tourism logo,
  - ✓ Protected area logo,
  - ✓ Charter Partner (Sustainable Tourism Partner) logo and/or a specific logo for the relevant protected area scheme.

## 6. Partnership Agreement

The Partnership Agreement is a **document negotiated and signed by the protected area authority** and by the **tourism business** seeking accreditation with the ECST, identifying the commitments to be taken on by each party during the following three to five years, with an aim to collaborate more closely and improve tourism sustainability in and in connection to the protected area. This document, is to contain the following:

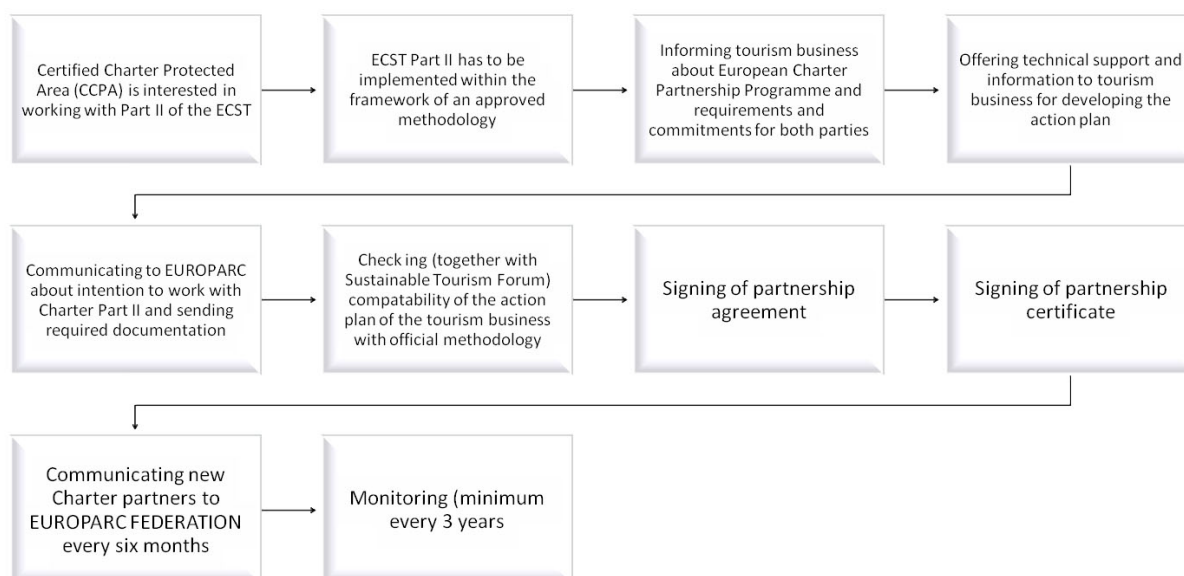
- The identification of the tourism business and the protected area, signatories to the agreement,
- The commitments undertaken by the protected area,
- The commitments undertaken by the tourism business,
- Date of signing and term of validity.

## 7. Partnership Certificate

The Partnership Certificate is the **document issued by the protected area authority**, certifying that a tourism business is a European Charter Partner, and, as such, and in view of its firm commitment to sustainability, is distinguished as a protected area partner. This certificate will have the same term of validity as that of the Partnership Agreement.

## 8. Accreditation Process

### European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (ECST) Implementation process of ECST Part II



EUROPARC Federation, January 2011

Note: A protected area must be a member of the EUROPARC Federation in order to join the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism. In order to implement Charter Part II, the protected area must be certified as with ECST Charter part I.

## 9. Monitoring

The accredited businesses should report yearly on the implementation of their Sustainability Action Plan to the Charter Park and to the Charter Forum of the respective Charter Area.

Recommended contents of the business' report are:

- number of customers,
- investments made,
- trainings done,
- etc.

END of document.



**EUROPARC**  
Sustainable Tourism  
in Protected Areas

The underlying principles of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas, aligned with its vision and mission, aim to enhance **Quality Sustainable Tourism, that will be good for Parks and good for People:**

## Vision

Sustainable Tourism in European protected areas provides a meaningful quality experience, safeguards natural and cultural values, supports local livelihoods and quality of life and is economically viable.

## Mission

Through awarding the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas, EUROPARC seeks to safeguard cultural and natural values by stimulating quality sustainable tourism, engendering partnerships to support local livelihoods, increase awareness of the need for sustainability, and promote international cooperation.

The principles govern how tourism is developed and managed in a Protected Area. The principles overarch the key topics and the associated actions that are the core of the European Charter for Sustainable tourism in Protected Areas.

PRINCIPLES

KEY  
TOPICS

KEY  
ACTIONS

1. Giving priority to protection
2. Contributing to sustainable development
3. Engaging all stakeholders
4. Planning sustainable tourism effectively
5. Pursing continuous improvement

The **Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan** should be based on local circumstances and priorities as assessed and agreed through the consultation process.

However, to comply with the requirements of the Charter it must demonstrate coverage of the following key topics and associated actions in the Action Plan.

## KEY TOPICS

## KEY ACTIONS

**1)** Protecting valuable landscapes, biodiversity and cultural heritage

- 1) Influencing land use planning and the control of potentially damaging developments;
- 2) Influencing the location, type and design of tourism developments;
- 3) Managing visitor flows, activities and behavior in sensitive areas and sites.

**2)** Supporting conservation through tourism

- 1) Encouraging visitors and tourism businesses to support conservation, through donations, volunteering and other activity;
- 2) Using revenues obtained from tourism-related activity to support conservation;
- 3) Establishing, supporting and promoting tourism-related investments, projects and activities that help to conserve the natural and cultural heritage.

**3)** Reducing carbon footprint, pollution and wasteful resource use

- 1) Working with tourism businesses to improve environmental management, including use of energy and water, waste management, and noise and light pollution;
- 2) Promoting the use of public transport and other alternatives to cars.

**4)** Providing safe access, quality facilities and special experiences of the protected area, available to all visitors

- 1) Providing a wide range of access opportunities, with attention to safety and risk management;
- 2) Improving the quality of visitor facilities and services;
- 3) Providing visitors with specific tourism offers which involve discovery, interpretation and appreciation of the area's special natural and cultural heritage;
- 4) Providing facilities and information for visitors with special needs.

**5)** Effectively communicating the area to visitors

- 1) Ensuring that marketing materials and activities promote the area effectively and responsibly;
- 2) Providing good quality and effective visitor information and interpretation;
- 3) Ensuring that tourism businesses and other local stakeholders are well informed about the area and provide relevant and accurate information to visitors;
- 4) Providing specific information and interpretation for young people, schools and student groups.

**6)** Ensuring social cohesion

- 1) Anticipating, monitoring and minimising any existing and potential conflicts with local residents;
- 2) Maintaining good communication and engagement between local residents, businesses, visitors and the protected area authority;
- 3) Encouraging and developing appropriate partnership activity with and between stakeholders.

**7)** Strengthening prosperity in the local community

- 1) Promoting the provision and identity of local produce and services and their purchase and use by visitors and tourism businesses;
- 2) Supporting the economic viability and performance of local tourism businesses and the provision of local employment in tourism.

**8)** Providing training and capacity building

- 1) Providing relevant training for staff of the protected area authority in sustainable tourism development and management;
- 2) Providing and encouraging relevant training and capacity building for tourism businesses and other stakeholders in sustainable tourism.

**9)** Monitoring tourism performance and impacts

- 1) Monitoring of visitors – volumes, patterns, spending and satisfaction;
- 2) Monitoring of tourism businesses – performance and needs;
- 3) Monitoring of tourism impacts – on the environment, economy and community;
- 4) Monitoring progress in implementing the action plan.

**10)** Communicating actions and engaging with the Charter

- 1) Communicating sustainable tourism actions and results to local stakeholders and more widely at a local, regional and national level;
- 2) Promoting and making visible the award of the Charter;
- 3) Engaging with EUROPARC and the Charter Network, including participating in related events and activities;
- 4) Taking steps for re-application and renewal of the Charter.